



Mason Lemer

Water is an important resource in the lives of everybody. For example, it powers our bodies and allows our crops to grow. However, water can also have a devastating side to it as well. Water can cut into the earth, overtake land, and leave a lasting impression on the earth. While my family has always appreciated the fact that we have a lake in our back yard, that lake also altered our lifestyle and cause a lot of stress to a ranching family.

I live on a farm north of Drake, North Dakota, near a lake called Lake Lemer, an alkaline lake. The farm has been in the Lemer family for 100 years and is now considered a centennial farm. In the 1930s, the ground that now houses this lake was actually dry. On windy days, the soot from the ground would cause a dust storm or sorts.

Prior to the lake filling with water, my grandfather used the area as pasture land for grazing cows. It wasn't until 1994 that water actually began to accumulate. In the fall of 1994, the farm received 15 inches of rain in October. This is a vivid memory for my father as it was also the year he and my mother were married. Over the next 20 years, the lake grew and expanded. That growth caused a lot of land to become unusable and caused quite a few problems for my family and our farm.

In those years, my father, brother, and I spent a lot of time fencing and moving fences to keep up with the ever-changing waters of Lake Lemer. Even though I was only a child, I could definitely see what was happening. I could also see the worry in my father's eyes. Though he is an optimist, there were days I wondered what else could happen.

My most vivid memory concerning water happened when I was in fifth grade. I don't think I fully comprehended the level of devastation I was witnessing in the spring of 2015. Simply walking in the yard near our barn and shop caused water to spring up at our feet. It was not until I saw my father's growing worry about the yard and the rising waters that I realized how powerful the water truly was.

By 2015, lake was eating up much of our yard. We were not able to use one of our pastures, and the dirt in one corner of one of our pole barns was eroded away and replaced by a hole. It was a frightening time; my family was not sure what to do. If the lake kept rising, we would lose even more of our yard and even our house. My dad tried to get a dike built, but no one would build a dike where we wanted it. He contacted FEMA and the Water Board; however, we were either too small of an operation or our land didn't meet the criteria to receive help. The situation was looking dire.

To make matters worse, our well went out. The water in our house turned a dark gray color. To deal with the dirty water, my dad put a water tank in our attached garage. This tank was filled with cleaner water from a different well. Every week or so it had to be refilled. However, we did not drink this water. We had to buy a water dispenser just for drinking water which we purchased in town. My family quickly grew tired of these tedious actions and decided that we could not live like that.

In the summer of that year, my family decided to buy a double-wide trailer house, and we relocated the farm about three-fourths of a mile west up our driveway. This spot allowed us to remain close to the farm, but was far enough away from the lake that it would not be affected by any changes to the water level.

It has been seven years since the waters devastated our farm, pasture, and barn areas. In those years, the water has receded, and we are able to use the land around the lake once again. Fences have been moved once again, but we are ever-mindful that this may not be permanent. Water is powerful and we have definitely learned to change with this force of nature.