

Merry Christmas 2023!

I hope you had a good year and are anticipating better things as this pandemic finally winds down. We certainly had an interesting year, with many highs and sadly, a few lows. However, without sadness I doubt we would appreciate the good times as much as we do!



The year started on a sad note; my beautiful Mom passed away on New Year's Eve. It was actually a relief when she died, as her quality of life had declined over the last 2 years and especially in the last few months of life. I can't thank my brother Greg enough for keeping me and my sister Lynda informed regarding Mom's health. And my brother Randy was instrumental in finding a stellar residence for her last few months. Both Greg and Randy reported that the nurses and other staff really loved to take care of her. What a relief to hear as the pandemic and Perry's health (though he is recovering – more on that later!), made it far too difficult to go and visit her. Greg organized a wonderful Celebration of Life for Mom on her birthday in June. It was cathartic to see my loving family in person again – I hadn't been back since 2019!

Global warming continues to rear its ugly head with an alarmingly early start to the wildfire season. The nearby community of Pressy Lake had a human-caused wildfire starting in late April. It was difficult to fight it as all the local lakes were still ice-covered, but thankfully BC WildFire was able to extinguish it by helicoptering buckets of water out of small swampy ponds that had already thawed. We were spared from wildfires locally for the rest of the season, although the province experienced its worst wildfire season on record. And it must have been the longest season as fires continued to burn until late November – yikes!

One last bit of sad news to report so I can get to the wonderful good things that happened this year; our dear dog Midge died suddenly at the end of February. I think she may have had a pulmonary embolism, but things escalated so quickly, I didn't even have time to take her to the vet. She was a very young 11 year old with snowshoeing every day and playing lots with her brother Guy. She is missed terribly, but this Fall, we had an addition to the family, little Miss Nell! More on her later!

This year felt to me like a "rebuilding year". I spent much of my time working on various projects at both the ranch and our Green Lake home. The weather certainly cooperated, so much was accomplished! First on the list was a second layer of plastic over the greenhouse and a rock wall to the south of it that allowed me to plant potatoes above-ground in tubs. My wonderful nephew, Alex, came for a brief visit and we managed to build the rock wall in less than 2 hours, thanks to his muscles! This second layer greatly extended the growing season – we had a bumper crop of tomatoes, potatoes, squash and other goodies!



In late Spring, I repainted the dormer panels on our Green Lake home to look like rock. They look really convincing from a distance, such as when you're out on the lake, ha ha! In late Summer, I had the last 5 windows at Green Lake replaced with energy-saving double pane windows. The contractor was awesome – he put gorgeous trim around the windows that I will need to paint to match the house trim next Spring. I also had our non-working furnace replaced which is providing much-needed piece of mind this winter. No more worrying about frozen pipes at -40C – hallelujah! And I plan to continue renovations inside the house this winter – it needs more insulation and wall paneling. Wish me luck on that!

The last major building project was here at the ranch. We were given a wood cook stove over a year ago. It had lost its CSA sticker so it couldn't be installed in the house (for insurance purposes). So, I built a summer kitchen! One of our Green Lake neighbours replaced their deck and gave me the used deck lumber. There was enough lumber, all 2 x 6, to frame the building, build the floor joists and the rafters! We had some left over plywood (from redoing the roof at Green Lake) and some metal roofing, so

the cost of this summer kitchen so far has been minimal. It is not yet finished – it still needs a sliding door, stove pipes installed, rough counters and cabinets built, painting, window trim and some landscaping, which will be done next year. I think my Dad would be proud as I did nearly all of the work myself! Yes, I am bragging, ha ha!

Perry's health has improved along with a return of some strength. He's been able to bring in firewood, cut it, split it and stack it. He also completely replaced the brake assemblies on our flat deck trailer and then hauled over 120 round bales from our hay lease back here to the ranch. He walks the dogs every morning, which helps keep him mobile.

Speaking of dogs – as I wrote earlier, we have a new addition – Nell is an Australian Shepherd – Border Collie – Blue Heeler mix. She is a very skittish little dog around people as she hasn't been socialized much. She is very bright and learns quickly, so I'm confident she will get past this nervousness around people in due time.



Miss Vicky, now 16 years old, and Guy, 5 years old, continue to thrive. Guy is a great big brother to Nell and is teaching her the ropes, ranch-wise. Miss Vicky is still remarkably active. She still enjoys her walks with Perry and runs around like a much younger dog.

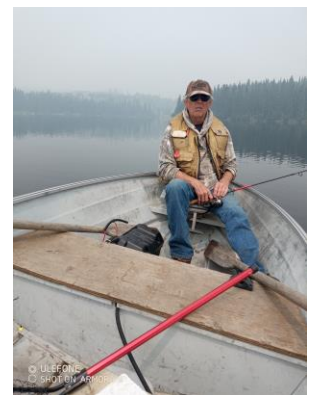
I'm still enjoying riding my horse and get out whenever I can. He is so much fun to be with and loves to go out for a nice trail ride. He is naturally so well behaved, despite not getting ridden as much as I would like! With the dry conditions this year, the ground was like concrete. I had shoes put on the horse for the first time, which he greatly appreciated.

Our cattle herd also thrived this year with a 100% calf crop. Sadly we lost two calves (one to extreme cold and the other to a hungry Momma bear with triplets), but had the best year ever at the cattle auctions in the Fall. We made enough money to pay off the ranch line of credit and still have some money left over for much-needed repairs and replacements to various ranch equipment. This size of herd (2 dozen) is still very manageable for us, especially with Guy, our Border Collie helping when needed. He has turned out to be a great working dog. As the saying goes, a good dog replaces 5 men. How true, ha ha!

We also did extremely well with our hay production, despite the severe drought that wreaked havoc for most ranchers in Western Canada and the US. Because our fields are wet meadows in the Spring, they produced a great hay crop that allowed us to sell hay to desperate ranchers needing forage for their livestock. It is heart-breaking to hear how many ranchers had to downsize their herds due to limited or no winter feed. Let's hope next year is better for everyone in that regard!



Our own health has been okay, though we are reminded daily that we are NOT spring chickens! I have learned to limit physical work to just a few hours each day to avoid any back issues. The ruptured disc in my back has not yet healed and I don't want to make it worse. As mentioned earlier, Perry has improved, though he still needs to take numerous short breaks during the day. I can't complain as he is quite active for a guy who will be turning 80 in January. And our quality of life is excellent. We still get out to fish once in a while!



I do hope you have a wonderful, restful Christmas holiday and all the best in health and happiness for you in 2024.

Much love and hugs to y'all,
Laura, Perry, Vicky, Guy, Nell and Buddy the horse!