

What I Learned Fending off Wild Camels in Pamukkale (A Travelogue)

Written by Patricia Sohn

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PATRICIA SOHN, MAY 11 2017

When I was five years old, I moved from Alaska to Vermont. We lived in the country in Vermont situated in-between several large farms. In order to get to a neighbor's house, one had to walk through fields and ravines and such, some of which were filled with cows. Some of the fields were filled with cows with one bull guarding them.

When I was seven years old, I was taught that one could fend off a bull by acting like a tree. If the bull looked interested in you as you walked by in the field, all you had to do, I was told, was to stand upright and imagine yourself to be like a tree. You put your right hand out, the face of your palm forward at the bull, and you say, "Stop." When you say, "Stop," you're supposed to project some sort of "power" with the utterance of the word, a process that I only decades later learned to associate with "Ki." With the "Ki," however, you are also supposed to project yourself as unthreatening; so, "power" in this context was the power of an unmovable tree who is as legitimately unthreatening as an old-growth pine. You have to be actually not threatening, though. If you are threatening, the animal will know and assume you have a gun, and all bets are off. I did not have such a conceptual framework to draw upon when I was seven, I just wanted to go to my friend's house to play. I don't know if the Vermont-Bull method works in Pamplona, nor if it works in Iowa. But it worked in Vermont. Perhaps we had particularly genteel bulls, who, like Ferdinand, preferred the dandelions to the flesh of seven-year-old girls walking to a play-date next door. I don't know.

We had our own cow, half-Holstein and half-Guernsey. Her name was, *Chance*. She was named for the cow in *The Walton's*. I suppose I should not be admitting that. But, in order to walk to my neighbor's house, which was about a field and two ravines away, I had to walk through our fields and brave two large horses, a pony, 20 chickens, one rooster, and *Chance*. Our three dogs, two German Shepherds and one Collie, would often accompany me to the edge of our fields. I had the opportunity to implement the Vermont-Bull method on many occasions throughout those years, as *Chance*, while not flesh-eating in any way, appeared to see herself as an over-sized, bumbling teddy bear. Cow-sized teddy bears are not always great for small children. A variation on the Vermont-Bull method worked on the rare and distant wolf as well. In short, I survived Vermont; and, the Vermont-Bull method was reinforced in me as part of my tool-set.

I found the Vermont-Bull method useful on two occasions in my travels: once in Haifa, when a *wild-boar-with-child* had insinuated herself into the nature preserve next to the dormitories; and once in Pamukkale, Turkey, when *ababy-camel-gone-wild* was running around, attacking people at random for some trespass the substance of which I never learned.

Fortunately, the wild boar was far enough away that we girls, out for a jog, never had to confront her up-close-and-personal. We did, however, use a variation of the Vermont-Bull method (reaching to the pits of our stomachs and roaring at her in unison) to give ourselves that one extra moment to let us get far enough away that we would no longer appear to be a threat to her newborn. I had read enough *Robin Hood* stories growing up to know to stay away from wild boars. You never know when legends, myths, and fairy tales will come in handy. We escaped safely.

In Pamukkale, I had arisen before sunrise to see a ruin at sunrise, as the local guides insisted that was the best time. Coming down from the ruins after viewing them, we saw a park filled with men and boys and a few camels.

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Suddenly, a baby camel went wild and started attacking both boys and men. Then some of the men and boys would try to chase him, and they would run that way for a while. The baby camel would then become incensed, and he would turn on the boys and men and chase them. Then, they would run that way for a while. They were not having fun. The men and boys were trying to bring the baby camel to heel, and he would have nothing of it.

I was a bit concerned coming down the hill to the park, as we could not pass by the park without coming into the sights of the baby camel. And I did not relish being trampled that day. The baby camel was not as big as his Mother, who he approached periodically for support. But, I learned that day that baby camels are, nonetheless, rather large. He was as big as a medium-sized horse. He was no trifle.

We attempted to walk around the edge of the park, but it did not work. The baby camel saw movement, and he came right for us. My friend, who had been with us during the wild boar incident, and who had always lived in cities, asked me, "What do we do?" I said, "Stand behind me, and whatever you do, *don't move*." If you move, of course, you are not submitting to the animal's need to assert its will for that one moment, and he or she has the right, by honor, to trample you. My friend did not know the details but had seen it work with the wild boar, so nobody moved (except the guide, who moved behind a tree).

I did as the farmers had trained me in Vermont. I stood upright in the best posture I could muster. I imagined myself to be an immovable tree in every way, and just as innocuous and unthreatening to the baby camel. I raised my arm up as the baby camel neared, took a deep breath, turned the face of my palm toward him, and looked at him in the eye as he approached. I said, quietly with my breath, "Stop."

The baby camel charged right up to my hand, breathed into my palm, broke his stride in that instant, and then walked away. The entire park was silent for several moments. I, who had been raised on the stories of puritan New England (e.g., Salem), decided that it was time to leave town, although I am sure that Pamukkale does not share New England's history in this regard. I smiled and nodded at the men, who nodded back at me. My friend and I went to our *pension*, packed, and took a bus to Izmir.

In my travels, I learned that Vermont farmers are pretty smart. I learned that lions are not like cows, nor are baboons. However, camels are not dissimilar to horses and cows in the large-animal skills required to manage them (although I claim no expertise on the topic). Indeed, I learned that animal husbandry has some commonalities all over the world, even with quite different animals.

And I learned that people are wonderful everywhere if you approach them with the same humanity that you grant yourself.

About the author:

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