

Grateful for friends and neighbors

On July 5, our daughter Andrea was severely burned while helping to control a range fire near a friend's home. She was taken by ambulance to our local hospital, then flown to the Intermountain Burn Center at Salt Lake City, UT. The fast, efficient teamwork of the emergency medical technicians (EMT) who brought her to the hospital saved her life.

The past few weeks have been traumatic. But, we've gotten through it – a day at a time – with the help and prayers of many caring people.

Andrea was in critical condition with third-degree burns over 42% of her body. She had a ventilator tube in her throat for three weeks, was given many liters of fluid intravenously each day to offset losses from the burns, and was fed through a feeding tube.

Though she was still in critical condition, skin grafts began five days after the accident. They started with her arms and hands, using strips of skin (the top two layers, which then regrow) from her belly to cover them.

The second surgery transplanted skin from her back to cover as much of her legs as possible, using cadaver skin as a temporary covering for the rest (until her body rejected it). Surgery was done again July 31 to finish covering those areas, after her back and belly skin healed enough to harvest again.

Lynn, Jim, Michael and Carolyn, and a close family friend and neighbor have all been taking shifts, driving 390 miles to Salt Lake City to sit with her. I've stayed behind to do the chores and take care of Andrea's little girl, Emily (age 2½), but we hope to take Emmy down to see her mama soon.

It's been traumatic for her as she witnessed the fire and the EMTs working on her mama. She still has nightmares about it. She understands that mama is in the hospital having "owies" fixed; she spends a lot of time putting sticker labels (bandages) on herself, her dolls and on Grandma, and this seems to help.

Chores Still Need Attention

We have been so grateful for the help of friends and neighbors in this time of need. Folks have helped us hay. They also rounded up the bulls when they

escaped through a fence break, helped remove the tree that caused the break and helped rebuild the fence.

Neighbors also took care of little Em for me during the days I helped Carolyn and her kids move our cattle to the high range pasture. We rode for five days to get the range fences and troughs checked and fixed and the cows moved.

The first three days were fairly easy. Even though it was 90° weather, we were only riding six to seven hours/day, gathering

the high cows and moving them in paired-up groups. Nick, 7, and little Heather, 9, were good help following the herds or acting as "herd holders" while Carolyn and I sorted out the ones we had to cut back.

The fourth day was a tough, nine-hour ride. By the end of it, we'd found and moved all but 18 pairs and two yearling heifers. The next day Carolyn and I rode seven hours and found the rest – except one yearling heifer, which Carolyn and the kids found the next day. We moved the cattle the rest of the way up the mountain and then came home.

We still have one stretch of fence in the timber to check, a springbox to clean out and a little more hay to stack, but we are managing. Another good friend helped us pick the big patches of Larkspur in the creek bottom while we were moving cows into that pasture.

We're short-handed this summer, since Andrea usually does a lot of this work herself, and now we are "being there" for her in her crisis. But friends and neighbors have pitched in to help and we will make it through the summer OK.

The good news is Andrea is healing swiftly. Barring complications, the doctor thinks she may be out of intensive care by mid-August. After a few weeks of physical therapy in Salt Lake City, she may be able to come home to finish her final months of physical therapy. We eagerly look forward to that time! ♦

Heather Smith Thomas and her husband Lynn own and operate the Sky Range Ranch near Salmon, ID.



**Heather Smith
Thomas**

Thomas family tragedy

Andrea Daine, the daughter of **BEEF** columnist Heather Smith Thomas, was badly burned fighting a sagebrush fire on July 5. Heather says Andrea is in critical but stable condition in the Burn Trauma Intensive Care Unit at the University of Utah Hospital in Salt Lake City.

Andrea was working with two other people on a Cat cutting a firebreak to prevent a range fire from spreading to public land. The wind shifted the 20- to 30-ft. flames back over the top of the crew, severely burning Andrea and neighbor Mark Hansen.

Andrea suffered second- and third-degree burns on more than 51% of her body and at press time had just undergone the first of four skin graft surgeries. It's expected that she will spend three months in intensive care and several more in physical therapy. Members of the family are taking turns travelling to Salt Lake City, almost 400 miles away, to sit with her. Heather requests your prayers.

Townpeople have established a fund for donations. Send them to: Andrea Thomas Daine Fund, First Security Bank, P.O. Box 810, Salmon, ID 83467.

In addition, cards and letters may be sent to: Burn Trauma ICU, University of Utah Hospital, 50 North Medical Dr., Salt Lake City, UT 84132.

E-mails, which will be read to her, should be sent to: Linda.Edelman@hsc.utah.edu.

Contest For Best Beef Innovator

BEEF magazine is proud to be a participant in the IRM TIPS for Profit contest. IRM, of course, stands for Integrated Resource Management, a 20-year-old program developed to help cow/calf producers improve herd reproductive efficiency. It's since evolved to include the entire farm and ranch resources and a systems approach to management.

As most of you know, **BEEF** is where you'll exclusively find the IRM program's quarterly newsletter, *IRM News*. In fact, it's in this month's issue on page 28a.

The IRM TIPS contest has been

established to recognize the best beef innovators. Two individuals, each from one of the seven National

Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) regions, will be chosen as regional winners.

From these semifinalists, three national IRM TIPS for Profit Awards and 10 honorable mentions will be awarded. Displays and presentations will be made during next February's Cattle Industry Trade Show and Convention in San Antonio, TX. Winning entries will be showcased in a

spring issue of **BEEF**.

The entry deadline is Oct. 1. For rules and entry forms, contact Renee Lloyd at 303/850-3373, or e-mail her at rlloyd@beef.org.

There's A New Gordon In Town

As of 2:10 p.m. on July 14, **BEEF** managing editor Kindra Gordon has more than just editorial deadlines to worry about. That's when Kindra gave birth to her and husband Bruce's first child. Kindra says they named the 7-lb., 3-oz. little boy "Bridger Justis." By the way, Kindra, baby Bridger and proud papa Bruce are doing well. Congratulations.

Beef Quality Challenge

The 2000 edition of the Beef Quality Challenge is just around the corner. The third annual edition will debut in our October issue.

Last year, thousands of you participated in this prize-laden, hands-on contest designed to be a fun learning experience about the factors that determine profitability and quality in beef cattle.

As usual, **BEEF** will be cooperating with Texas A&M University and the Texas Beef Council, with sponsorship by Ft. Dodge Animal Health. Look for it in our October issue!

This Month On beef-mag.com...

- Defining Beef Demand
- More Beef Industry News
- Ethanol And The Environment
- Complete interview with

Smithfield Foods' CEO Joe Luter on the prospects and plans of the world's largest hog producer and processor. ♦



Joe Roybal

Goodbye, friends

This past year was one to remember – record drought, fires and moisture in October, and record cold in November. Winter started early, with snow in October that never melted and cold weather in November that froze water lines to the troughs on our mountain pasture.

Thanks to the cows eating snow, and some protein supplement to encourage them to utilize the rough tall grass they could still find, we were able to leave the cows on that pasture until the end of November. With the hay shortage from summer's drought, we couldn't afford to start feeding hay, and they had to rough it – but they managed.

Due to deep snow, we fed the weaned calves hay the last two weeks before we shipped them. The morning we sold them, we had 8 in. of new snow and had to chain up trucks to get out of the driveway. It may be a long winter, but we're glad for the moisture.

Now we're getting ready for calving, though it should be fairly easy because we've cut our cowherd. The first cows are due Jan. 10; the last one on Feb. 5. The big advantage to a short breeding season is that the calving is fast and over before we run out of endurance!

As we get older, however, our stamina is diminished, and we are seriously looking at changing to summer calving. We don't want to calve in the spring because spring here (late February to April) is a sea of mud – putting newborns at risk for scours and pneumonia. January is usually cold and frozen, with much less illness (though it's labor intensive putting all the cows through the barn in cold weather).

The problem with summer calving is our dependence on public range; cows would calve and breed on the range, which is fraught with problems. If we do switch to a summer calving program, it will probably mean giving up use of the range and cutting our herd to just the number of cows we can pasture at home. We'd depend more on my writing than on the cows for making our living.

It's a hard decision because many ranches in public land states are not viable units without use of that range.

Our decision will depend, in part, on whether our daughter will be able to help us as much as she has in the past. If it's mainly just Lynn and I taking care of the cattle, we may cut the herd more next spring and give up the range. We have until April (our usual breeding season) to decide.



**Heather Smith
Thomas**

Andrea Is Mending

Andrea is slowly recovering from her burns and skin grafts. She must be careful what she does, since the grafted skin is still thin and fragile. On her legs, the major arteries are directly under the skin in some places (much of the muscle was burned away as well as the skin). Overall, she's mending in body and spirit. We plan to write a book about her ordeal.

Our family is grateful to the kind folks who wrote and helped with her assistance fund. Many of you will be our friends for years to come.

This is my last installment of "Rancher's Journal" for *BEEF*. Thank you, everyone, for reading this column and sharing with our family the ups and downs of ranching and the cattle business and the joys and sorrows of this kind of life.

Our experience with Andrea's accident this summer has had its up side along with its test of our spiritual and physical endurance. It gave us a lot more compassion and understanding about many things in life, and it created a bond between us and a lot of caring people.

The "subculture" of ranch life (as some city folks might call it) is a true blessing. We help sustain one another in times of tragedy or crisis.

Thank you for your concern, your prayers and your help when we so desperately needed it. I'm glad I had the opportunity to write this column for the past four years and to share our lives with yours. ♦

Heather Smith Thomas and her husband Lynn own and operate the Sky Range Ranch near Salmon, ID.

Another View...

Federal land policies may have added fuel to fires

By STEWART TRUELSEN

The Thomas ranch near Salmon in central Idaho is nestled in a picturesque valley. The valley and uplands are typical of the western range with cattle, elk, cool mountain streams and plenty of fresh air. But that's not the way it was this summer.

"We've been inundated with smoke in our valley almost every day from late July on until this past Friday when we started to get a little rain," said Heather Smith Thomas, a rancher and well-known author of books about horses. Although the wildfires never got closer than a few miles from the ranch, Thomas said she felt like she was sitting next to a campfire because the wind carried ashes and hot air from the blazes. Work outdoors became difficult and taxing on a person's lungs.

Heather and her husband, Lynn Thomas, did not lose any cattle but some of their neighbors in Lemhi County did, as ranges burned up. The extent of losses probably won't be known until fall. Some ranchers pulled their cattle off summer

ranges early because of the fires. Now, they are faced with a shortage of fall pasture and hay because the drought caused stream levels to drop, and there is not enough water for irrigation.

More than a half million acres were still being consumed by 20 fires across Idaho at the beginning of September. The Clear Creek fire, 10 miles west of Salmon, is expected to burn until the end of September when rain and snow will likely snuff it out. Sen. Larry Craig (R-Idaho) wants to examine whether Clinton administration policies are partially to blame for the ferocity of this season's fires. Craig will hold hearings in the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, which he chairs.

Many local people believe fire conditions shouldn't have been allowed to get to this point, said Thomas. They criticize the government for shutting down timber harvests. If some of these areas had been selectively logged, there would have been less fuel for the fires. This was particularly true in the wilderness areas where there was

no logging or grazing, she added.

At the same time, land management agencies have been erasing roads in the national forests, and the Clinton Administration wants to prohibit future road building on more than 40 million acres. The question now being asked is how critical were these roads to transporting firefighters, evacuating the public or acting as firelines?

Environmental groups like to argue that tourism is more important to the economy of places like Salmon, Idaho than logging or livestock grazing. But how many tourists want to visit charred forests, or worse yet, ones that are still burning? The air is better in heavily industrialized cities than it is around Salmon, where the Red Cross and others distributed air cleaners to residents who needed them.

The Clinton administration claims to have vision for the western landscape. Certainly this can't be it.

Truelsen is the director of broadcast services for the American Farm Bureau Federation.