

WinkWorld October 2002

Joan's Real World: Prairie Pedagogy

In these short Prairie Pedagogy sections, I try to capture only the highlights and details of our past month on the ranch. You might recall that last month, I spoke of the drought, the wind, the blowing dirt, a coyote on the front steps, and a Threshing Bee parade and dance.

CritterCare

Dean, not the new little baby Dean Austin Wink, but the older, bigger one went to Australia for 2 weeks in early September. I suddenly found myself the Top Hand. My objective was to keep everything alive, which meant food and water for several hundred hungry cows and calves and the four horses. No small feat in a drought, I might add.

Dean has always told me that if I fail to carry through on a professional responsibility, the only thing that happens is that someone gets mad at me. However, if he fails in a responsibility, something dies. While he was gone, one calf died from a lightening strike. A calf that dies from lightening does not look like a calf, which dies from sickness.

In what follows is a short description of my CritterCare responsibilities. I had to hop on my 4-wheeler and drive out in the pastures and check all of the cows, horses, feed, and water once or twice per day. With my old jeans, I wore my 20-year-old black, dirty cowboy boots to protect me from snakes, stickers, and/or manure. I wore a turtleneck long sleeve shirt to protect me from West Nile diseased mosquitoes, which meant that I only needed a hint of Deet around the neck and ears. I wore strong blue rubber and nylon gloves to protect my hands. I wore yellow ski goggles to protect my eyes from the bugs in the air. I wore an Australian leather hat to protect me from the sun. And, I hung my passport holder from my neck for the little notebook to maintain a daily journal of any information on the cows: which ones might not yet be bred; which ones might be sick; which dams, dugouts, or bogholes might potentially be dangerous for the animals; and which floats are working or not working in which water tanks. I imagine that I did not look like a stereotypical cowperson when I stopped on a ridge to write in my little journal.

Daily, I saw antelope and coyotes. There is one male antelope, in particular, which fascinates me. Antelope simply run away when they see you; they run far and fast. However, this one likes to run huge slow circles around me. He never likes me to get out of his sight. When he gets on top of a little ridge, he will stand and stare at me. Then, he will make another big circle, sometimes passing right in front of me or behind me. He also does this when I am walk alone in the pastures. I call him Curious George. He wonders what I am doing on his prairies.

Other animals I encountered during the past month: one Golden eagle feeding on a rabbit; a badger, which crossed right in front of my 4-wheeler and then turned and stared at me while I drove by; and 5 great blue herons.

Sad news. Chulo is one of Dean's best horses-the flashiest, fastest, and friskiest horse we have. About 18 months ago, Chulo stifled himself. This means that a ligament pulled over the hipbone, and tends not to go back into place. We have been nursing him for the past year and half with rest and a horse chiropractor. However, to no avail. Chulo will not get

better. He is now starting to lose weight and seems not to feel well. Dean cannot bring himself to sell Chulo at an auction, as he fears he will suffer too much before they put him down. Chulo is not well enough to simply grow old here on the ranch. I am assuming that you know how this story will end.

Anthrax has been discovered in some cows not too far from us. The last time this disease was seen in this area was in the 1930s. As some of you may know, anthrax can be caused when diseased animals are not buried deep enough and the spores work their way up through the soil. The theory for this recent outbreak is that because of the drought, the cows are eating so close to the soil that they are taking in spores.

West Nile Disease has come to South Dakota. Some horses have died; and some people are sick. The irony is that the drought is so bad, that we have very few mosquitoes. From listening to NPR, it seems that there are no theories yet on why we have West Nile Disease in the area.

In closing, our weather report: During the first two weeks of the month, our 100-degree temperatures continued. However, fall arrived the second weekend, and the temps have been cool since. We are expecting wet cold rain and snow tomorrow. The prairies are the land of extremes. Weather has primacy.