

WinkWorld January 2003

Joan's Real World: Prairie Pedagogy

In this short section, I try to capture only a glimpse into our world on the prairies. You may recall that I wrote about Northern Lights Spectacular in the previous issue. You may also have noticed that I missed the December 1 issue. Sorry.

The major event of last month was that Dean won the election for Meade County Commissioner. No one was more surprised than we, as he ran as an Independent against an incumbent Republican candidate. His primary purpose in running was to represent the rural perspective. He will be terrific. We should all be so lucky politically to have someone with Dean's character representing us.

This month in our WinkWorld, I will summarize a typical day on the ranch, as I write in the little East bedroom, which has become known as my sanctuary. I am aware that many of my colleagues envision me writing in peace on the prairies. My reality is quite different. Ranch life is as compelling and demanding as any other. Dean always tells me that if I make a mistake, the worst thing that happens is that someone gets annoyed with me. However, if he makes a mistake, an animal dies.

12-20-02

20 degrees and a light skiff of snow - not enough, as the prairies are still blowing away as a result of the drought. It continues to be heartbreaking to look out daily at the dry dams and the barren prairies. Many neighbors have had to sell their herds. We have sold down the numbers, and Dean's days are filled with trying to get water and feed to the cattle and calves.

7 a.m. I go to my sanctuary write the political chapter for the next book, *Passionate Pedagogy*.

8 a.m. Dean is gone to the breaks, a rugged area of land, to feed. The man who fills the semen tank arrives. I run downstairs. We have coffee and visit until Dean returns. I run back upstairs about 8:30 and begin writing again.

9:15 a.m. A panel truck arrives, and I run downstairs. A stranger needs diesel fuel to get to the next little town, 40 miles away. He gives me 20 dollars and goes out to our tank and takes what he needs - the honor system reigns. 9:30, and I run back upstairs.

9:40 a.m. The Mary Kay sales person calls. We all know that I will be a great disappointment to her. I run downstairs, and as we talk I wash the vegetables for a beef stew.

10 a.m. A man arrives to cut 12 young bulls. I run downstairs and wish him well. I finish the vegetables and put the beef stew on the stove. I run back upstairs.

10:40 a.m. Dean and the man come in for coffee and cookies. I run downstairs. As we visit, I prepare a 20 pound turkey, which we will take to Santa Fe for Christmas.

11:15 a.m. I run back upstairs and begin writing again.

12:30 p.m. Dean comes in for lunch. I run downstairs. The midday meal is known as "dinner" on the prairies, but we still have lunch: a capucchino SlimFast.

1:25 p.m. I go out for a walk to take advantage of the most sunlight and warmth of the day. I wear black, felt-lined heavy snow boots and a long mauve down-stuffed quilt coat with ruffled sleeves-without a doubt the grooviest thing I own. A colleague in Davis, CA gave it to me 18 years ago - it is warm and light and great for walking on the windy prairies. On my head I wear a brown cap with lined pull-down earflaps, which makes me look so much like the woman in FARGO that it scares me to look in a mirror.

Ginny, my labrador, and I walk into the wind to the North pasture. I am concentrating on the emptiness of nothing to regain my grounding so I can concentrate on writing again. The wind is howling, and I am oblivious. Suddenly I realize that Gin is nervous and agitated. I turn around to see several hundred head of cattle within 10 to 20 feet behind me - very interested in Ginny, who is now wrapping herself around my left leg.

I take Ginny off the lead hoping she will run away - she stays glued to the hem of my long coat, and the cows continue to approach. As I can't get Gin away from me, nor the cows away from Gin, I make a mad dash (in my big snow boots and mauve long down coat) to a large tractor tire turned inside out for feed, which happened to be about 100 yards away. I jump into the tire and am sure that my brown earflaps will scare the cows away - but, no luck; they circle the tire with me in the middle, whirling the blue nylon dog lead over my head and yelling, as Gin runs around the outside of the tire with the cows circling us.

Finally I lift Ginny into the tire, and I get out. Despite the howling wind, my yells, and my frightening attire, I cannot scare the cattle away from Ginny. We are stuck with Gin in the tire, and the cows and I circling it. I know it will be a long time before anyone happens by to help, so I decide to make a another run to a wing fence, a couple hundred yards away. Still swirling my blue nylon dog lead in the air and yelling, Ginny and I take off at a lumbering pace, with the curious cows in hot pursuit. We make it, and I scale the fence-no small feat in that mauve coat. The fence is so well made that Ginny cannot crawl under it. I reach down and pull her through the small space.

2:45 p.m. We get back to the house, and Dean asks how my walk was. I make coffee and go back upstairs to try to remember what I was writing.

4:05 p.m. The sun sets.

5:00 p.m. I go back downstairs, and we eat beef stew. After dinner we take out the turkey; take the meat off the bones; throw away the carcass; and freeze the meat.

6:30 p.m. We drive to Faith (28 miles away) for a School Board meeting. The board votes to support the community and build a community center/gymnasium. Our taxes go up - ranchers need more land than a house in town, and thus pay a much higher proportion of taxes. The rural perspective.

Happy 2003 to us all.
I send you love.
Think Peace.