

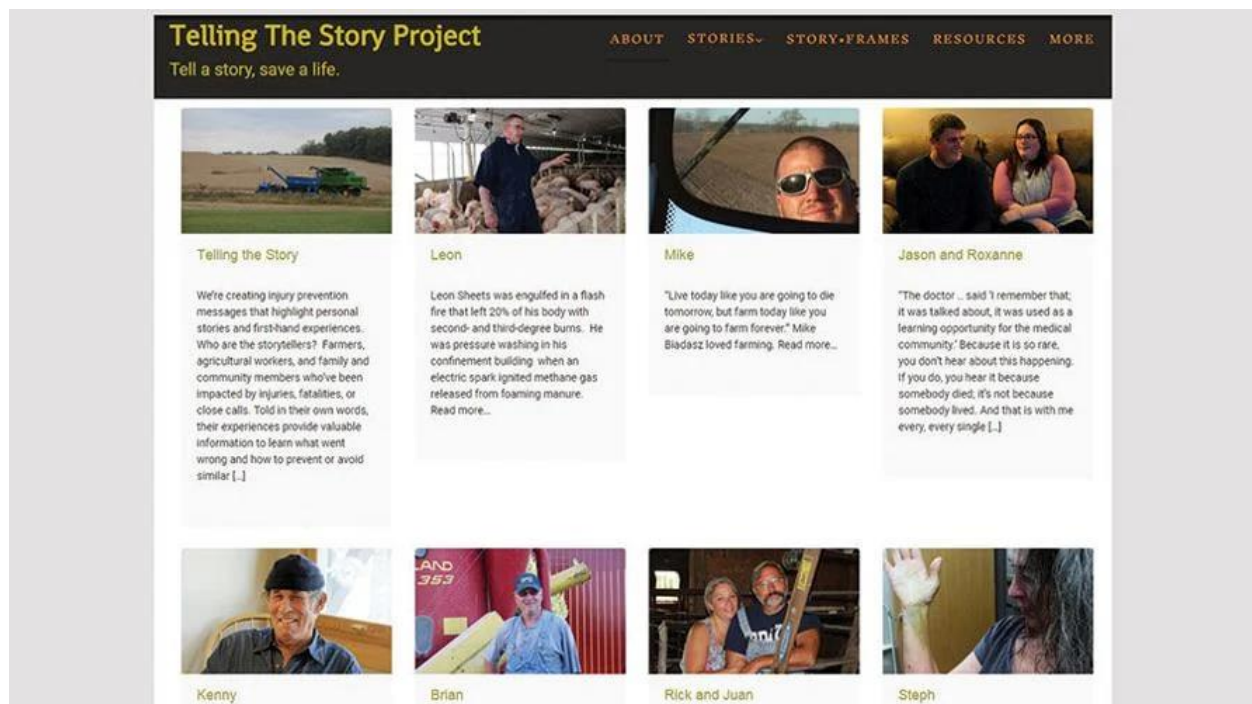
## *Iowa Farmer Today*

# Safety Watch: Telling the story

Website brings together farm stories of safety and survival

By Stephanie Leonard

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Screenshot of [www.tellingthestoryproject.org](http://www.tellingthestoryproject.org)

"How'd it happen?"

That's often the first question upon hearing of an accident or seeing the result of someone's injury: What's the story?

We asked that question many times as part of the Iowa FACE Program, collecting the "how" and "why" about work-related fatalities to learn information that could help prevent other incidents.

An overriding response expressed by families and coworkers who participated in these investigations was a desire that something good should come out their tragedy:

"We don't want anybody else to go through what we went through."

"If my experience might help just one person not get hurt, I'll participate."

## **Personal accounts**

Farmers tell me they want to know the facts when they learn about an accident or death. Was it an equipment issue? Human error? Preventable? Could it happen to them?

We're learning those answers and hearing the same motivation to help others from farmers who are sharing personal stories of injuries, close calls and fatalities through Telling the Story Project, a new collaboration among regional Agricultural Safety and Health Centers that includes the University of Iowa's Great Plains Center and our partners at the Central States Center (University of Nebraska Medical Center) and the Upper Midwest Center (University of Minnesota).

In their own words, the storytellers give a close-up, honest look at the “how” and “why” of what went wrong and the impact of an incident, even months or years later.

Their accounts contain insightful lessons others can use to recognize unsafe situations. The storytellers are safety advocates, explaining changes they’ve made for safer work.

When you learn their story, you relate to them personally. You might imagine yourself or someone you care about having their experiences. Their multi-media stories are housed at [www.tellingthestoryproject.org](http://www.tellingthestoryproject.org).

The website also has topical resources with prevention recommendations and a page with anecdotes in cartoon format, inspired and created by Rick Friday, one of our storytellers. We’ve included links to multimedia personal stories with safety messages that were created by others.

Our initial stories are about manure gases, equipment-related accidents, falls and working after injuries. Some address unrecognized hazards, while others are about common, overlooked hazards, working alone or taking a shortcut.

Several have appeared in Safety Watch, thanks to the supportive interest of this publication.

Mike Biadasz died after he was exposed to hydrogen sulfide (H<sub>2</sub>S) gas while agitating manure at an outdoor lagoon in Wisconsin. Mike’s death was the first known case of a H<sub>2</sub>S fatality occurring in an open pumping environment. His family’s campaign raises awareness about the hazard, promotes use of gas monitors and increases farm safety education opportunities locally in Wisconsin.

Jason and Roxanne Fevold tell about their tractor date that turned into a nightmare when Roxanne discovered Jason unconscious inside a swine nursery building. Jason is a rare survivor of H<sub>2</sub>S exposure. Their experience could easily have resulted in a multiple fatalities.

Kenny Patterson crawled for hours on his arms and elbows after his ATV dipped in a hidden cattle rut and rolled over him, breaking his thigh bone. Patterson's determination and hindsight are part of a remarkable survivor story.

Brian Egel describes an auger entanglement that amputated his left arm when he was eight. He and his wife, Pam, talk about how this affects his risk for other injuries, and how he proactively factors safety considerations into his work practices and farm.

Leon Sheets was severely burned in an explosion and flash fire while he was pressure washing his confinement building. He warns about foaming manure, pit gases, fire risks and responsibilities toward young employees.

It's been a privilege to work with the individuals who've generously shared their stories. They tell us that sharing their story to help others is a positive experience.

## **Use the stories**

The stories are written for everyone, but especially for farmers and their families, classes and the media. To date, the stories have appeared in print publications, online and social media, and have been used in an ag safety course.

They've prompted correspondence from readers, support for the storytellers and sharing of similar incidents. We've seen stories beget more stories.

Like many good stories, the experiences of our storytellers stick with you. We hope their — and your own — stories are shared and used to start the conversation about safe decisions and help others recognize unsafe situations before it's too late.

## **Participate**

Telling the Story Project is looking for more stories to share from folks whose experiences impart a safety message. We're eager to hear from Midwest storytellers of all ages and a range of operations. A new page for short anecdotes is in the works.

What about you? What's your story? How'd it happen?

You might not know the person you'll help, but your experience can make a difference.

We'd be pleased to hear from you and help share your story.

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