

WinkWorld November 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 may recall that last month, I spoke of our new little grandson, Dean Austin; my CritterCare responsibilities while Wink was in Australia; Chulo; West Nile disease; Anthrax in cattle; wild animals on the prairies; and my ever-present weather report. In this issue of Prairie Pedagogy, I want to mention only one thing, as it was so magnificent.

10-07-02 Northern Light Spectacular

I have seen the Northern Lights before, but this was truly a one-in-a-lifetime experience. I suspect that I will never again see the vividness of color, the duration of time, nor the intensity of moving colors, which filled 180 degrees of the pitch black sky.

"Go see the Northern Lights," I heard Dean's voice saying through the crackling sounds of the cell phone on a moonless night about 10 p.m. I went outside and marveled at the entire northern horizon, which was covered with brilliant, moving, colored beams of light. The pole light (similar to a street light) near the house was limiting the brightness of the Northern Lights. So I jumped in the truck with the horse trailer still hitched and drove up to the north pasture. I turned off the lights and engine, and simply sat in complete silence, awe, and wonder. The night was completely black. From East to West, the entire northern sky was covered with a dazzling display of bouncing colored lights dancing across the northern horizon.

For you who live in cities, it looked as if 100 used car dealerships had suddenly purchased and plugged in those huge spotlights they use for advertising in the urban areas. It even looked as if they had purchased multiple intense colors of cellophane papers to place over the beams of light.

For you who live in the more rural areas of South Dakota, it looked as if the sky were alive with colors from Belle Fourche to Bowdle.

"Heawt stwuck*," are the only words I can find to describe my feelings as I watched this amazing natural phenomenon.

*These are the words our 4-year-old grandson, Lukie, whispered when he saw for the first time the book nook his mommy had created in their living room. The minute he said it, it became, yet another, family word, which we will use for decades. Obviously, he comes from a long line of little Wink guys who develop the "r" sound a little later.