

Merry Christmas 2015!

Well, here we go again with our annual Christmas newsletter. I hope this letter finds your own family healthy and happy as we approach another new year. I must apologize for yet again having to send this newsletter electronically this year. It's been another hectic Fall and Winter so far, and the mailing deadline caught me off guard.

For us, we had another pretty good year at Dry Creek Ranch. It was a mild winter last year, so our livestock were happy. However, the dogs and I were not thrilled with too little snow from mid-January onward to enjoy our near-daily snowshoe treks. This winter, so far, seems to show some improvement, though the temperature has been "see-sawing" a fair amount – in fact, we were down to just a few cm of snow left after a near week-long thaw that led to treacherous icy conditions at the beginning of December. Poor Perry had a fall while I was away at school. Nothing was seriously damaged, but he had a hitch in his git-along for a few days!



We had a dry spring and early summer which was a mixed blessing for haying. We were able to put up decent hay at our hay lease, but the yields were low due to a wide-spread drought throughout western North America. This in turn led to record high hay prices. Thankfully, beef prices continue to be high, which meant for a decent profit year for us. Unfortunately, we have ongoing battles with Canada's lovely national emblem (beaver) which flooded some of our hay fields here at home. We ended up turning out the cattle again on some of our uncut hay fields, so they were happy with the good grazing.



Perry, Vicky and Midget: celebrating the end of haying season.

The graduate work is finally showing rewards after over 3 years of effort. My DNA sequencing panel is proving to be successful, with about 25% of our "patients" (post mortem tissue samples from children with no cause of death at autopsy) showing mutations for inherited cardiac syndromes. This may not seem like good news, but for families, it means finally getting some answers and carrying on with their lives with renewed hope that they will likely NOT have another tragic sudden cardiac death if they undergo assessment by cardiac specialists. Treatment for most of these syndromes is fairly simple – taking a pill, having an ICD (similar to a pacemaker) or sometimes just changing one's lifestyle (no Olympic athletic activities). I'm also getting quite a few people contacting us to collaborate in other research projects, to use our DNA sequencing panel and/or consultations for their own sudden cardiac death cases. It's been a very exciting year and I hope to actually...*graduate* (sorry – I hope you were sitting down when you read that) at some point next Spring or early summer. What a concept!

Perry continues to enjoy good health and keeps very busy around the ranch. It is so wonderful that he can continue to build, fix, weld, do electrical work, plumbing, fencing and a myriad of other essential skills for ranching. His eyesight is well monitored as he has glaucoma that he inherited from his Mum. Thankfully he never misses his twice daily eye drops regime, which I'm sure helps to keep the glaucoma from becoming a concern.

One of my own New Year's Resolutions last year was to take more time off to enjoy life. We have spent more time at our Green Lake place and in the late Spring/early Summer went out fishing at least a dozen times – including attending the Annual Watch Lake/Green Lake Fishing Derby. I caught a beauty of a rainbow trout in Green Lake and won prizes for first fish caught on Green Lake (Sunday), last fish on Green Lake and (Sunday) and won 3rd place overall in the largest fish category. It was very exciting and completely unexpected – and I took home a ton of loot, plus we enjoyed a lovely fish dinner! I can't wait until ice fishing season starts, as well as next spring for boat fishing – especially if I've graduated and we can really enjoy taking more time off to enjoy it.

We had two grim reminders that it is worthwhile to take time off and enjoy life: one of our closest friends died very suddenly and unexpectedly (likely a heart attack) during the summer which has been devastating not just

for us, but for many friends and his family. Another friend of ours died of cancer just a few weeks ago. It's a harsh lesson that is teaching us that life is short and we need to enjoy every moment.

Another major life change has occurred just recently; on December 14th, I worked my very last day as a coroner here in British Columbia. I made the decision to resign because my research is very close to becoming a conflict of interest with the job – especially when it looks like we will be taking on some cases here in British Columbia (and possibly living patients as well). The other reason was that coroner's service did not approve of my volunteer work with the P.A.R.T.Y. Program. This is an international organization (PARTY stands for Prevent Alcohol and Risk-related Trauma in Youth) that teaches young people (aged 14 to 16 yrs) how to make good choices in life to reduce risk of serious injury or worse, death. Apparently, they don't believe that the program is "effective". Well, if you know me well, you know I will NEVER stand for any agency that tells me what I can or cannot do regarding community service. Ergo, after 24 years, it was time to cut loose.

We also have 3 new "family" members here at Dry Creek. Our dear old barn-turned-housecat, Ashley, disappeared in late Spring at the age of 20 years. She was really missed around here, so we were given 3 very wild young barn kittens. It's taken nearly 4 months, but we now have two very friendly gentlemen, Smokey and Bandit and a very shy girl, Cinder, who hasn't quite warmed up to people yet. Smokey really wants to be a house cat, so I wouldn't be surprised if I find him purring away by the wood stove when I return from my frequent treks to SFU!



Well, I suppose it's time to bake some cookies and start planning Christmas dinner. It's feeling very strange that I will not be on call this Christmas. It's the first Christmas holiday in 24 years that I've NOT been on call! Gee – I think I'll have another glass of wine...because I can!

Much love and hugs to y'all,

Laura, Perry, Vicki, Midge and the 3 barn kitties – Smokey, Bandit and Cinder(ella).

And this is Smokey!