

Merry Christmas 2018!

Well, here we go again with our annual Christmas newsletter. I hope this letter finds your own family healthy and happy as we approach the New Year. Compared to 2017, we had a much less eventful year and we are quite grateful for that. We still had some trials and tribulations, but then again, who doesn't? Sit back, grab a beverage and hopefully, enjoy reading what's up at Dry Creek Ranch!

After the unprecedented wildfire season last summer, our ranch was impacted by drought which meant not putting up enough hay for our cattle and our cows not getting bred until we finally found our bull on August 1st. That meant a very late calving season this spring— we didn't start until May 10th which is two months later than normal and it also meant that we had to buy enough hay to see us through until late June, until the majority of our girls had calved out. Many ranchers in the area were in the same boat and we surmised that the smoky conditions interfered with the bulls being able to detect when cows were in estrous and in some cases (like ours) completely left their herds to wander around alone. I knew we'd be feeling the financial strain sooner rather than later, and although I wanted to continue doing research part-time, my PhD supervisor had several unsuccessful grant applications and couldn't hire me. Therefore, I started looking for a part-time job in January. I ended up getting hired into a full-time contract position with United Way as a Community Wellness Manager. This is a wildfire-related position with the main role of helping people develop resiliency moving forward, to help with future disasters (which in our area is mainly wildfires). The job has been interesting, demanding and rewarding. We had a dry spring which meant many people were feeling extremely anxious about the upcoming wildfire season – so I hit the ground running with this job! Our first fires started in early April, but thankfully many fires were burning within the perimeter of last year's mega-fires, meaning, that they could not suddenly take off and burn miles and miles of land like they did last year. This year, we had hundreds (yes, I do mean hundreds!) of wildfire starts around our area. However, the majority of these fires were dealt with immediately, so they didn't become the monsters like in 2017. We avoided evacuation orders and alerts like we had last year other than I was evacuated from our hay lease out at Buffalo Creek due to a wildfire that started less than a mile away. Again, it was dealt with quite quickly and the evacuation order was rescinded within 4 days.



For the first time ever on the ranch – twins!



Meet "Guy", the new baby brother for Vicky and Midge

I am still collaborating on a few research projects – one from my old lab at SFU and a few others at the inherited arrhythmia clinic at St. Paul's. Because of my job however, I'm limited to what I can contribute until the job ends in December, 2019 (next year). United Way wanted to have me as a research consultant and added some salary top ups to my wellness manager job so I could initiate some wildfire-related research projects – therefore, I'm still putting that PhD to work!

Weather-wise, after a slow start to winter, we had another somewhat traditional Cariboo winter with a decent amount of snow and moderate temperatures. There were a few opportunities for ice fishing and of course, daily snowshoeing here at the ranch with the dogs. As mentioned above, the spring was very dry, but we had a somewhat wetter than normal summer which really helped the wildfire situation. Unfortunately, the damage was done crop-wise, so we had another lower than normal yield of hay from our ranch and our hay lease. We decided to sell all of our calves this year in order to break even. Thankfully, cattle auction prices are still very good. Because of the late calving season, we are just now

sending our calves to auction! We have one more shipment to go tomorrow, then we are done.

We had a very wet fall and nobody is complaining! The ground is close to saturated, which should hopefully help fire-wise if we have a dry summer next year.

Similar to last year, it has also been extremely windy, so we have had many trees come down which means many hours repairing fences. Thankfully Perry's health allows him to continue to do the work that needs doing around here. We have had some amazingly mild winter conditions so far. Late October and November were wonderful. It allowed us to get firewood in without lots of snow and cold to contend with.

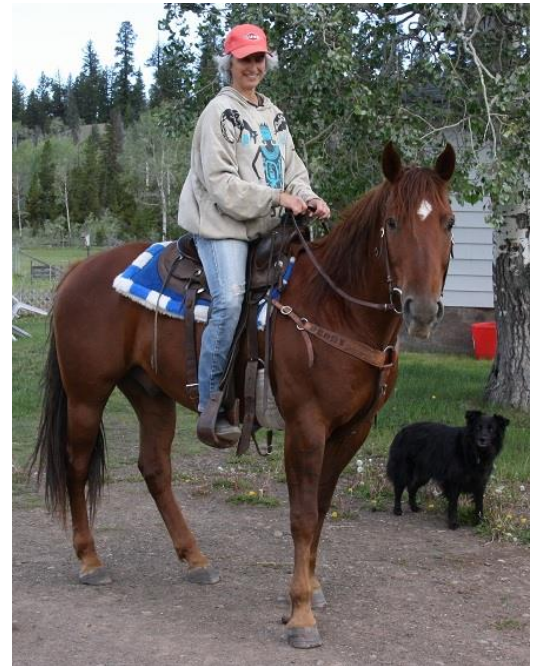
And finally, we have two new additions at the ranch. Guy, a purebred Border Collie puppy came into our lives in mid-May and he's been wreaking havoc ever since! I had forgotten how "busy" these pups are and how quickly they can get into trouble (finding things to chew on is the main issue). He's a very good-natured pup though and reminds me a lot of our Annie. Like her, Guy is excellent with children and is a fast learner. His vocabulary is impressive, too! The other addition is a new horse, Buddy, who arrived in early June. He is also a nice natured boy and is fun to ride and be around. We put down my dear old gelding "Kid" in February. He was very arthritic and starting to lose weight, so it was his time. It's nice to a rideable horse again!

Well, I suppose I should get back to work. I am planning to take 3 weeks off this Christmas, but there's lots to do beforehand, including getting paperwork up to date, getting the house thoroughly cleaned and decorated, and finding and decorating a Christmas tree. Finding a tree is an all-time favourite activity for the dogs. This is Guy's first Christmas, so he needs to learn the ropes from his sisters Vicky and Midge.

In the meantime, I hope you have a wonderful Christmas holiday and all the best in health and happiness for you in 2019.

Much love and hugs to y'all,

Laura, Perry, Vicky, Midge, Guy, Chico the barn cat and Waylon the shop cat. And Buddy the horse!



Buddy and I, with Midge keeping an eye on the newbie.