WHEN A CITY GIRL goes country

By Annette Bridges

Where gratitude and grief meet

There was a time when I thought ranch life belonged mostly to my husband.

He understood cattle, hay, weather, equipment, and all the rhythms of country life that once felt completely foreign to this city girl.

For years, I stood more on the edges of ranch life than in the middle of it — raising our daughter, homeschooling, keeping our household running, and quietly trying not to embarrass myself in a world where everybody else seemed to know exactly what they were doing.

What I didn't realize then was that ranch life was shaping me anyway.

Slowly. Quietly. Season by season

.Back then, I thought strength looked loud and confident. I thought country women probably came into this life naturally knowing how to drive a tractor, work cattle, cook for a crew, and recognize every problem before it happened.

I knew none of those things.

But over time, ranch life taught me something far more valuable than ranch skills.

It taught me resilience.

It taught me how quickly plans can change because of weather, drought, broken equipment, sick calves, or the simple unpredictability of caring for living things. It taught me flexibility, patience, and how to keep moving forward even when things don't unfold the way you



Quiet moments on the ranch can offer space for reflection as the seasons and family life change. (Photo courtesy of Annette BRidges)

Gratitude

hoped they would.

It also taught me the quiet beauty hidden inside ordinary days.

Seeing the sun rise over our barn. Hay bales lined neatly waiting for winter's arrival. The sound of cattle calling at feeding time. Watching the herd graze quietly as the sun slipped lower in the sky. The familiar comfort of sitting down to supper together at the end of the day.

Country life has a way of slowing your eyes enough to notice things city life once hurried me past.

I became grateful for things I never would have noticed in my younger city life.

Calves running and chasing each other across a pasture as if they had nowhere important to be. A newborn calf nursing while its mamma stood quietly still. One cow gently licking another one as they rested side by side in the grass.

There is a tenderness in a herd people rarely talk about.

And somewhere along the way, these cattle stopped feeling like "his herd" and started feeling like part of our shared history.

That's what makes ranch life difficult to explain to people who've never lived it.

They sometimes think ranch decisions are mostly financial ones. Numbers on paper. Buy. Sell. Downsize. Move on.

But when you've spent years feeding animals through ice storms, nursing sick calves, watching over pastures through drought and flood, attachment has a way of quietly settling into your bones.

And perhaps that's why gratitude and grief sometimes live so close together.

Perhaps grief doesn't always wait until something is gone.

Sometimes it uietly arrives the moment you begin realizing how deeply a place, a routine, or a life season has woven itself into your heart.

Suddenly, all of those ordinary moments feel different.

Not because they are ending today, but because somewhere deep inside, you understand life does not stand still forever.

Because the things we are most thankful for are often the very things hardest to imagine changing someday. But life, like the seasons themselves, was never meant to stand still forever.

These days, during these early fall evenings, I find myself looking across the ranch with a deeper appreciation than I once had as that nervous young city girl all those years ago.

And I know now that this life gave me far more than I understood when I first arrived here.

It gave me confidence. Partnership. Strength I didn't know I possessed. A deeper appreciation for hard work, quiet beauty, shared responsibility, and the rhythms of nature itself.

Most of all, it gave me a grateful heart for a life season that shaped me in ways I never could have imagined.

And perhaps that is where gratitude and grief walk together for a time... until gratitude slowly begins to heal what grief fears losing.

