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Shattered windows and burnt cookies

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In life, it seems like there is always something. Maybe you're in the middle of a drought year and it decides to rain only after you cut your hay. Maybe you left the gate open and now your cows are in the neighbor's yard.

Maybe you have a brand-new grandbaby you get to go see. Maybe all those things happened on the same day, a day where it seems like everything – the good and the bad – is piling up and it's getting to be too much. A recent experience helped me to see that this building pressure likes to find our weakest spot, and sometimes, it breaks us.

My nephew just turned 3, so last weekend my whole family got together to celebrate. We were all in my brother's backyard playing cornhole and horseshoes and watching the kids enjoy the new trampoline. I have no idea now what I needed, but I left the party to go grab something from my car. I opened the driver door, grabbed whatever it was, then shut the door. (I drive a 1999 Chevy Tahoe, so it's probably more accurate to say I slammed the door.) I stopped dead in my tracks when I heard a noise that always makes me cringe – shattering glass. I looked around to pinpoint the source and found my back passenger window had a nice new hole smackdab in the middle. The glass hadn't completely fallen out, but the window looked more like a spiderweb than glass.

I stood stunned for a moment. How did closing the driver door shatter the back door on the opposite side?

Luckily, I have three older brothers and a wonderful father who all know way more about cars than I do, and they all happened to be in the backyard. I drifted back through the gate in my bewildered state and somehow managed to stumble through something like, "Can one of you guys come look at my car? I closed the driver door and the back window shattered."

Most of the adults immediately jumped up to see this anomaly, and I reluctantly led the pack of fascinated followers to my back door. We cleaned up the glass on the ground and taped cardboard up as a temporary cover while I waited for my appointment to fix my window. I was still just so confused, so I asked my dad what he thought caused this mess.

“Air pressure,” he said. “I once shattered my passenger window the same way. There was probably one chip or weak spot, and when you closed the door, the air pressure was just too much and it blew out the weak spot.”

So that’s it – one slammed door was enough to shatter a window. But when I take a step back and really look at it, it was more than my over-zealous door shutting. That weak spot may have been there from manufacturing, it might have been from a rock chip, or it might have formed slowly through the years of extreme weather that window has been exposed to.

No matter what the real cause was, this situation made me reflect on a lesson my mom taught me growing up. My mom is a very patient and typically cheerful person. She rarely became agitated, and she didn’t let us see her cry often. So, I remember the times when she would cry, she would say something like, “I’m not crying because the cookies are burnt. I’m crying because the cookies are burnt, the house is a mess, my kids need help with homework, the dishes are piled, we have that trip coming up, and, and and.” The basic message here is she wasn’t really that upset about the last thing – it was the 99 other things that pushed her right up to the edge, so she broke over something as trivial as burnt cookies.

We all face days and situations like this. The cookies will get burnt, the glass will shatter and we might break. Farming and ranching is a stressful job – anyone who denies that clearly hasn’t ever worked in or around ag. Things will pile up, both good and bad, until one day you close a door and something shatters. Do what you can to mitigate the impact of those smaller things, but be prepared for a day where nothing seems to go right and you just get pushed over that edge. If you do find that burnt cookies or a gate left open leads to a larger emotional reaction than you would have thought acceptable in that circumstance, know at least that my mom and I can relate and might understand a bit of what you’re going through.