

# WHEN A CITY GIRL goes country

By Annette Bridges

## Cow Besties

Renowned Primatologist and Anthropologist Jane Goodall wrote, "Realize absolutely that we're not the only beings on the planet with personalities, minds and feelings."

I couldn't agree more, Jane! I know without a doubt that cows are highly social animals. Indeed, I'm pretty sure that cows experience a full spectrum of emotions. Stress. Contentment. Love. Sadness. Fear. Anger. Anxiety. Joy. Sympathy. And empathy!

When Jane says "minds" she must be speaking to how adaptable and intelligent cows are. Their problem-solving skills are very impressive. Cows learn to maneuver obstacles like fences and gates as well as loading chutes and trailers.

They have the keen ability to assess their surroundings and find food and water sources as well as find escape routes when faced with potential danger. Their insightful skills include the capability to recognize edible plants and avoid toxic ones.

I like to think of our herd as a bovine sisterhood of kindred spirits – that includes one bull, of course.

There's definitely a hierarchy within the herd and it seems to me largely influenced by age. Our matriarch and leader of the herd is "Blackie." She is always first in line for pasture moves and always first through the gate. It's quite evident the rest of our cows as well as our bull understand this. They never challenge her and when she



(Photo courtesy of Annette Bridges)

says "let's go" they follow.

Even within a herd, cows form close relationships with a small select group of friends. This is precious to witness! Cows will seek out physical contact from their friends. Groom one another. Go on walks together. Take a dip in the stock pond together. Babysit their friends' calves. Even curl up side-by-side to sleep.

The most endearing expres-

sion of empathy I've witnessed was when "Batgirl" lost her calf. When her bestie "Butterfly" realized what had happened, she and her calf stayed beside Batgirl in the immediate hours and days that followed. Batgirl's grief and despair was very evident but she seemed comforted by her good friend's presence.

I can't say everything is totally rosy all the time within the herd,

however.

While there are many groups of besties within the herd, we do have a couple of loner cows that don't seem particularly close to anyone and often stay just a little distant from others. These irritable gals don't hesitate to show their discontent if other cows get too close.

It's also evident that some cows don't like each other. Interestingly I have read that cows will hold grudges against other cows who have offended them in some way. This dislike can result in shoving and head butting. But mostly cows that don't like each other seem to avoid and ignore one another as much as possible.

Cows are curious about other living things and the world around them. This naturally includes a curiosity about humans. Especially the humans that feed them!

I'm pretty sure my sweet Butterfly would climb into the Ranger to get into my lap if she could. She prefers very close encounters when I'm hand feeding her cubes. And she loves for me to rub her head. Whether she knows her name or my voice, she comes toward me when I call out to her. She knows who I am even when I don't speak. Always!

Sharing a ranch with all the beautiful bovines that have been born and raised here has been a privilege these forty plus years. I feel very honored to have been welcomed as part of their family. They have taught me about friendship, patience, collaboration, survival and so much more!