

Merry Christmas 2017!

Well, here we go again with our annual Christmas newsletter – time sure flies! I hope this letter finds your own family healthy and happy as we approach the New Year. I have to say that 2017 was the most eventful year we've ever experienced, with the highest of highs and sadly, the lowest of lows. Fortunately, we have arrived at the year's end intact and looking forward to 2018. Sit back, grab a beverage and hopefully, enjoy reading what's up at Dry Creek Ranch!

The year started with the highest of highs; I had a very successful thesis defense on December 20th. I don't know why it's called a "defense" as it was more of a celebration of the culmination of many years of work, frustration, major accomplishments and a few letdowns along the way. What made it extra special was that Mom flew out to BC for Christmas, so I made a side trip on my way home from SFU to see her at Lynda's beautiful home in Kamloops. Amazingly, the euphoria of finally completing this degree has not diminished. I'm so thankful and joyful every single day!



1 Spring Convocation with my Mom, June 7th

I'm continuing to do part-time research related to my dissertation – unfortunately we did not get the March of Dimes renewal grant, but I'm still working with the arrhythmia clinic in Vancouver and have put together a post-doctoral proposal for future work – at least for the next 3 years or so. Now, we just need funding for a small salary for yours truly! My PhD supervisor continues to work on a particular mutation I discovered in my sequencing study that holds great promise to be a cause of SIDS. This work will have a huge impact on many families in providing them with some answers, and will hopefully save lives in the future.

Last winter was almost a return to the traditional Cariboo winter, with long stretches of cold temperatures and with a substantial snowpack. It made for great snowshoeing and ice fishing – something I was so looking forward to with the extra time since completing my degree. I am still so grateful for the free time – I can't really explain the feeling! I guess 24 years of being on call as well as putting so much effort and time into this degree makes me really appreciate the euphoria of being able to just drop everything and go do things I've been wanting to do for years – especially fishing!

We've also had the lowest of lows earlier this year – my nephew David died suddenly in April. It was a shock to receive such news and the entire family was left reeling. It's been hard on all of us, but especially my brother and sister-in-law. They have shown amazing strength however, due in large part to the tremendous support of their other children and grandchildren. Their resilience has been a real inspiration for us.

We had a wet spring that led to lots of flooding on our ranch. We didn't complain, but we were worried about whether or not we'd be able to put up hay on our wetter meadows. We shouldn't have worried as we experienced a traditional Cariboo summer with plenty of hot, dry weather. One major bonus to the high spring water levels was we had huge trout spawning in 83 Mile Creek. Some of them were massive – I'd estimate between 8 and 10 lbs! There were even fish attempting to spawn in Taylor Creek! Thankfully, we only observed suckers in that little creek as it always dries up in early summer. We didn't shed any tears for the loss of any sucker hatchlings as they eat trout roe! It was exciting to watch the fish make their spawning beds.



2 View of Elephant Hill fire from our deck before it crested the hill, Aug 29th

We had lots of lovely green grass to start the summer. We were so grateful for the snowpack and spring flooding as we had a seriously hot, dry summer. If you were following the news, you would have certainly heard about the worst fire season in British Columbia's history! There were over 2.5 million acres burned here in the Interior. The Elephant Hill Fire burned close to half a million acres, starting near the Ashcroft Indian Reserve and finally finishing its devastating run just slightly northeast of us. This fire came within walking

distance of our home on Green Lake. We can see blackened trees across the lake and on the eastern shores. I haven't yet walked down the road to look at the devastation – it's just too soon! It was surreal to see all the aircraft flying around our place working on the fire. Dad would have really enjoyed seeing the different types of aircraft involved – both fixed wing (jets and propeller craft) as well as helicopters. For a few weeks, it sounded like we were living in a war zone – I guess in a way, we were! We were evacuated twice from our Green Lake house – however, this was not as traumatic for us as other people, as we just stayed in the double-wide at our ranch 19 Km away. Amazingly, the Elephant Hill Fire was just a small fire compared to the huge complex fires burning to the northeast of us!



3 One of the ranch additions this Spring, April 27th

Over 8,000 livestock and hundreds of homes and ranches have been lost. We are bracing ourselves for the economic impact that will be felt for years. Another issue, one that has already impacted us, is the sharp increase in the number of predators – wolves, cougars, coyotes and bears (until they went into hibernation) that have been displaced and are desperate for food. Our neighbours have already lost several cows and calves to wolves. So far, we've been spared of any attacks on the livestock, but we regularly see cat and wolf tracks in the snow this winter. And, sadly, all but 2 cats have survived this terrible summer. We still have Perry's geriatric shop cat, Waylon (probably because he doesn't venture too far outside) and Bandit, whom I've renamed Chico, who is the resident barn cat.

The dry summer weather meant that we were not able to put up much upland hay as the land was baked to concrete. The wet meadows, however, really benefitted from the wet spring and hot temperatures, so I was able to cut hay in meadows that I haven't been able to touch for over 15 years! We even had a decent crop at our hay lease. The consistently hot, dry weather made haying a breeze – however, with the fires burning close by, it was not the rewarding experience it should have been!

After a hot, dry summer, we had a cold, dry autumn which is not good news in terms of drought relief. It has also been extremely windy, so we have had many trees come down due to the bone dry soil not offering any support for their roots. Perry spent hours every day trying to keep up with all the fences that were brought down by trees. It was very frustrating as well as time-consuming, given that we would normally be spending way more time bringing in firewood for the winter.



4 Ranch visitor - lynx, September 24th

Speaking of winter, the dry trend continues unfortunately. We have less than 10 cm (4 inches) of snow on the ground so far. The good news, however, is that it has also been very mild and sunny. It has allowed us to continue cleaning up all the fallen trees around our pastures. The cattle have also been enjoying the mild temperatures and have been rustling each day for grass. That means our hay supply should be more than adequate for the winter. I'm now starting to look around for more horses as my dear old gelding is far too old for riding and will likely cross the rainbow bridge this winter. I will miss him dearly. The dogs are doing well, but without any snowshoeing so far this winter, they appear to be a bit "wider" than normal! Let's hope we get some decent snow soon, so we can ALL get back into shape!

Perry continues to enjoy good health and keeps very busy around the ranch. I think he is also glad that I'm no longer making frequent trips down to SFU. He still walks miles every day as his shop ("Man's World") is not close to the doublewide here at the ranch.

Both Perry and I continue to enjoy the coroner-free life since I resigned 2 years ago almost to the day. I have to say that I still don't miss being on call – not one bit! It continues to be so relaxing to be able to do what we want, when we want!



5 Two of the four skimmers picking up water right in front of our house at Green Lake, August 30th

Well, I suppose I should get back to decorating the tree. The smell of fresh cut spruce is so lovely! I hope you have a wonderful Christmas holiday and all the best in health and happiness for you in 2018.

We are celebrating in the midst of the usual Cariboo Christmas weather. After getting some much-needed snow (we're at roughly 30 cm so far – let's hope we get much more than that!) and temperature has dropped to -30C each night. Time to put more wood on the stove!

Merry Christmas and much love and hugs to y'all,

Laura, Perry, Vicki, Midge, Chico and Waylon.