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Ain't This Romantic?

"*Ain't this romantic?*" hollered Steve from his position on the opposite flank of the handful of cattle we were struggling to push into the biting wind.

"The best part is that there are no mosquitoes," I replied, pulling my neck-scarf up to cover my numbing cheeks.

Steve Gordon and I were gathering a small group of two-year-old heifers with new calves which had been caught in an open field by a late winter storm. The heifers were new to this business of motherhood and alternately ran away from the group in a tizzy, then returned bawling for their new babies. The calves couldn't decide whether to follow the group, their mothers, the horses, or to just lay down where they were and hide.

Our objective was to push the group into the shelter of the brush along lower Richardson Creek, but our erratic progress was further hampered by a north wind which was blowing snow into our faces at a temperature of 5° below zero.

The time was February 1996, and the place was the Gordon Ranch on the slopes of the Big Belt Mountains southeast of Cascade, Montana. Steve is the third generation of Gordons to occupy this beautiful piece of ground, and he plans for his son, Daine, to be the fourth. I was raised on TV westerns - Bonanza, Lone Ranger, Rawhide - and have spent thirty years in Montana, making my living ahorseback.

Popular movies of the late 1980s, such as "Urban Cowboy" and "Lonesome Dove", sparked a resurgence of interest in the cowboy way of life, and commercial "trail drives" became popular recreational events. Steve and I were "real" cowboys, making our living day in and day out from the cattle for which we were responsible. We both understood that modern ranch life had become largely mechanized, and that a cowboy now spent more time jockeying equipment than riding horses.

But for each of us, horses continue to be vital to our lifestyle and self-image. We know both the joys and sorrows of the ranching business, and our love is unshaken. We tolerate the months of routine and boring chores, and live for the moments of drama and excitement.

In these pages I share some of the events that have made cowboy life worthwhile for me. I hope you enjoy reading them as much as I have enjoyed living them.