

WinkWorld February 2004

As I am on the ranch all of January, I will try to capture some descriptions of our life here.

First Week of January 2004

Thursday, January 1 - 9 2004

Temperature varied from 20 above to 20 below all week.

The most significant event for us this week was the BSE scare. Cattle prices for producers immediately dropped 20%. We had saved all of the calves to sell this week, but now Wink will continue to feed them. Feeding calves is very expensive and an amazing amount of dirty work in the cold every day. The cattle industry is very complex, but basically there are three levels: the retailers, the packers, and the producers. Wink is a producer. The 20% price has not affected the packers; and, I suspect you have not seen a drop in the retail price of meat. However, it sure has hit the producers.

I suspect our lives out here are not as idealized as some might think. Ranching has its own compelling reality. I hope to capture a bit of it. It was so cold this week that I rarely left the house. At times the howling wind and bitter cold make it miserable to be outside; this type of weather is hard on vehicles, pumps, water lines, animals, and people. When it got up to 20 degrees, I thoroughly enjoyed long walks in the snow on the prairies. We had some snow, which made the prairies white and gorgeous again, covering the old hard snowdrifts, which remind me of ugly gray clumps of concrete. The terrible winds make the snowdrifts so hard that even a tractor can drive over them.

I did go out one day to help Dean with a small party of the chores.

First, we fed the colts. We scooped out big buckets of feed from a 1000 lb sack and carried it to the colts. We stood in the middle of the colts, as they fed from the buckets; some are still too nervous to come near us. Today *Genie* came to me, the first time she has walked up to anyone. *Brown Sugar* and *Snippy* also came to me. The other colts in the pen are named: *Holly*, *Dolly*, *Blue Moon*, *Pip*, *BB*, and *Amiga*.

After eating, the colts were running, playing, and kicking a lot. Suddenly, one of the colts, *Brown Sugar*, slipped and fell on the ice. She struggled to get up, and each time she fell down again. It was scary to watch, as this is how horses break their legs, and it is also how they learn to respect ice. Finally, she did succeed in getting to her feet.

While we were out with the colts, I noticed the big black bulls in the next pasture. Their backs and sides were completely covered with a blanket of white frost. The cows in another pen had elliptical circles of white frost and ice around their mouths.

Second, Wink broke the ice with his foot on a big black tire, which is rigged to water the animals. The animals played with the electrical cord on the heater and broke it yesterday, so today he had to put in a new heater and electrical cord. This required that he put his bare hands in the ice and water many times in order to get the float working properly. Ranchers have to be able to fix anything.

Third, we separated the yearling bull calves into two different groups; those who will stay

bulls and those who will be steered today. I hated to shoo any of them into the pen for those who will be steered.

Two days of this week were a change of pace because of the county commissioners' meetings. On these days Wink started doing chores (feeding and watering the cows, colts, and calves) at 3:30 a.m. in the bitter cold darkness. At 6:30 a.m., he drove to the commissioners' meeting in Sturgis, 85 miles away. He came home at 8:30 p.m. and went outside at 9 p.m. to do more chores. Breaking ice and getting the pumps to work in the darkness and cold is a horrible job.

A neighbor, Dan, gave me some of his homemade buffalo jerky today. Delicious.

Welcome to the world: Kalliope Dobras Zappelli, 6 lb. 6 oz. In San Francisco

This week I finished two chapters (4 and 6) of the next edition of *Critical Pedagogy: Notes from the Real World*.

Week Two

January 11 - 17

A balmy 10 degree to 40 degree all week

The good news of the week was that when the hot water heater in the basement burst into flame, we didn't burn down our house, which was built about 1915. The bad news of the week was that the left rear axel, plus the two rear tires, came off of our 1977 GMC Dually truck (a.k.a., *Heavy*) while Wink was driving. This is good news, too, as no one was hurt.

I finished three more chapters (5, 7, & 8) of the next edition of *Critical Pedagogy*.

Week Three

January 18 - 24

We continued to bask in 20 to 45 degree weather.

Wink flew to Washington DC to try to get COOL (Country of Origin Labeling) taken out of the Omnibus bill, and while there he and his rancher colleagues visited every senator's office. COOL was approved last year, but the president buried it into the spending bill to delay its implementation. The reason that Bush does not want meat labeled is because this benefits the meat packers' monopoly. Without COOL meat packers can pay less for imported beef and cattle and sell it with the USDA stamp of approval. Most consumers assume that beef stamped USDA is born and raised in the US. Actually, we import beef from 37 different countries. All of this hurts the cattle producers like Wink, who are committed to producing good and SAFE meat. I told you it was complex. The bill did not pass - until the next day when the cowboys left town. However, it was a symbolic victory, and there is now talk of a new bill, which will keep COOL separate and send it through the senate and house again.

Cattle prices bouncing back. Wink says that we are almost up to 0 (breaking even) now.

This week I wrote the Pestalozzi story, 2 new syllabi, and WinkWorld. I also began printing the manuscript, until I ran out of toner. The closest toner is 110 miles away. I did get the draft and proposed Table of Contents for another book sent off to the editor.

Week Four January 24 - 31 Bitter Cold Weather Hits

January 30 and 31 we attended the Rapid City Stock Show. It will be a cold, gala round of rodeos, horse sales, and cattle judging. I plan to begin the long drive from SD to CA Sunday, 2.1.2004. As you read this, I'll be in my *'Lil Red Chili* (Saturn Vue) driving through Wyoming, Utah, Nevada, and down the Central Valley of CA, where the fruit tree orchards will be budding.