

A LIFE WELL-OCCUPIED ART HEINZE HAS SPENT A FULL PROFESSIONAL LIFE OVERCOMING CHALLENGES, NOT DISABILITIES

Saturday, December 7, 1957, started as an ordinary day on my parents farm near Elrosa, Minnesota. At age 19 and two years out of high school, I was planning to work on my Dad's farm until I could join the Army. My plan was to into farming after completing my military obligation.

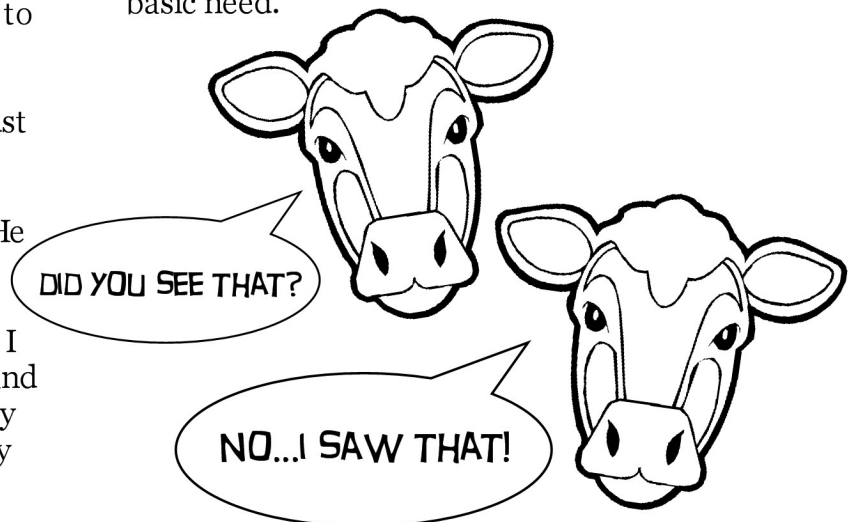
As usual, I got up at 6 am and did my share of the usual chores and had breakfast. I anticipated working on our 4-H project to saw firewood to heat the District 12 schoolhouse where the Elrosa Stars 4-H Club held its monthly meetings and activities. My younger twin brothers, Dennis and David, and I left to go to Uncle Paul Heinze's farm to help saw the firewood.

We were joined by other 4-H Club members and our cousin Jerome Heinze and Uncle Paul. Uncle Paul had an old platform lumber mill saw and a smaller 30-inch circular saw used to cut slabs into kindling wood. It was a snowy, cold December morning. Everything was going along fine. I was feeding the saw. Others were pitching or stacking blocks or bringing slabs to the table to be sawed. We were nearly done when we discovered that some of the piled slabs were frozen together with snow, sawdust and ice.

Jerome used a tractor to loosen the pile. He gave the slab a gentle poke to break it up, which didn't work. A heavier poke sent the entire pile tumbling toward me and the saw. I stumbled while trying to get out of the way and fell into the running 30-inch circular saw. My left arm was cut off through the wrist and my right arm was cut off through the elbow. It was an accident. No one was at fault. But what a shock to everyone! Fortunately, no one panicked. I remember the blood spurting out of my arms as my heart pumped. Uncle Paul helped me up and tried to staunch my bleeding arms while Dennis ran to the house to get towels and sheets, which they tightly wrapped around my arms to stop the bleeding. I credit the quick thinking and the fast action of those around me and our 4-H first aid training for stopping the bleeding. I thank the staff at St. Michael's hospital for saving my life.

Because my accident was considered a "previous injury," it was not until 1983, when insurance laws changed, that my limb repairs and replacements were covered by my health insurance at 80%. Since my parents did not have medical accident insurance on me at the time, a neighbor and 4-H club parent initiated the Art Heinze Trust Fund to help with future medical, prosthetic and educational expenses.

I recuperated at Sauk Centre Hospital for 16 days and then entered Gillette Hospital in St. Paul for rehabilitation and the fitting of artificial limbs. I was discharged after 90 days. Gillette had a very complete and intensive rehabilitation service team. Within 3 days of entering Gillette, I was fitted with a crude but functional prosthesis, which was worn over my left residual arm. This allowed me to activate a cable that opened and closed a hook so I could feed myself, brush my teeth and go to the bathroom. My left elbow was not damaged, so I became predominantly left-handed. I will never forget the helplessness I felt when I was dependant on others for for my every basic need.



As my therapy progressed and my residual arms healed, I was fitted with my permanent left, below-elbow prosthesis. After recovering from two shaping surgeries for my right arm and again enduring physical therapy, I was fitted with my permanent right, above-elbow prosthesis. Now I had two hook hands and was ready to take on the world. I could do most of the tasks people need to do in life to live independantly and comfortably. But when I was discharged back to our farmhouse, I still had a lot to learn.