



What do they say, “It never rains but it pours?” For a year and a half, New Mexico and all of the southwest United States have been suffering from extreme drought thanks to ‘La Niña,’ El Niño’s unpleasant little sister. However, yesterday morning La Niña delivered blizzard conditions, one of those rather rare times when the weather dudes are actually right. We awoke not only to the blizzard, but also a pregnant mare threatening to colic, impassable roads, and flickering electrical power. Fortunately, we were prepared with banamine, mares in from the pasture, plenty of horse feed, diesel for the tractor, firewood, and the generator ready to go. And as the day went, the colic resolved. More crises averted.

But still, thanks to La Niña, we have had hay prices through the roof as all of Texas, Oklahoma, Arizona, and New Mexico scramble for what little hay there is to be found. We pull the horses off the pasture to avoid

overgrazing. The expenses start to mount. Then we get the blizzard. While that is not exactly an event that you ordinarily look forward to, it brings hope of continuing moisture to the area.

So, why do any of us do this horse thing? Maybe it’s times like these: as yesterday’s storm conditions began to ease back



from blizzard to merely winter storm, I went out to move Prospektor, aka Spec, one of our stallions. I pony these guys from saddle horses, the bicycle, ATV four-wheeler, and even out of the car window at times of torrential downpour (professional drivers only). Yesterday, I took the ATV and my copilot Iris, who resolutely believes

that I really can’t do anything properly without her. It never ceases to amaze me how copacetic the horses are about all these crazy inventions. So there we were out in the cold, wind, and snow (wishing I had worn my ski goggles), but despite all of that, the three of us were having a ball.

While feeding this morning in the wake of the fresh,



windblown snow, I discovered the tracks from our resident elk herd. They had been eating the lush, still-green grass that grows behind the horse sheds. I followed the tracks and found, not more than 30 feet from the horse sheds, four large depressions melted into the snow where they had bedded down sometime in the night. I wonder if the proximity to the horses lent them some security. But I've also watched the mares out in the pasture make a beeline, at a high trot, toward elk on the other side of the pasture to deliver their eviction notice. No free lunch here, apparently. The wildness of the ranch lends itself to many wonderful encounters with "the natives." One recent morning before dawn, I was padding through the house with the lights off and glancing out the window saw the outline of "our" bobcat sitting against the wall, peering out — scoping out a rodent breakfast, I presume.

Several years ago, our tractor ran out of diesel while trying to break trail to the highway through navel-deep snow. Now what? Brad, my husband, suggested that we do, after all, have long-legged horses. I rode one of my broodmares, put the pack saddle on a gelding — nope, he had never had a britchen on before — stuffed the 5-gallon diesel cans into the pack saddles, and headed out four miles to the plowed highway, where I met a friend from town. While I waited by the side of the main highway, he took the cans, filled them and brought them back. I'm guessing folks driving by are still wondering what the heck I was up to hanging out with a saddle horse and pack horse in snow up to their bellies. Hay burners to the rescue of the diesel burner. Who knew that running out of fuel could enrich my relationship with those two horses, and frankly, be so much fun?

So sure, the horses and ranch require constant attention, adjustment, and a lot of work. But as Tom Dorrance said, "I have had such a good life looking for the good in both people and horses." Leading a life like this makes you feel alive. It challenges us to be creative; it is like Spec realizing that being led by me whether I am walking or riding some contraption or other, it is still me, and whatever, it is all good. It is horse as both soul mate and teacher. Life here on this spectacular ranch with these amazing horses, a great dog, and my understanding and creative husband is all good. It's the moments of kinship with these wonderful partners that makes it worthwhile.

My wishes to all for a New Year filled with an abundance of times like these.

## ARABIAN HORSE WORLD

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CORRECTION: The photo of Natalie Alves and her Champion Hunter Pleasure JTR 13 & Under horse AW Psyches Mateo from our 2011 Canadian Nationals coverage (November issue, page 85), was taken by Ashley Toye of Altogether Design & Communications.