

Merry Christmas 2016!

Well, here we go again with our annual Christmas newsletter. I hope this letter finds your own family healthy and happy as we approach the new year. It's been another hectic, but amazing and rewarding year, so sit back, grab a beverage and hopefully, enjoy reading what's up at Dry Creek Ranch!

For us, we had a decent year here at the ranch – there were a few ups and downs, but all-in-all we are ahead of the game, so to speak. We had another mild El Nino winter last year, so our livestock were happy. Once again, however, the dogs and I were not thrilled with the lack of decent snow from the end of January onward to enjoy our near-daily snowshoe treks. This winter is a La Nina phenomenon and we are experiencing the first "real" Cariboo winter in years. After getting a few good dumps of snow, it's been below -30C every night for nearly two weeks now. With the cold comes spectacularly clear, bright sunny days which make for rewarding snowshoe treks with the dogs. They don't seem to mind the cold, as long as they're running along the trails!



We had a wet spring and probably one of the wettest summers on record! It made for very challenging haying conditions, as we didn't seem to get any sunny breaks longer than 3 or 4 days. It meant we really had to scramble to put up our hay, both here at home and at our hay lease. At the hay lease, we had unexpected flooding on top of all the rain. There was some logging a few km down the road from our lease and they built a corduroy road to reach some of the timber, but didn't put in any culverts for the creeks. Needless to say with all the rain, the creeks backed up, then the drainage ditches in our hay fields backed up and all of our fields were under water. The loggers did eventually put in culverts, but the fields did not completely dry out so we could only hay a portion of the 650 acres (sigh). It meant we had to turn away some of our hay customers to ensure we had enough for ourselves. Well, hopefully all that flooding will reward us with a better crop next year.

Believe it or not, this August we celebrated our 25th wedding anniversary. Of course, we celebrated in style – by having a party/BBQ at the local gymkhana grounds after the August gymkhana was over. Time flies when you're having fun, I suppose!

We had a weird Autumn – it started off cold and wet, but the first half of November was the warmest and sunniest I can ever remember. I picked fresh broccoli out of our garden – in November! The latest I've ever harvested anything was mid-October, so that was strange, to say the least. Winter, as I said above, started in the 4th week of November and it's been a good one!

The graduate work is finally coming to an end. After a few delays, including getting manuscripts ready for publishing, my thesis defence date is December 20th, which likely will have passed by the time you read this. I'll



either be celebrating with a glass or two of wine, or drowning my sorrows by this time next week (it's Dec 16th today). There were several positives this year in my research. One was to be invited to present my research at the world calibre Heart Rhythm 2016 meetings in San Francisco in May and again presenting my research to the pathologists and clinical geneticists at the Winnipeg Health Sciences Centre and at the Annual Arrhythmia Day conference in Winnipeg during the same week. All three were exciting and amazing opportunities and were the highlights of my PhD "career".

Another highlight of the year was to go to Ireland with my Mom. At 92 years of age, she is not showing signs of slowing down. What really put the trip over the top was that my

brother Randy and sister-in-law Sharon surprised me by going on the tour as well. It was a well-kept secret and I was caught totally by surprise by them. It was the best holiday in years. We absolutely enjoyed ourselves and met some lovely people as well. I had to write a grant application during the first part of the tour. Getting up at 0400 hours (while jet-lagged, I should add) was a cheap thrill. However, you might say I'm rather "determined" and by Jove – we got that grant written and submitted on time. It's a renewal for the March of Dimes research grant that funded a big portion of my dissertation work. I do hope it is successful, as it will give me a part-time project manager position for the next 3 years. Just enough to pay the bills and keep me happily immersed in research!



Perry continues to enjoy good health and keeps very busy around the ranch. It is so wonderful that he can continue to build anything, fix everything, weld, do electrical work, plumbing, fencing and a myriad of other essential skills for ranching. He also vacuums and cleans during my now infrequent trips to SFU. His eyesight is well monitored and he continues to do well with his glaucoma. Thankfully he never misses his twice daily eye drops regime, which I'm sure helps to keep the glaucoma from becoming a concern.

I'm continuing to honour one of my New Year's Resolutions from 2015 - which was to take more time off to enjoy life. Although we didn't get out to do as much fishing this year, we still entered the annual fishing derby.



It was on my bucket list to win that derby some year and be the first woman to do so. Well "some year" became "THIS year"! Yes, indeed – not more than 200 metres away from where I caught the prize-winning fish of 2015 (with which I won 3rd prize) AND on the same lure AND close to the same time in the morning, I hooked onto a lunker: a 7 lb 6 oz rainbow. It was the largest trout I'd ever caught and it took me nearly 15 minutes to land it. It was very exciting and completely unexpected – and, just like last year, I took home some nice prizes (including \$500 cash) plus we enjoyed three lovely fish dinners! I can't wait until ice fishing season starts, as well as next spring for boat fishing. After graduation, we can really enjoy taking time off to enjoy life.

Both Perry and I have really enjoyed the coroner-free life since I resigned a year ago almost to the day. I have to say that I don't miss being on call – not one bit! It has been so relaxing to be able to enjoy dinners out, accidentally forgetting my phone (which I do fairly regularly now) and not panicking that the police/hospital agencies are trying to contact me.

Our barn cat family grew and shrank this year. Cinder gave me 5 kittens this Spring, but we lost both her and 2 of the kittens (sadly one was a favourite of Perry's). Barn cat life can be dangerous – especially with vehicles coming and going frequently at the ranch. Anyhow, the remaining 3 kittens (Slick, Squint and Puff) are super friendly and we're still enjoying the company of the two older "bachelors", Smokey and the Bandit! And of course, Perry still has his geriatric shop cat, Waylon. He must be well into his teens by now – perhaps after the 20th, I'll dig out his kitten photo's to figure out his real age.

Well, I suppose I should get back to studying for the upcoming defence. It's been hard to concentrate on Christmas preparations with the defence looming overhead, but, as my Dad used to say "This, too, shall pass". And then, let the celebrating (or sorrowing) begin!

Much love and hugs to y'all,

Laura, Perry, Vicki, Midge and the kitty gang: Smokey, Bandit, Squint, Puff, Slick and Waylon.