

# WHEN A CITY GIRL *goes country*

By Annette Bridges

## How Do Ranchers Deal with Loss?

My husband and I have been ranching together for more than 40 years. His cattle ranching experience has been much longer than mine since his parents purchased this place in 1963. I am not sure when they began raising cattle, but it is probably fair enough to say he has been around cows most of his life.

I do not have any grand answers for how to deal with loss. I am sure my tenderhearted husband does not have much advice to share other than just keep doing what you have to do.

I have read the average lifespan for cattle is 18 to 22 years. On our ranch, these numbers are probably close to correct, and my hubby says we have had some mothers live longer than average. All of our girls were born here.

When it comes to life span, I pretty much feel the same whether it be a cow, dog or human, that no number of years is long enough. My precious mom passed at 92 and my dear dachshund at 17. I wanted much more time with them both.

Probably no one is ever ready to say goodbye to those we love. With our beautiful bovines, the most heart-wrenching is losing calves, especially those who have been sick, and you have tried your best to save. Even worse than that scenario is a calf you did not realize was sick until too late to save. Sadly, that would describe a loss we experienced recently.

We have had rainy seasons before, although droughts seem much more normal. When it comes to the weather, we often feel like we go from one extreme to the next. We are grateful to say we did not lose any cows during the record-breaking cold we experienced this past winter. Thankfully, our spring calving season did not begin until a week after. We have also never lost a calf we thought was related to floodwaters and salmonella until this year. Luckily, a second calf that began showing similar symptoms was discovered faster and responded quickly to treatment.

Loss for a rancher is not only about loss



Winter attire, pictured, is a good example of doing all that can be done to stay warm while doing all that is needed to take care of cows in the bitter cold. (Photo courtesy Annette Bridges)

of life. There is loss of time that can be detrimental. Rainy weather can cause loss of the perfect time to spray for weeds and putting out fertilizer, resulting in a serious impact on hay production.

Too much rain or not enough can destroy a vegetable garden or young fruit trees. An infestation of grasshoppers can do the same. We try very hard not to lose quality hay bales in the fields so we are very cautious about when we cut and bale. We have many horse owners and cattle ranchers who depend on us. Of course, we have our own cattle to feed. There have been a handful of devastating years where droughts or excessive rains resulted in such a slowdown of hay production that we were forced to sell cows we did not want to

sell to be sure we could feed our herd through the winter.

So yes, loss takes many forms. It is a bitter truth to accept that we cannot do anything about what we cannot change.

Our attire, pictured, is a good example of doing all that can be done to stay warm while doing all that is needed to take care of our cows in the bitter cold. This included things like breaking ice and giving extra feed to help our girls stay warm and hydrated, of course.

That old saying to “put one foot in front of the other” has merit and may best sum up how we can get through loss and grief. Indeed, focusing on what we can do and what we must do may be the best way to get through any challenging time. 🐾