Hidden Bar Ranch

Chapter 1

What matters are the memories. All we are left with. For those days between 1954 and 1981, the days of the Hidden Bar Ranch, life created its own whirling momentum, that left so many memories.

Now, so many years later, I can see how I was caught up in my husband's dreams. I had no unusual ones of my own. I'd dreamed of a loving husband and healthy children. The dreams I married were as contagious as chicken pox and sometimes as irritating.

From snippets of our life at Hidden Bar, I can now see what was happening. But did I relish those times as much as I could? Did I know what I was living? Did I know – truly know – those times would be a large part of the "stuff of life"? Did I know how I would fare as the wife of a dreamer always onto a new idea? And, ideas for things I knew nothing of?

These are my memories, and they are rich and good, though when I zero in, they aren't without the tension of wondering.

In the beginning, our headquarters consisted of an original settler's cabin, walls chinked with mud, then whitewashed as it awaited new occupants. No indoor plumbing or electricity. Sagging paint-deprived outbuildings and cattle pens wanting attention. Before long we would meet male neighbors who came to see who had bought Chris's farmstead

It's the biggest story of the three. The three ranches: Hidden Bar Ranch, east of Edmonton, Stampede Cattle Station, south of Calgary, and Paradise Ranch in south central British Columbia. It was the first. In 1954 we scraped up all we could afford for a few acres of gray wooded land east of Edmonton. At the end, Hidden Bar had three thousand acres and everything that went with it – machinery, cattle, horses, barns, wells, bunk-houses, houses, bank

loans, and new pages in our accounts payable and receivable books.

You see, it was like this. At least I think it was, though so much happened in those days, some details now escape me. The big picture was my husband Hu wanting a ranch operation. I was ignorant of what this would entail, but willing to support his wishes. Anyway, Hu could talk me into most anything. Oh, how I loved that enthusiastic aura of his. Everything seemed so reasonably do-able

Though I have few regrets, I can't help thinking, "Our lives would have been so different if we'd invested in an uncomplicated lake cottage or even Canada Savings bonds, instead of the ranches. No telling what trails Hu would have taken. But then I must remember that the need for land, cattle and horses was bred in his bones …. What was in my bones? If I think hard, from my mother's family, an appreciation for beauty and civility, curly hair, and a distaste for confrontation. I don't think I got her strong will. From my father's side some quiet Irish humor, patience, small bones and curly hair. Only a few of these qualities helped me through the life of the Hidden Bar Ranch.

We called it the Hidden Bar Ranch, using Hu's Welsh veterinarian father's old cattle brand – HB (attached) with a bar underneath -a derivative of his name Thomas Batin Harries. Tom Harries had a small holding out of Calgary where he kept his cattle. We were lucky to get his long unused brand in the family again, though only used it on the commercial cattle, not on the purebred Black Aberdeen Angus. They were tattooed on their ears as is still the custom.

In the early years, every Saturday or Sunday we'd go from our own driveway in the city of Edmonton, and head three quarters of an hour east. The car would be cracker crumbed and crowded. I'd have packed the usual picnic fare. As well, a box with diaper bag, extra diapers, dirty diaper bag, wet washcloths, towels, rolls of toilet paper, extra training panties and overalls. Disposable diapers, like seat belts and car seats were still non-existent. I held the wiggling baby

on my lap.

When we unloaded, the children raced or stumbled through the tall yard grass, then we all trailed after Hu. His face glowed. "That' s where the new barn should go." he said, "And we can shore up the old one, and over there – a machine shed. We' ll slash a lane through those woods to the meadow and have a small feed lot behind the trees, so sorting pens can be here to the west. Great headquarters." His dreams and vision for Hidden Bar were visible only to him. I was as ignorant as the children.

Why can I envisage a ball gown from looking at a bolt of fabric or a table setting when I pick flowers? I thought. My world was my details, not his. His big picture. When I think about it, it isn' t as if he' s a rich kid in a toy store, pointing and ordering whatever toy his little heart desires. But what do I know? After all, his family had had a farm and his first of his four university degrees was in Agriculture and we do have other income sources. Neither did I suspect then what the children and I would see and learn over the life of the Hidden Bar Ranch.

Hu could see exactly the future details of this property, while I somehow pictured something grander, more movie-like than what actually appeared,

It would take me many years to bask in the same quality of well-being that he must have immediately felt when he surveyed these acres of poplar scrubland. The land where small prairie sloughs and lakes were duck splotched and beaver damned. The land, many acres covered by poplar, spruce, chokecherry and wild rose, which was eventually cleared, bushwhacked and seeded yearly to make more pasture land for what became first a commercial herd of cattle then a herd of prize-winning purebred black Aberdeen Angus. We raised horses at different times – cutting horses, hunters and thoroughbreds (who led us to the world of the racing back-stretch and a trucking business which hauled horses from the Atlantic to the Pacific, as well as a horse van fabrication facility at the ranch.)

There were so many purchases: fence posts, barbed wire coils, new wells, corrals, tractors, barns, houses. We were always one stage behind what we could reasonably afford while back in Edmonton, Hu was hustling in his economic consulting business and teaching extra classes at the University of Alberta. Our children, Bruce, Jody and Lori were growing out of their shoes, eating more and more. Jeffrey and Danny came along during more land purchases in the area. Our first son Tommy died when he was four, in 1953, the year of the big polio epidemic, the year before our first rural land purchase. Every September we worried there could be another polio plague.

Chapter 2

Harold was our first employee. We were lucky to have him help us start off in ranching since he' d lived in the area all his life. Not long after his arrival his mother, Mrs. G. moved in with him. No one told us – certainly neither of them – but we guessed her husband was difficult and this was her escape route. At the time, I thought Harold' s mother was old. She told me, "Eighteen years older than Harold", and I never knew his age though I figured he was certainly older than Hu, who was nearly seven years older than me. So she seemed ancient. Today, I think she couldn' t have been sixty.

Harold was a gentleman, handsome, lean and ever smiling. I think of him lifting our young children one by one onto old Penny' s back and leading them grinning, around the small corral in front of our first old barn. He would say, "Good for you – Penny likes you," when she would sneeze, jostling them into wide-eyed smiles. Harold' s sisters were teachers who sometimes came for Sunday tea. Occasionally, I joined them while the men stood in the yard talking and the children played with kittens. I would caution Hu before I left, "Watch the kids don' t fall in the horse trough", though he did tend to be super safety-cautious.

We installed power, water and a septic system and a new electric stove and fridge in the

small house the first year. "But of course we won't use the indoor bathroom in the summertime. We'll use the outhouse," said Mrs. G.

In those days too, I was answering nighttime calls from constituents, since Hu had become a city alderman (councilor). In the city we needed plumbers and milkmen, babysitters and doctors, sand-piles and trikes and bikes and cough medicine and jeans. The ranch needed saddles and veterinarians and ranch hands and parts for tractors and oats and farmer's purple gas.

Harold suggested we hire an area farmer's son, Roy since he was good with horses. Roy would ride (unless snowdrifts were too deep) back and forth from home to us. His route was near where we cut our Christmas trees for home, school and kindergarten. It was where we had Hu's "arctic picnics." Parking the car on the highway's edge, Hu and eldest son Bruce broke trail and we'd slog through snow waist high for the younger children. Then we would gather firewood, pushing snow in a round high bank circling the large fire. One such picnic was always after Christmas when leftover turkey with *Laurey's Seasoning Salt* was warmed in an iron skillet and dropped into buns. I remember standing after I'd been sitting in the snow. My back was to the fire. I watched my little family, red cheeked, gobbling the buns, sparks from the fire rising and clicking in the early moonlit sky. That smell of cold, spruce bough fire and contentment will stay with me always.

Saturdays, in the early days, when Hu wasn't traveling, he took Bruce, our eldest, with him to Hidden Bar. Bruce would be exhausted, too tired to eat, when they came home to town, and always late for dinner. I would say, "Why must you stay so long?" and Hu would say, "We had things to do". Emergencies – broken water lines to the cattle waterer or fixing a pump, or they might take a load of cattle to the stockyards. This would give Harold or

Roy a weekend breather.

I teased Hu, because he continued to buy adjoining land and other pieces. Finally we had three thousand acres. "It seems you always want the land next door. When are you going to stop?"

But with each purchase, every-day freeze-framed details would etch in our memories. Scrubby poplars and willow inched next to the corrals at their east boundary. Gumbo in the corrals and lane to the feed lot was lumpy with heavy hoofed prints. A tall manure pile in the center of the lot provided a vantage point where the animals would take their turns, standing at crooked angles looking over the slat-boarded barn wood fence toward Antler Lake. The morning sun could seep through their tough hides and make them grunt, fart and moo with what could have passed for pleasure.

In summer, we found tiny strawberry plants in the old schoolyard. This grassy area was the field between the two-lane highway and our buildings. "Mummy, Daddy, here' s s'more and here' s s'more." They would be gorging, eating the tiny sweet berries, their faces, fingers and clothes stained red. I rarely had enough for complete dessert bowls full. While there was no sign of the old Uncas school, there was still the rusty school pump. Bruce and Jody were old enough to try taking turns pumping, but no water gushed forth.

I look at a drawing done by our six year old Lori. It shows Bobby, who worked for us part time, a red toque on his head, making him look like a Santa' s elf in profile. His arms are stretched forward holding the reins. He stands in the green wagon, the horses, Mick and Flick, their manes shaggy, puffs of steam snorting from their nostrils in the cold fall air, their legs bending in peculiar ways. Lori draws the children hanging colorfully or peeking shyly from behind Bobby. Hay bales serve as seats and appear as squares of yellow like blocks without alphabet letters. Each of the four children is smiling. (This picture was drawn before Danny was

born.) A wobbling HB brand centers the wagon's side. Spruce and poplar trees fill the corners. The sun shines down, the sky is crayon blue and cloudless. In a child's crooked printing is the misspelled "Hidden Bar Ratch by Lori Harries"

We had a weekend retreat at the edge of the woods next to the single men's bunkhouse - a faded red second-hand trailer. It had only one bedroom for Hu and me. Jeff, the baby, slept in a crib in the trailer. The other three children slept in the back of the station wagon.

Jimmy, a Calgary friend of Hu's, who had connections with some Stoney Indians, asked them to make us a tepee. The kids had great fun helping raise it each summer. Hu would yell, "O.K., up she goes" and Hu, Harold, Roy, his brother Bobby, and Bruce would heave on the long spruce poles slotted into the top flaps at the tent's smoke opening. Then he would say "O.K. kids, let's see you paint some birds and buffaloes or whatever you want." And Bruce, Jody, Lori and little Jeff would push up their paint shirt's rolled arms, old made-to-measure size sixteen and a half neck, forty-four chest and thirty-six arm length ones of Hu's, and paint with green and red barn paint, their own versions of native art on its outer walls. There were camp beds with a fire pit in the middle. After hearing wails of distress some mornings, I would rush out flapping a tea towel at the magpies who strutted around the children's beds.

One awful day, while Hu was away, Harold's sister Thelma phoned. "I'm at the University hospital. Harold lost his right hand in the grain auger."

It was terrible. He was with Roy, who applied a life-saving tourniquet. Each time we visited him he said, "I can't believe fingers that aren't here anymore can hurt so much." Hu had insisted on a workman's compensation deduction from Harold's pay cheque, so he did have a settlement which helped him buy his own place after he decided he could no longer work for us.

Chapter 3

I never did fit into that country scene. I didn't listen in on the party line, though my daughters did on occasion, so I didn't know which neighbors were ill or who had been in an accident. I didn't have a baby shower for a neighbor's pregnant daughter, didn't know whose daughters were pregnant, nor did I enter my wild blueberry pies or sprouted wheat bread in the local bake sale at the school. My cucumbers didn't end as crisp green fingers in jars with my own dill and garlic. I didn't know how to drive a tractor or operate the grain auger. Nor was I strong enough to throw more than one hay bale at a time. I wasn't practiced in wielding a hoof-pick, a branding iron, a rasp, a welding torch or a post-pounder. What I did was help Hu and the girls do the scads of paper work needed applying for registrations for our purebred Aberdeen Angus cattle

You see, I was a part-time rancher's wife, or rather, I was a full-time wife of a part-time rancher. We only lived at the Hidden Bar part of the summer and some weekends and occasionally during the week. Could I have become a citified interloper, carpet bagging my way into a world I knew very little of? I didn't know. In those days and later, I felt scattered enough as it was. Scattered as young mothers of five got in the „50" s, „60" s, „70" s and „80" s, with three ranches to visit, cook in, supply with, among other things, beds, bedding, tea towels, canned Danish bacon and mousetraps.

One of my extra-curricular activities during these times was to model in spring and fall fashion shows for local stores. I would stride the ramps wearing the latest French, American and Italian creations, miles away from the Hidden Bar Ranch.

While the Hidden Bar increasingly played a larger role in our lives, what with the riding ring and the children's new-found competence handling cattle, horses, and farm equipment, I remained a novice. Mostly my place was in the kitchen. I was comfortable there and liked it,

though sometimes I did feel left out. Of course there were those brief forays where I' d leave my post, trot to the pens, check off animals being weighed and loaded into large cattle liners. The snorting cattle would scramble up the ramp, after being freed from a neck-squeeze apparatus. My fingers and toes would be numb, while Hu and the children would be sweating – slogging through the corrals waylaying and shoving the beasts into the desired locations.

So sometimes I was part of it. Part of the real activities of the ranch. But more often, I readied meals, sat alone, reading or taking quiet walks into the garden, thinning the carrots, moving the hose, or gathering poppy pods.

Over time, the children and I developed a sense of place and affection for the Hidden Bar. In spite of the fact I spent less time there than did Hu, I came to recognize its fine timothy horse hay, cattle feed and straw bales in the hay shed, its chicken coop with the pungent odor, the cattle and manure smell of the corrals and loading dock, the wonderful leather and horse feed perfume of the tack room, the heavy warm horse smell of the new box stall barn, the dusty air of the granary, the grease and welding smells of the machine shed. Also I knew the direction the coldest wind would take. I knew the place on Antler lake where ducks landed by the tall bulrushes and ruffed grouse ruffled their way across our paths and where my mother and I crawled on our knees on moss, picking the tiny blueberries of late summer which appeared in Sunday morning pancakes. I went to the Murray place with its sorting pens and sagging barn where there were inkcap mushrooms which no one would eat but with which I made spore patterns on white sheets of paper.

We picnicked in crunching leaves next to a cattle trail between one field and the next. In between, were huge piles of poplars and spruce bulldozed and burned safely in the winter to create more pastureland.

There is a picture of us all, posed on bales in the hay barn. We used it for our Christmas

card that year. It was Thanksgiving weekend. The sun is shining on our faces, warming the tough yellow-green strands of vitamins the horses and cattle would munch through the winter. Danny is the little one in the red shirt and black cowboy boots. He's three years old and watches his older brothers and sisters. Bruce and Jeff are wearing gumboots. Hu may have had them tromping in the pens. I can't tell what Jody and Lori have on their feet. I wear a headscarf like the queen did when in the country, and sunglasses. Hu is smiling. Oh, he looks so young. He's probably thinking of how proud his parents would have been to see this sight. But also how worried they would be
knowing the debt we'd tackled to have this place with all its cattle, horses and equipment. It was young Harold B., a city friend of Bruce's, who took this picture. I can smell that hay shed. I can see the crows flocking. I can see through the leafless poplar woods into working chutes and beyond, the feed lot. Was it the day before Thanksgiving, when I would be thinking, what time will I need to put the turkey in the oven tomorrow? Remember to pick up whipping cream for the pumpkin pie on our way
back into town…… what about those bank loans?"

One summer, in the ditch pond next to the home place gate where fireweed, Indian paintbrush and wild roses grew, we kept geese and ducks. Each night, they were herded into a coyote-proof shelter in the barn. Budding engineers Jeff and friend Dougie built a wobbling dock into the pond. In the fall, the birds were shipped to a Kosher butcher who correctly slaughtered, plucked and delivered them frozen for our freezer, along with bags of their down feathers. I spent a day in my town kitchen dealing with this soft white blizzard. It still resides in cushions in my living room.

Chapter 4

Hu recognized hired-hand Roy's quick brightness and encouraged him to go to

university – the first in his family to do so. But before he went, inexperienced though he was, he began training cutting horses for us and had some small success. In those days there were not million dollar horses on the cutting horse circuit as there are today. Cutting is a sport begun by cowboys on ranches in Texas and Arizona which pits a specially bred horse named a quarter horse to cut an animal, a heifer or steer, from its herd – originally for shipping or maybe treating. The horses have strong hind quarters which enable them to stop and turn abruptly. In competition, the rider has two and a half minutes to be judged on the success of the rider and the horse, against the steer. So Roy left us to study Commerce at the University of Alberta where Hu was the Dean of the business faculty. While Roy was there they started a rodeo club for students, and he married Greta, a secretary in Hu's economic consulting firm. During those years a student told me, "I didn't think we'd live through it when the Dean quit smoking, his gas pipeline application was turned down, and his charcoal plant caught on fire." Those were just some of the ventures he tried in those very full days.

Bobby, who'd worked part-time for us through the years, replaced his older brother Roy. After he'd been with us a while, he married a local girl, Margaret. She was only about seventeen I think. Never have I known anyone more shy than she. Like a fawn. She would lean into Bobby, as though she could melt into him and become invisible. She would twine behind his slim blue jeaned cowboy shirted girth and Bobby
would smile and say, "Margaret, what are you doing?" and she, eyes down at the grass,

> would say nothing. What must she think of us? Why is she frightened? When we invited them to a barbecue, after he'd gone to get their steaks, buns, salad and beer, she would have him stand with her away from the noisy crowd. Then she would hold her wobbling paper plate as though it might be sprinkled with strychnine, Bobby would smile all the while, adoring his tiny black haired wife. I thought, She looks like Walt Disney's Snow

White. Maybe she' ll start to smile and sing Some Day My Prince Will Come. Although her prince had already arrived.

F For two summers, Bobby and Margaret stayed in the red trailer and we had the little white house along with the new "boy' s cabin" and "girl' s cabin" for the older children and their visiting friends. These were roughly furnished with metal army bunk beds and nails in the walls for clothing.

We needed the larger kitchen since I became cook for three university students who worked for us putting up hay, fencing, feeding and other chores. We had all our hearty meals on the newly constructed screened-in porch hugging two sides of the little house. Let' s see – breakfast again today: dry cereal, orange juice, bacon, sausage, eggs, fried tomatoes, piles of toast, honey, crabapple jelly, coffee – what' ll I pack for their lunches?. These young men lived in the single men' s bunkhouse which had electricity and a biffy in the bluebell and wild-rose wooded area behind. When we went away, Mrs. Sank, who had the general store on the way to North Cooking Lake cooked for them.

Eventually, Margaret became pregnant. When I asked when the baby was due she replied, "I' m not sure." I said, "Well what does the doctor say?" She floored me with, "I don' t see him anymore. I' ve kinda lost faith in him." Hmmf. I wondered what would happen. Nature took its course and they had a beautiful son. Two more children

followed, all three strikingly beautiful. A few years later Margaret began painting. Horses. Horses in profile standing on lawns with tiny flowers, graceful trees drooping spring-green branches above their heads.

We always had our own dry-aged beef in the freezers. An appropriate animal was shipped to Mr. Gainer, who custom slaughtered and butchered the beast into too many roasts,

steaks, stew and ground meat packages. We also began buying lamb from a friend in Lethbridge and Bruce and pals provided the odd small birds for our consumption.

One summer we had a field day for our friends. I had no idea what this would be like, but as usual, I was pulled along by Hu's enthusiasm. That dear man's yen for new projects couldn't be denied. And anyway, why would I want to? It was fun to go along.

Hu said, "You can't have a field day without a grandstand for the spectators," so he built bleachers on the west side of the riding ring. We invited friends with their children from town – about seventy-five, as I recall. Roy and Bobby's uncle Albert brought some cowboy friends to do calf roping and cattle penning. For the kids, there was calf riding and catching chickens in gunny sacks, but only a few city kids wanted any part of these scary rural sports.

I provided the grub. I made many cartons of corn chowder which I took next door. Very nervy of me, since I hardly knew Mrs. C. I'd only been in her home once before. However, in spite of many sponge cakes in her freezer, she let me wedge the chowder in for a few days.

After the excitement at the arena, the crowd had chowder, hot dogs, watermelon, ice cream, beer, pop and coffee. One of Hu's lovely traits was that he always told me how great the food was and what a success the party was, just as though I'd been in charge of the whole production.

During this period we had a shaggy-maned Welsh pony. Lori and her friend Wendy loved to decorate Miss Muffet with dandelion chains. Then they would take turns jouncing around the arena on her, laughing that she loved to wear flower necklaces.

One of those summers was when we had a pathetic orphaned calf. A Hereford, whose expressive face was heart-rending. The poor thing was near death and seven year old Jody said, "Daddy, can I save her?"

Hu said, “I don’ t think so dear”

“But Daddy, can I try?”

“O.K. dear, but I think she’ s too far gone. You’ ll need to build her a pen, put bedding in it and then feed her with a bottle.” So Jody gathered some scrap boards. One was an especially clean but heavy piece. She valiantly tried to hammer this across the corner of the nearest exercise corral in front of the new box stall barn. The nails kept bending and it was hard for her to get it stabilized. Older, thinner boards were then applied. A final sign was nailed on: “Fawn”. She brought straw and hay to her nursing station and called, “Daddy, I’ m ready – can you bring me the calf and the bottle?” The patient and its nourishment arrived and Jody spent much of the afternoon coaxing the calf to drink while her subdued brothers and sisters watched . It was too little, too late and the calf died. There were many tears that night.

Andy, a son of friends from Toronto, came for a visit. He and Bruce became good pals, and one time when Hu was attempting to get them all organized to saddle up for a ride to check fence lines, the boys were fooling around, as young boys do. Hu, the ever-safety-cautious cowboy, shouted, ”Andy, watch it – you don’ t know one end of a horse from the other”. So ever after, when Bruce and Andy set out on Squirrel and Rusty, Andy would grasp Squirrel’ s tail and say, “Want some oats?”

Chapter 5

.. We offered Hidden Bar for a *Three Day Event Pony Club Rally* in August, and prayed the weather would be as nice as it had been earlier. Hot and enough showers at night to cool things off and keep the grass growing. A rally is a huge undertaking. There would be up to one hundred parents and kids sixteen years and younger, with their horses and ponies, from Alberta

and Saskatchewan.

The world wide *Pony Club* organization was formed by the *British Horse Society* to train young riders in all the correct methods of horsemanship.

Bobby and Margaret had left the ranch and Jim and Betty Lynn came to the little white house. Handsome Jim looked more like a high jumper than a cowboy. His legs were so long he looked like he could walk onto a pony from its tail-end. Betty Lynn was a tall blond glamorous Arabian horse breeder as well as a fine seamstress.

Hu and Jim spent many weekends before the *Pony Club* event with three knowledgeable couples, a number of whom were riding instructors and whose kids were active in the movement. These other couples all knew far more about the English riding scene than we did. Our children didn' t yet have the horseflesh or knowledge to compete. Although they were thirteen, twelve, nine, eight and four, only daughters Jody and Lori poured over the red, blue and black *Pony Club* textbooks filled with instructions, data and lore about horses and horsemanship and dreamed of the day when they too could take part in a rally. The two girls and their three brothers eventually did compete in horse shows, using the *Pony Club* books as back-up.

I thought, these people all know so much about horses. They talk more about horses and ponies than about their children. Two of the women became district leaders in the movement and another developed a distinguished career as a jump course designer, traveling the world and hobnobbing with royalty at horse shows.

At first, Hu, Jim and these *Pony Club* experts hiked through our fields, took down fences, moved rocks, fallen trees and old rusted equipment and began building safe but challenging trails and jumps. One of the more exciting jumps was called "the piano jump". It began at the top of an outcropping, and came down, one "key" at a time -a challenge for the young competitors. Our cattle and horses were driven to the farthest corners of the sections. This was in order to build an

interesting cross country course. The rally was to be a three-day event, like summer Olympic games. Friday through Sunday events included cross country, stadium jumping, and dressage classes.

Jim tilled the muddy arena next to the old school yard with sand and wood shavings to make the footing stable for the stadium jumping and dressage classes. We converted barns for visiting ponies including the old cow barn we used as a veterinary hospital in winter was cleaned out and hauled its manure to distant fields.

That barn had once housed the three nostrilled calf that Lori and Jeff were going to take to a circus to make their fortune, although it died before they could put their plan into action. The kids did their bit too. They helped clean the tie stall barn, and readied the new box stall barn with straw and water buckets. The girls housecleaned the tack room and converted the machine shed into a stable with straw and buckets.

Hu outfitted his personal crew (Bruce, Jody, Lori, Jeff, four year old Danny and me), with big paintbrushes, red barn paint and assigned us to the new unpainted bleachers. I remember him calling out "Come-on gang, I' ve got an important job for all of you". Fortunately we more or less completed that project before the teeming rains hit.

Under threatening skies and then pouring rain, borrowed Imperial Oil bunkhouses arranged for by one of the Pony Club dads, were set up, porta-potties were put in place, a chow wagon and dining tent with tables and chairs were set on the grassy area by the red trailer, next to the single men' s bunkhouse.

The first of the three days began, and I remember seeing a line of yellow slickered silhouettes snaking through newly flattened grasses on their way to the turquoise biffys. I crossed my fingers that the sun would come out again. We don' t need this.

Finally, we began. The P.A. system called out the classes before the events. Parents"

hearty good humor attempted to help their velvet helmeted young riders keep their concentration for the trials ahead. Thank goodness the dressage competition, somewhat like ballet on horseback, and the stadium jumping could go ahead safely because of the good footing in the arena. There was some worry about the slick sloppiness of some of the trails and areas on the cross country course. But the intrepid young riders came through safely. I have no recollection of any extra accident insurance or parental forms absolving any of us in the case of disaster.

When the whole weekend came to its soggy end the cheers suggested it was a success. It took a few days to return our horses, cattle and equipment to their former spots after the bunkhouses, chow wagon, tent and biffys disappeared, and ranch life returned to normal.

Sometime after the rally, Hu started riding a cutting horse – *Birdwell's Tex (Tex)* while Bruce rode *Toby* for a couple of seasons. Hu really enjoyed the new sport and we had commercial steers available so had many competitions at the ranch. Cutting horse competitions started in Arizona and Texas a number of years on ranches where cowboys needed to "cut" one animal from a herd. Their horses became a registered breed. A rider is scored for the two and a half minutes it takes him to cut, or separate an animal from its herd. Most of the times Hu went to contests in small towns, and to Calgary and Vancouver and I went with him. What was really fun – at the Douglas Lake ranch near Kamloops, B.C..

Because he was away so often, or busy at the University or consulting office, he didn' t have the time to devote to the sport as did a number of the other amateurs who were mostly retired men.

As for me, I recall one year, sitting waiting while Hu warmed up his horse and in between events, I was on a Nancy Mitford reading spree. I thought of my life and how different it was from that of the crazy Brits in those old orange and black Penguin books "The Pursuit of

Love" and "Love in a Cold Climate".

Chapter 6 Before long the children

needed ponies and horses and velvet riding hats and britches and tweed

jackets and boots and saddles and cowboy boots and spurs and more

pony club books and boxes of elastics for braiding horse' s manes and tails and snaffle bits and halters and bridles and saddle soap.

And Hu produced three rodeos in Toronto at the Maple Leaf Gardens and ballpark. The first was a financial disaster because customers were hunkered down at their televisions watching the Kennedy assassination clips. While the other two were better, they were also financial drains.

At the house in town I kept two sets of seven pairs of jeans washed and wrestled onto metal frames to dry. Denim in those days was not stone-washed and soft and by the time the jeans were comfortable, they were on my mile-high mending pile next to my sewing machine left open on a counter in our bedroom; I constantly broke needles going over the GWG, Lee Rider or Levi heavy seams.

Then we bought the Stampede Cattle Station – 14,000 acres of southern Alberta prairie grass with five farmsteads, many employees and purebred Aberdeen Angus cattle. After doing a successful economic study for a German Steel company, Hu was asked to be the chairman of its Canadian board and we went to Dusseldorf for meetings.

Before we knew it, the kids needed hair dryers and lipstick and nail polish and

Beatles records and ballet, riding, guitar and piano lessons. We worried about drugs, motorcycles and dirt bikes, while our horse trailer-trucks and the hitch of eight heavy show horses were gobbling money faster than the bucking barrel in the main ranch yard

regularly tossed riders into the sawdust.

When Jeff was fourteen we sent him to Calgary to take a course enabling him to do artificial insemination on our black purebred cows. By this time we' d bred a very high-class bull – *Byergoes Black Revolution* -and along with expensive vials from other bulls, his semen was regularly used. Jody and Lori spent summers at Stampede Cattle Station riding the many miles, detecting and penning cows for this procedure.

In 1968 at the Hidden Bar Ranch, we built a four bedroom log house complete with dishwasher, swimming pool and boys" and girls" cabins. It was in this house that we had our Saturday and Sunday brunch parties of omelets cooked to order. One year I made raised pork pies which I vowed I' d never do again. It was too nerve-wracking. Crazy. In those days we nearly all smoked and at these parties drank Harvey Wallbangers which were vodka and orange juice with a float of Galliano. It was always bright and sunny, though cold. Our guests crunched crookedly down the driveway for home as the sky turned pink in the west and the sun lowered.

In early summer, our kids always had their high school grad breakfasts here with bacon, sausage and pancakes on the outdoor grills – parents chaperoned and cooked. Of course everyone fell or was tossed into the pool before changing into bathing suits, and the dryer whirled.

This was also when Hu began commuting to Ottawa for the four years (19681972) he was a member of parliament under Pierre Elliot Trudeau. We bought the Paradise Ranch on the shores of Lake Okanagan in British Columbia where we ran a unit of purebred cattle and then turned some of its silted cliffs and orchards into vineyards. I worried about Hu. How he could keep up the pace. We were of course ever more heavily "into the banks".

***** When Jim and Betty Lynn moved on, we built a yellow bungalow next to the

foundation of the original settler's cabin and Albert and Gail came to stay. Two sons were born to them at Hidden Bar and they brought some of their relatives, Ronnie, Frankie, Jim and Gary to work through the years for us at Hidden Bar and the Stampede Cattle Station.

Hu was travelling abroad for the World Bank and we bought the large Church place (formerly owned by the Mormon church) at Hastings Lake with its half section hay meadow dammed yearly by beavers. Roy became an expert at dynamiting these dams. He'd worked for us years before and had left to study Commerce at the University of Alberta while Hu was the Dean of that faculty. In the winter, Albert used heavy horses and a sleigh to feed the cattle. A more reliable method of feeding than a tractor-pulled breakfast.

Twice, we went to Aberdeen Angus World Forums. First, in Aviemor, Scotland and next, to Christchurch, New Zealand where Hu gave a paper on I-can't-remember exactly-what, but recall that it was well received. Great trips, purebred cattle and fine people.

Eventually, most of our wells at Hidden Bar produced hard water which magically turned scotch a gray-purple color when Hu poured drinks for visiting cattle buyers into large glasses. I knew there would be suppressed grimaces after they saw the expensive brown bottle tilt, and what happened after, when Hu poured a small amount of water into the scotch.

This was all at the log house – from 1968, until 1981 -the end. I call those years the biggest, the busiest, the best and the worst years of Hidden Bar Ranch.

Chapter 7

I know I was a necessary part of the team. In the kitchen of the big house I prepared soup not salads, roasts not pizzas, stew not stir-fries. In the long spring days, when Saskatoon blossoms frothed next to pale green leaves, and frost had almost melted under three feet of manure in the pens by the loading dock, I set meals on hold and walked down to the action

station where Hu' s voice rose above the mooing grunting of the animals and his shouts, "Get over to the side Bruce …Jody not that way – towards the fence…Lori, Jeff, Danny …look sharp."

Only occasionally would I have a task at the pens. Perhaps recording weights as an animal stood on the jiggling platform of the weigh-scale, or counting the critters as they were admonished physically and vocally to clamber up a ramp to a cattle liner, their snorting farting protests unheeded. When I think of it now – the sounds, clear as rolling drums and the smell of heat steaming from winter coated bodies and manure plopping on newly thawed gumbo. I' d watch a driver leaning against a front fender of his well-kept truck, cupping an ungloved hand around a sputtering match as he lit a cigarette. Our burly veterinarians, either Dr. McLean or Dr. Klavano, cheerfully stating, "Well gang, that' s it for today" and I' d trot back to my kitchen.

One winter morning when we came from town to the ranch we drove through the main yard and saw the heavy horses leaning as they often did, against the metal pipe corrals. Vapor from their nostrils and steam from the water trough clouded the area next to the red pump house. Its motor labored on this minus twenty day. Hu said we had to ship two loads of purebreds to Virginia and the vets had to clear them.

At the main house I turned up thermostats for the two gas furnaces which were kept on low setting while we were away from the unlocked ranch house. Everyone except me climbed into grubby snowmobile suits, sorrel boots, wool toques and down mitts. Hu said, "Come down after a while and see how we' re doing". I thought, he really wants a coffee/hot chocolate delivery.

I recall looking out the large kitchen window at the woods. Trees and bushes surrounding much of the backside of the log house were poplar, pine, high bush cranberry chokecherry, Saskatoon and wild rose. That weekend, they' d all been touched with a double sifting of snow.

It wasn’ t a damp heavy snow like in the spring, but rather more like icing sugar wafted from a sieve on a fancy dessert. I wondered what the Inuit name for this kind of snow would be.

Later, I took lemonade thermoses, now filled with hot cocoa, two other giant thermoses of coffee, mugs, a sealer of milk and jar of sugar along the cleared road to the corrals. My boots made scrunching sounds and bits of snow dislodged from branches as the occasional sparrow went for vitamins stored in the few remaining frozen berries.

I saw the bawling cattle, shaggy and unkempt looking and thought, poor things. They’ re sad. No longer were they the shiny oiled specimens I’ d admired a few months earlier at the Toronto Royal Winter Fair. I knew the heifer, winner of “best in show” was no longer here. Nor did they look as they used to while they were munching grass in their summer pastures here and at the Stampede Cattle Station. Cows were often trucked to Stampede to calve out in the dryer, earlier spring.

I hung around while Hu, kids, Albert and the vets sorted, tested, then pushed the snorting animals up a slippery chute into the liners. It took time.

Before they finished, I hurried back to my kitchen where I turned up the heat under the soup pot, took the plastic wrap from the platter of cold cuts and cheddar cheese, plunked the jar of dill pickles on the checked table cloth, made a big brown betty pot of black tea, glugged milk into the dark green plastic pitcher (light weight so it could be easily lifted), set out the plates, cutlery and mugs. Lastly, I buttered the buns, putting them in brown paper bags to warm in a very low oven.

I could hear them approaching the back porch, (cleverly made of used though smelly creosoted railway ties.) and the mudroom door burst open. Cold blew into the kitchen. Thunks and clunks. They took off their boots. The toilet flushed again and again. Taps turned on again and again. And they trooped in, laughing as usual, and squished in around

the table. I stood in the working area, making more and more tea.

This had been my role, and I was not discontented. When I look back, nearly forty years later, I thought then those were only snippets of solitude. I now recognize that snippets of solitude were and are, gifts.

Chapter 8

Some weekends when we moved cattle to the north east corner of the Hidden Bar I' d take the yellow truck to the Bennett corner, meeting the cattle and riders who' d maneuvered south to the tricky turn into the Murray place. I' d seen what could happen if a few bouncing blacks took it into their heads to keep going south instead of going through the small opening to the lush north west front field of this property which was separated from our home place. Those maddening critters would jounce along like an ink blob. They' d stay on the road or ooze along fireweed-filled ditches, tails swinging, running like crazy, as though they had one internal compass among them. One animal would do something foolish, perhaps end at a small holding with a barking guard dog.

Suddenly they' d turn tail, troubled and wheezing, doubling back on themselves and I' d stand in the middle of the road, arms and legs spread, yelling " yo…yo…yo" and thinking, this sure beats peeling potatoes for stew.

I' d watch as our mounted company – cowboy hatted, leather-chapped and loud voiced - whistled and put the spurs to their horses. They' d round up the errant beast and push it back through the correct gate to the herd. Then they' d move up the lane into the mustering pens by the old Murray barn. I' d drive the truck through the fence opening, wrestle with the gate, almost in tears, thinking, fee-ble, *f*ee-ble. Pull harder. My boots sliding as I leaned back, hands holding the loop of heavy wire to be slid over the post top. Finally, the gate of wobbling saplings

wrapped with barbed wire went from limp to stiff in closed position. With a satisfied grin, I' d jump back into the truck thinking of the lunch jouncing in the back of the pick-up. If I was a proper rancher' s wife, we' d have homemade buns and apple pies.

One year – late fall – too cold, we had a purebred Angus sale at the ranch. For publicity, we offered proceeds of one calf sale to the Edmonton symphony, and that attracted the Edmonton Journal who sent a photographer and writer. Hu installed large portable space heaters in front of the sales area by the big hay barn.

An idea of mine to warm up the buyers and put them in a better bidding mood was to provide hot stew with buns and hot mulled wine. These were to be sold. Coffee was free. The idea was that Jody, Lori and I would make kettles of this stuff. From the profit the girls would reap enough money to put towards a ski trip. The boys helped in the pens, which at least kept them hopping and warmer than the shivering buyers who stood with hands in their pockets. My plan ran fine, „cept it was difficult toting the stew down to the pens, and, I hadn' t allowed for a heat source there. The cattlemen didn' t like our sweet lukewarm wine, preferring to pour shots of their own Scotch into the free hot coffee (which we had made in rented coffee percs). Our catering profits were zilch. But the cattle sold. We didn' t repeat the effort the next year and went for private sales only, as well as continuing our yearly sales at the Stampede Cattle Station during Calgary Stampede week.

Then on the way to Banff, where Hu was to attend directors meetings for the Banff School of Advanced management, I remember him saying, "I know, why don' t we put a small subdivision on the ranch? Leave the home place with houses and everything. We' ll put a new road in from the main north-south road". As usual, he had the whole plan in his mind.

Chapter 9

After two years negotiating with the local planning board, we finally got permission to develop a subdivision called *Farrell Properties.* It was named after my dad. I chose and ordered six pre-fab houses and sited them -I was adamant that kitchens face east to get the morning sun (on acreages you can do this.) Bruce and his friends Brian and George, who could operate a back-hoe, set the foundations. Bruce hired the carpenters. I contracted for the floor coverings, appliances and hired the painters.

Oh, the problems I had with Pat the Irish painter who too often didn't complete a job when he said he would. I'd heard that many painters become alcoholics and I wondered about Pat, but had no reason to think this was why he didn't show up when he said he would. I furnished one show home without spending a cent. I used an office desk covered with floor-length cloths for the dining room table, borrowed beds, pictures, a chesterfield and chairs and put many dried flower and grasses in corners -the style in those days. When one show home sold, I moved the furnishings to another.

Many years later, when I was a florist for the designer of show homes I found myself thinking, no wonder only buyers with special vision purchased our spartan acreage properties. At first, most weekend open houses were under my command, but we finally turned this job over to real salesmen. Our goal was to sell these six acreages with houses so the remaining properties would be more saleable. And, over time they did sell. I thought that was the end of that.

Well, it was, until we decided to develop another piece of the land. This site bordered the west side of Antler Lake, its south boundary running partly along the C.N. Railway main line. To counter objections from the Planning Board that houses might be too close to the tracks, I visited eight households whose homes were located even closer to the trains than the ones we had planned. Those householders told me they "just love the sound of the train's whistle at the Uncas crossing. It's a comfort!" When I asked if their dishes fell out of the cupboards when

trains rumble past, they laughed and told me, no. They heard the trains as we did -a song familiar as geese honking overhead in the fall, coyotes yipping throughout the year, and frogs croaking in springtime.

I remember the final hearing that granted us permission to tackle this project. Hu sat between me and Kim, who was the town planner we' d hired to design the *Antler Lake Meadows.* When a witness spoke of the possible inconvenience of the railway tracks being too close to some of our acreages, Hu disagreed so heartily, Kim and I each put a hand on his knee, pressing hard, to keep him from jumping up and objecting. In the end we got approval.

Fortunately, we built the roads and sold the whole project just before a drop in the real estate market. It helped with the banks. But we were still overextended by their twenty plus percent interest rates.

Then Albert and Gail left to start their own ranch and we knew they' d succeed. It was because of Albert' s quiet competence and Gail' s red headed energy. Succeed they did. Many years later, Jeff' s eldest son spent part of two summers at their ranch, learning about a place so different from his family' s vineyard home in the Okanagan.

That spring we also celebrated a family wedding in Edmonton when our daughter Jody married Jan. The beautiful bride wore my wedding gown remodeled for her more curvaceous figure. Her glowing sister and three grinning brothers were all in the wedding party. No blue jeans.

Chapter 10

We had a series of incompetent employees after Albert left. One was a thief who stole Hu' s best trophy saddle and also Jody' s Steuben English saddle. Neither of them ever

recovered.. Then Koski came to us from Japan with his wife Myumi and little boy, Kazu. They stayed till the end of the Hidden Bar Ranch.

One day, the machine shed caught fire with both Koski and Hu in it. Hu said he saw the blue flame snaking along the ground to a tractor, and yelled "Koski, get out of here *now!*" They ran out separate doors just before the building blew up and threw them into the air. One leg of Koki's jeans were alight so he rolled in the grass. Then he ran to the corrals. Hu ran to our house shouting "Get Billy up from his nap. The place is on fire". Twenty minutes later the county volunteer fire department arrived. By this time flames had destroyed the garage and shed containing Hu' s valued restored " 28 Chevy and " 49 Mercury trucks plus two snowmobiles, tractor tires, grain auger and oat storage, and I-don' t-know-what-all-else. Flames leaped not only across the road to the large metal building where we fabricated horse vans and also to the metal corrals behind. They didn' t reach barns or hay shed. Koski and Hu drove the cattle and horses to safety.

I had grabbed our dozy little grandson, whose Mummy was in Ontario, put him in the truck' s passenger seat and drove a short distance away from the log house. I can still see the outcome -the smoke haze and little Billy sitting on the fire engine drinking apple juice.

A neighbor took Koski to the hospital for treatment on his one leg. Thankfully, there were no other injuries to humans or animals. Before this I had been visiting my mother daily in hospital, and this was the only day I didn' t visit her, six weeks before her death.

This was about the time that Lori caught the "cutting horse bug" and often went with her dad to competitions whenever she could.. Hu did well on *Doc's Twister.* Lori ended up as the Canadian champion novice rider on *Mia Freckles.*

Chapter 11

How did it end? It was spring, when poplars cast their chartreuse haze and ditches were full of spring run-off. Hu left the office early. We arrived at the log ranch house, and Gyp, the ranch dog panted alongside the car from the barnyard and through the trail to the log house."

Through the car window, Hu called, "Glad to see you Gyp, you run pretty fast for an old fellow". I took the basket of dinner extras from the car while Gypsy feathery tail waved around me. Early evening sun shone through the wooded west edge of the clearing at the back porch. Hu said he was going to check with Koski and would be back in a while.

So quiet. I knew Hu had been thinking how different it was now that it was just the two of us. I didn't mind, but he must have seen the writing on the wall.

I lit the barbecue and basked in the early evening glow. Crows were cawing and gophers were popping in and out of their holes. Horses stood at the fence-line in the front pasture, wondering why I was just standing there, doing nothing. But I was thinking. Thinking of this place. Thinking of how much longer we could hang onto it. The place where we'd started the whole ranch scene for our family. I felt it couldn't be much longer. The children were rarely here. We'd sold the Stampede Cattle Station in the south, and we'd cut back on the numbers of purebreds. Though as Hu patiently tried to explain, you need volume. Now we could concentrate on the vineyards in B.C.

I made a salad, cooked a sirloin steak, tented it with foil, and before dinner Hu poured us each a scotch. We sat staring at the tall fieldstone fireplace. I smiled, "You were so glad when you finished building it."

He frowned, then smiled. "Wish I'd had time to help with the stonework. Nice to think, isn't it, that the stones are all from our own fields?"

No TV or radio. We talked about the children, the future of the Paradise vineyards,

what the future held for us, and what was right and wrong with the world.

We sat at the old mahogany dining room table, sun striping across its dusty surface. I' d run a tea towel across it but the results were not perfect. I' d put a few short branches with bursting leaf buds in the speckled pottery vase . I felt a tear. If the children were little, this would be filled with dandelions.

Hu leaned back in his chair. "We have to, you know. Sell. What do you think?"

"I know. It' s time. We still won' t be free of the banks, will we?"

"No". He reached over and took my hand. "We' ll be over the worst dear."

We would sell Hidden Bar. Have an auction. A land auction, the first of its kind in the area.

And so, Hidden Bar was sold. June, 1981. I stayed for most of the day in the house. I could bring myself to watch cattle going under the hammer. But this? Our home-away-from-home? Where our children had come every summer and many weekends. Where ranch-hands, truckers, veterinarians, mounties, politicians, foreign students and dignitaries, local university students and professors, scientists, cutting horse contestants, cowboys, European board members, Hu' s economic consulting staff, relatives, friends and neighbours, high school grad party groups, all had sat at our tables, drank tea, coffee, beer, scotch, wine, cokes and hot chocolate. Eaten rare and overcooked steaks, beans, corn chowder, hot dogs, hamburgers, wild blueberry pancakes, made-to-measure omelets and my once only pork pies. Where our children had learned to ride horses and drive cars. Where they' d shot skeet with their friends. Where all the kids put ponies over jumps, learned the odd ways of horses, cattle and chickens, and the ways of people from various walks of life.

I listened to the faint sound of the auctioneer' s loudspeaker, background to my

thoughts. Hu must never think this has all been a big mistake. After all, many of his dreams did become our dreams. It's been quite the education for me. And the children. And I love him for it.