

WinkWorld July 2002

Joan's Real World: Prairie Pedagogy, June 23, 2002

This is a glimpse into the 18-hour period of time of what was ~really~ happening as I worked on the final transcription of the Freire audiotape. I have often thought that I write in the nooks and crannies of life*. This was a rather typical example of my real life on our South Dakota ranch. If you have ever seen the movie, Dances With Wolves, you will know what the prairies look like.

This actually happened while I was doing the final editing and transcribing of the Paulo Freire (CABE. 1993) audiotape for my first electronic newsletter, July 1, 2002.

9 p.m.

June 22, 2002

My husband and I were enjoying a glass of wine and each other on the deck of the ranch house. As we looked to the southeast, we commented about the perfect temperature and the absence of wind. As we are in the middle of a serious drought, it was good to enjoy that moment of peace on the prairies. Darkness came to these extremely isolated lands of South Dakota. We toasted the second longest day of the year, without realizing that it was about to become even longer.

9 p.m.

The phone rang. A neighbor said that some cattle were out on the highway in the darkness. We jumped up and threw on work clothes and ran to the dirty old pickup, Dan, a 1985 Ford 1/2 ton, 4-wheel drive. Anyone who knows 1985 gray Ford pickups, immediately knows that it is now multiple shades of rust, as the 1985 gray paint began to oxidize in 1986. And, has continued. Dan is named after our friend, Dan, who sold us this classic old work truck which is alternately used for feeding, fencing, and 'finagling' bulls off highways.

With dirt and darkness flying in all direction, we roared up the lane for a mile onto the two-lane highway. Two more miles down the road, and we came to the neighbor's bull and two of our cows with their calves running in the ditches and on the blacktop highway. We jumped out of the pickup and chased them on foot toward an open gate. They ran past the gate and off into the darkness. Dean tried to circle around them to bring them back. During this time, I flashed the pickup headlights at on-coming traffic, with the hope that it would serve as a warning of cattle on the road. Not one of the cars even slowed; they simply flew by us and the cattle in the darkness. In the chaotic night, sitting alone in the pickup, I reflected on the sadness that even in this isolated corner of the world, they must have been too afraid to slow down, or even to stop to see if we needed help.

Meanwhile, Dean came running back to the pickup, jumped in, and threw it into gear. We chased the bull, cows, and calves up and down the ditches, vainly attempting to get them into the open gate. At one point, I feared we would roll the old pickup on the steep incline of the ditch. Finally, both cows and calves went into the pasture through the open gate, but the bull jumped a fence and also went running off into our pasture.

As this is one of our neighbor's bulls, we didn't want him with our cows which are going to be artificially inseminated in a week, so we drove around the huge pasture in the darkness

trying to get him out. Finally, we conceded and drove home; filthy and defeated. However, no one had been hurt, and we were thankful for that.

5 a.m. the next morning

We headed out on horseback to try again to get the bull back across the highway and over to his own pasture. Dean was on Speed, a serious working ranch horse. I was on Buttercup**, a not-so-serious ranch horse. We easily found the bull and began to bring him back to the corrals. I slowly became aware that my saddle was not tight. Often with Buttercup, we need to cinch up the saddle more tightly, after a mile or two because he doesn't have any withers, and the saddle tends to slip from one side to the other. However, this morning we did not have the time, as we had found the bull so easily. As we moved the bull toward the corral, I knew I was gambling with a loose saddle, but I didn't want to stop and cinch up, as I fear the bull would immediately take advantage and try to escape again.

Before I begin the next part of this story, I must tell you that Dean is like glue on a horse. He is the epitome of beauty in motion when he rides. He is an excellent rider and fearless. In addition, you need to know that there is a good reason why Speed is so named.

I looked over at Dean and suddenly realized that Speed was tripping, something I had never seen him do. As if in slow motion, I looked in horror as Speed started to go down with Dean on him. Dean was on the ground, and Speed was rolling right on top of him. Speed rolled about halfway up Dean's body, but then he suddenly jumped and landed on all four. I breathed a split second sigh of relief before I realized that Dean's boot was caught in the stirrup. Like a flash on the TV screen of my mind, I saw our 12-year-old neighbor, Janel, being drug to her death only a year ago. With his foot in the stirrup and flat on the on his back on the prairies, Dean raised his head and quietly talked to Speed, until he had successfully kicked his boot out of the stirrup.

Speed took off for the ranch alone. I tried vainly to catch him, thinking all of the time about my loose saddle. Dean yelled that he wanted Buttercup, and I rode over and got off. I noticed the dirt and dust on Dean's back, right shoulder and right leg. Dean jumped on Buttercup and took off after the bull, which immediately jumped another fence. As I walked back toward the ranch, I saw the silhouette of Dean, cracking his bullwhip in the air and galloping on Buttercup over the next hill. I waited and watched. Nothing. Not the bull. Not Dean. Not Buttercup.

I knew this was not good. I walked until I caught Speed; I knew I should jump on him and go find them, but I hesitated. Remember, Speed is a serious ranch horse. I stood and stared at the western skyline. Eventually, Dean and Buttercup came back into view. Dean was safely mounted. When we all met up at the corrals, I noticed immediately that Dean's left shoulder and leg were also now covered with dirt. The saddle had finally slipped off to the left, sending Dean to the dirt again, only this time, on his other side.

He said he just knew it was time for a second cup of coffee.

5:30 a.m.

We walked back to the house for coffee. Dean called the owner of the bull, who said he could not help with the bull until later in the day. This is a prairie faux pas; it is an unwritten rule of the land that you go immediately if one of your own animals is on another's land.

Dean sighed and went back out on his 4-wheeler to try to chase the bull home. I went back into the house and had my breakfast: Tylenol and estrogen. I returned to the transcription of

Freire's audiotape.

Yes, this is true. You can't make this stuff up.

*If you would like to real another example of my ~real~ world, see Critical Pedagogy: Notes from the Real World, 2/e, pp. 1 to 6.

*For more about Buttercup, see Critical Pedagogy: Notes from the Real World, 2/e