

## WinkWorld July 2003

### **The Commute, 1534 miles**

With my black Labrador, Gin, I began my commute from Turlock CA to Howes SD. The trip took 3 days: 5 hours the first day; 15 hours the second day; and 8 hours the third day. When I arrived on the ranch, we unpacked my 'Lil Red Chili (Saturn Vue) and got in the pickup to drive to Yankton, another 6 hours, for the funeral of our dear friend, Edna. When the funeral was over, we turned around and drove back to the ranch.

### **Before Ph.D.: Haul Water**

#### **After Ph. D.: Haul Water**

Ranch life gives new meaning to that old saying. Some of you may remember my writing about the drought last year. This spring we have had enough rain to coax the grasses to grow, but we have not had enough snow or rain to run water and fill the dams. Even the well water for the house has gone stale and turned stinky and dark. Thus, we are hauling water for use in the house to the 1500-gallon cistern near the house. Today we hauled 1000 gallons. I am predicting that it will last us a week. In addition, I haul water daily to the delicate little tomato and chili plants trying to grow in the brutal winds.

### **Skunk in the Cistern**

We never put water in the cistern without remembering the time a couple of years ago when a skunk got into the cistern and drowned. We slowly began to notice the smell of skunk in the house and guessed that it was passing through the yard during the night. Throughout the course of the next few days, the smell increased and eventually seemed to permeate the house. Finally, one Saturday evening while Wink was in the shower, he realized what must have happened. We raced outside and could see a slight opening between the concrete lid of the cistern and the rocks surrounding it. We lifted the lid, and the horrible smell hit us in the face. From here the story goes straight downhill. We put an 8-foot ladder down into the water, and I'll only tell you that Wink is too big to get through the opening into the cistern. However, the skunk had to come out; the cistern cleaned and disinfected; and, it had to be done before the sun set.

### **Mowing the Lawn**

Preparing to mow the lawn is a job in itself. First, we need boots to protect our feet and legs from snakes. Then we need sunscreen on every inch of skin peeking out. After that we put on Deet to protect ourselves from mosquitoes and West Nile disease. After this, I put on my snow ski glasses and the nose/mouth mask because of my allergies. Finally, this is topped off with a large sun hat. Suffice it to say that you would not recognize me mowing, nor when I climbed out of that cistern.

The rains have given us great grasses around the ranch buildings. We mow almost daily, as we try to maintain about 4 acres. This is not like mowing a lawn in town. The grasses and weeds are a strange mixture of pigweed, crested wheat grass, western wheat grass, pennycress, alfalfa, hemp, sage, and cochia. We have two push mowers. I emphasize, *push*.

### **The Primacy of Weather**

The reason that prairie people talk about the weather is because all depends on it. The weather determines each day's activities. The weather determines whether ranchers can

feed and water the cattle, meet the bank payments, and pay taxes, which support the few schools in the county.

### **The Amount of Rain**

I always enjoy the daily discussions of who got how much rain. Some are known to exaggerate; and, others to under-state. Data manipulation.