



# WHEN A CITY GIRL

## *goes country*

By Annette Bridges

**T**his is one of those really hard days.

I've lived with my husband on his family's cattle ranch for 39. Honestly, most of those years ranching was not my primary focus. I helped my husband when he needed me to, particularly driving a tractor when picking up hay bales.

The rest of it, well, it simply hasn't received my full attention. That's because I was busy doing my own things like working on my master's degree, teaching kindergarten, eventually homeschooling our daughter, caring for various ill and aging family members, along with many other projects and passions.

Since the passing last year of my mom and our 17-year old dachshund, I've been more actively engaged in ranching with my husband and consequently much more involved and aware of what cattle ranching means and requires.

Today is definitely one of the toughest days yet. Today was the day when it became necessary to take our almost eight-year-old rather crippled bull to the sale barn. I feel heartbroken and sad. My husband said it well when he lamented during our ride, "I feel like I'm betraying him."

I understand those feelings. I felt those when we were faced with helping our beloved dachshund cross her rainbow bridge.

I've read many ranchers opt for a new bull every two to four years. A few keep their bulls 10 to 12, but eight years was the number described as the average among



(Left) Annette's bull, back in his prime. (Right) The most recent, and last, photo Annette has of her bull. (Photos courtesy Annette Bridges)

ranchers. I've read the many reasons for swapping out for a new bull and those for hanging on to an older mature one – all sensible in the scheme of ranching.

Watching our gentle old bull loading up for probably his last trailer ride was like a dagger being thrust into my heart. I could not stop the tears from flowing. I know this decision was a hard one for my husband, and I wanted to be a supportive and understanding rancher's wife to him, but I can't stop my feelings.

I've walked through a lot of grief in the past five years. Besides

my dear mom and dog last year, I've lost two brothers, step-dad and friends. Grief is tough and it's not easy for anyone. We probably all wish we never had to face the loss of loved ones.

As I struggled with my feelings through last year's most difficult season of grief, I will never forget what a friend said to me. She said, "When you love well, you need to grieve well."

I didn't at first fully understand her words. I honestly wasn't sure I wanted to. I felt like they were telling me I had to embrace my sadness when at the time all I

wanted to do was run away and avoid feelings that simply seemed unbearable.

I have learned the best way, dare I say the fastest way, to walk through grief is precisely that. Through it, feeling all the feelings.

So today I feel very sad. It is perfectly normal and natural to feel sad to say goodbye to our bull. He's been part of our animal family for a long time, and he's done his job faithfully and consistently. Well done, Mr. Bull, well done. You will be remembered and honored as one of our best. ☹️