

### **Finding gratitude amid farm accident**

Barely a tick in time. Not enough of a moment to even form a thought. Just one minuscule movement. And suddenly, Dennis Sabin's left hand was mangled by an auger.

Sabin became a farm accident statistic on Aug. 20, when one split-second decision altered a typical hot afternoon during autumn's harvest.

Injuries in U.S. agriculture occur at a rate of 4.2 cases per 100 full-time workers, the third highest among occupations. Nationally, production agriculture has the highest number of work-related fatalities in the United States, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

While Sabin lost two of his fingers in the farm accident, he is grateful and thankful. Grateful the accident wasn't worse. Thankful for a caring community and the medical professionals who encircled him with care.

During National Farm Safety and Health Week, he shares his story to encourage other farmers to be ever-vigilant and to draw attention to the emergency care some take for granted.

"I do get emotional, because I'm so thankful. It could have been so much worse," he says.

### **One fateful moment**

At about 5 p.m. on Aug. 20, the Sabins had just finished harvesting wheat and were augering corn from a grain bin.

As the kernels flowed from the bin, Sabin put his left hand under the stream of corn to check the temperature.

"I was on the opposite side of where we normally check, which we won't be checking by hand anymore," he says. "We will never check again with a hand. It will be with a shovel, like it should have been."

"The impact of (the corn) just flipped my hand down into the bottom auger. I yanked back and I looked at it and my index finger was pretty much just bone," he describes.

"It's not like we have a bare auger. It's not an enclosed screen, because the grain wouldn't flow in, but we do have the bars on there, so I don't know how it happened," he says.

"It's like a split-second bad decision. Poor choice. Whatever you want to call it, it's a regret. I just have to go forward. I can't change what happened," he says.

His brother, Larry, his son, Walker, and his grandson, Sage, were all in the farmyard, which is about 30 miles from Elgin. Dennis had grabbed his wrist immediately and they iced his hand to slow the bleeding. And called 911, knowing they were at least 30 minutes on gravel roads from help.

"We knew it was going to be a while. We talked about meeting the ambulance, but I was I suppose going into a little bit of shock. I was starting to shake a little bit," Dennis says.

### **Care by the dozens**

Jaden Moser, who serves with the New Leipzig Fire Department and who lives near the Sabins, arrived first.

From there, the care team steadily increased, as the New Leipzig-Elgin Ambulance Service arrived, with driver Lamont Gaugler and paramedic Jim Weston onboard.

"I knew there would be a paramedic on that ambulance and if I needed an IV, they would have the ability to do that," Dennis says.

"I felt I was in very good hands," he adds. "The importance of the ambulance, it's life-saving, really." Jacobson Memorial Hospital Care Center (JMHCC) operates the ambulance under a

unique program, which allows for a paramedic to be onboard 24/7, a rarity for rural ambulance services.

The paramedic applied a tourniquet and inserted an IV port, which was used throughout Dennis's care in each hospital.

Then the care team expanded even more, as Dennis arrived at JMHCC in Elgin. There, the team also included an innovative concept called eCare, which links an emergency-trained staff of nurses and doctors located at a central hub in Sioux Falls, S.D., to subscribing rural hospitals through two-way video technology. With the press of a button, a doctor virtually steps into the emergency room – even though the doctor is more than 400 miles away.

The local provider, Matt Bickel, and the team of nurses, including RN Josh Miller, had already added the eCare team as Dennis arrived.

"I was so impressed. They had the telemedicine person on the screen and they brought the X-ray machine right over to me on the table and X-rayed my hand before they did anything," he says. Radiology techs Kelsey Minch and Jayda Olson and lab technician Ronah Sartaguda all stood by Dennis.

And the ambulance crew stood by as well, another emotional moment for Dennis.

"What was impressive was the ambulance crew basically waited to know if they were going to transport me to Bismarck. They had to wait, which, oh my gosh, I felt so bad," he says, holding back tears.

After initial stabilizing care in Elgin, he was transported to Bismarck by helicopter, where a surgeon and his team stepped into the operating room at 2 a.m.

"They wheeled me into their surgery, and I look around and...", he says, becoming emotional about another room filled with people there to help. "Just because," he says, pointing at his hand.

His index and middle finger were amputated and his other fingers received stitches. A broken bone in his hand was repaired with two pins.

But Dennis still speaks with gratitude.

"I'm just so thankful," he says.

"My two older daughters were there the next day and they drew a smiley face on my finger and my sister named him Lucky," he says with a laugh.

"I am just so thankful for everything," he says. "For every single person involved."

As a regular blood donor, Dennis also saw the other side of that gift, as he received a blood transfusion

"I do give blood regularly here, but this was a different experience," he says of the two-hour process. "It was very educational. They are very careful when they do it. They retested my blood and retested the donation."

As he recovers, he will start physical therapy in Bismarck, then switch to JMHCC for long-term therapy.

## **Boardroom to ER**

Dennis, who has served on the JMHCC board for a total of 10 years, has been in the boardroom, but only once before in the emergency room.

In the boardroom, he has learned about cost-based reimbursement and the financial aspects of a nonprofit critical access hospital.

"We don't make money. We're always struggling to break even," he says. "Coming from that side, we know how important it is to have people use the hospital, use the clinics and the facilities, and to have such a good combination of staff and leadership."

“But just to be able to have this facility for people who aren’t transferred to be able to stay home and be closer,” he says. “It’s so critical that we keep it. On the board, I will do everything I can.”

The employment side of the hospital is also critical for the community, he says.

And he’s grateful for each of those caregivers, sharing a heartfelt moment with one of them when he returned to JMHCC later.

While in the JMHCC emergency room, Dennis asked someone to remove his work boots.

“I don’t know who did it,” he says. But when he returned to Elgin to retrieve his blood-splattered boots, he had a meaningful conversation with RN Rose Tesani, the assistant director of nursing.

“She is a sweetheart,” he says.

With his hand still bandaged, Dennis now hears stories from others who have been injured in one fateful moment on the farm as well.

“Slow down and think about things a little differently,” he says. “Be aware of your surroundings at all times if you’re around machinery. We always, always avoid being around power takeoffs.”

He’s thankful his brother and son have been able to carry the farmwork forward.

“We did have a lot of neighbors call,” he says. “It does make you feel so good to be part of this community and everybody being so concerned about me.”