

PUBLICATION

The Story of S Lazy H: A Lesson in Poor Estate Planning from Corb Lund

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January 29, 2021

I'm not sure how many of you will be familiar with the song, "S Lazy H" by Corb Lund. It is one of my favourites - perhaps because of my love of being in the country. Corb is a home-grown Albertan and many of his songs touch on the Province.

Within this amazing song are lessons in poor estate planning and what can happen when the future is not carefully considered in this case, to ensure that the generational ranch is kept whole after the death of the previous generation.

Corb has confirmed that the song is not a true story but is based upon stories he has heard of three of four similar tales of family-run ranches or farms and what happens when the operation is passed onto more than one sibling.

The story begins with the character, we'll call him Darcy, talks about how he grew up on the land of the S Lazy H, learning to ride and ranch on property that had been in his family for six generations. He talks of his carefree youth, not planning for future. As he and his sister grow up, she moves away to go to school while he remains at the ranch to help his dad, gaining appreciation for the hard work done by his father to keep the ranch running. Eventually, his dad passes away and his sister marries. He is left to ranch the property and eventually his sister and her husband come to see that the land of the ranch is quite valuable and want to sell it.

Darcy and his sister go to Court and the Court awards her half of the S Lazy H. Darcy tries to find a way to purchase her interest but "no cow/calf operation carries that kind of cash" and he is forced to sell off 20 sections. His sister sells her half to a developer to build houses on the land while Darcy continues to try and ranch the property but with the smaller bit of land left to him, is unable to make ends meet and the song ends with the bank owning what's left of the S Lazy H.

This is a story that is far more common in Alberta than it needs to be. Some careful estate planning by Darcy's parents could have preserved the S Lazy H from being divided and sold.

"Sometimes right isn't equal, sometimes equal's not fair...so shed a tear and look skyward, god help the S Lazy H."