

Rock chalk Jayhawk

This past week my husband and I had an opportunity to do something we've wanted to do for years; we attended a KU home basketball game. We've been KU basketball fans since the days of Larry Brown's coaching and Danny Manning's playing. We have seen games several times but in Lincoln, Nebraska. This time we were able to experience the ambience of Allen Fieldhouse (Beware of the Phog). I received an e-mail which offered tickets to exhibition games at prices we could afford, so we decided to attend the Tuesday night game against Fort Hays State.

We left Norton on Monday afternoon because of the predictions of snow. We didn't encounter any snowflakes, but we drove in rain all the way to Topeka, where we spent Monday night. It rained all day Tuesday as well. When we arrived in Lawrence the first thing we did was find Allen Fieldhouse and figure out where we would park. We checked into our motel and then went downtown on Massachusetts Street to do some shopping. I bought Bob a tee shirt to wear to the game, a pink KU tee and pink and white KU socks for myself. I tried to buy some Jayhawk fabric in the quilt shop, but they were out. We found a yarn shop, and I stocked up on some yarns I can't get at my "local yarn shop" in Kearney.

We had lunch and then went back to the motel to wait for game time. We learned we could get into the Fieldhouse at 6:30, so we drove to the campus about 6:00, paying as much to park as we had for the tickets. When we were let in, it took us some time to find our seats, but then we had time to look around and experience being there. I've seen the floor, the fans and many games on TV, so there were no surprises. But actually being there is a totally different experience from watching a game on TV. We saw the retired jerseys, the banners showing Big 12 championships and the banners with the NCAA National Championship dates. I snapped photographs of everything.

When the game began, I put my camera aside and immersed myself in the experience of watching the game. I enjoyed the students' antics from the confetti to putting their arms in the air and then saying, "Whoosh!" whenever a Jayhawk made a free throw. The game was a blow-out (I like those), but the experience of being there was unlike anything else I have encountered. We were a part of the end-of-game chant, "Rock, Chalk, Jayhawk, KU." Our son, who attended KU, always bought his basketball tickets before anything else when he registered, and now I understand why. It's a special place, and there is a special feeling there. The crowd is so involved, cheering whenever the team enters the court and as the starters are introduced. Bill Self has obviously become an icon, and I was delighted to see Danny Manning.

Now that we are both retired, I hope we can repeat this experience again during the basketball season. When we watched the Jayhawks play their season opener on television, I could finally say, "I've been there and seen that." Indeed, Rock Chalk Jayhawk, KU!

Life is Good

Rita Speer



Weathering the storm of illness and moving on

So, I sold all the caramel corn. But, at what price?

I was exhausted and at the mercy of whatever cold/flu bug that lurked in the shadows. From Monday night through Friday I felt so bad I thought I might die. Then, I got worse and was afraid I wouldn't. I spent most nights in the recliner because if I tried to sleep in bed, Jim couldn't. The coughing was so bad. During those four days I scarcely moved.

My column about the lack of decent television programming came back to haunt me. I was assailed with "Excused", "Gold Rush" and "I Shouldn't Be Alive." There's a new one coming on about two Texas beauties who are professional wild hog hunters. Gee, sorry I might miss that one. Anyway there was enough "Animal Precinct Cops: Houston" and "Property Brothers" to sustain me. I think I wore out the batteries in the remote, though.

Back "in the day", how did we ever manage being sick without 500 cable channels to click through. I remember my mother reading to me while I sat under her improvised steam tent of a towel draped over an umbrella. There was some admonition about children not supposed to read while they had whatever it was going around. Bad for the eyes, it seems. I remember my dad

Out Back

Carolyn Plotts



teaching me to play "Authors" during mumps, measles or perhaps it was chicken pox. No matter the age, fever is still fever and all you want to do is sleep.

I'll spare you the gory details, but I was one sick puppy. Friday night, though, a corner was turned and it was like a flash bulb went off. I felt like doing something and while Jim was at a wedding rehearsal I started laundry and dishes. I ran the vacuum and cleaned the bathroom. Granted, I did everything in spurts. Work for five minutes; set down for 10 minutes. Repeat. I was still weak, but I could see the light. And, it wasn't that bright light people report in near-death experiences.

The big step came on Saturday when I actually showered, shampooed my hair and put on make-up. It's amazing how a little mascara can lift your spirits. I looked in the mirror and said, "Hey, girl. It's good to have you back."

We had a wedding to go to. Jim had been asked to perform the wedding

ceremony for a young couple we know. Abigail had been a high school girl on our very first mission trip and it's been a joy to watch her mature into a lovely woman. Her young man, Jacob, seems a perfect match for her. The wedding was beautiful and everything went off without a hitch.

Bottom line: I survived and everything is on track for the Thanksgiving Trip to Texas. Popcorn deliveries have been made; I have rolled out my pie crusts and stored them in a pizza box; the cranberries have been ground and mixed with sugar for the salad; and crescent roll dry ingredients and butter have been blended, ready to make rolls. I even measured spices into a baggie for the pumpkin pie. Talk about being ready.

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Some of my Facebook friends have started a daily "What I'm Thankful For" list leading up to Thanksgiving. It's not their cars, clothes or bank accounts they are thankful for - it's their families and friends; it's beautiful sunsets; it's a baby's laugh; it's your spouse's smile. Yes, we have much to be thankful for.

I wish you and yours a wonderful, bountiful, flavorful Thanksgiving.

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THE NORTON TELEGRAM

E-mail: nortontelegram@nwkansas.com

ISSN 1063-701X

215 S. Kansas Ave., Norton, KS 67654

Published each Tuesday and Friday by Haynes Publishing Co., 215 S. Kansas Ave., Norton, Kan. 67654. Periodicals mail postage paid at Norton, Kan. 67654.

Postmaster: Send address changes to Norton Telegram, 215 S. Kansas, Norton, Kan. 67654

Official newspaper of Norton and Norton County. Member of the Kansas Press Association, National Newspaper Association, and the Nebraska Press Association

Nor'West Newspapers

Dick and Mary Beth Boyd
Publishers, 1970-2002

Kansas Press Association



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Protecting the prairie from prairie dog populations

Like the grass, wind, tumbleweeds, tornadoes and drought, prairie dogs have long been a part of the northwestern Kansas landscape. At the same time, farmers and stockmen have lived and thrived in this short-grass environment for more than a century.

In the early 1900s, the first landowners and settlers broke out some of the native, short-grass prairie to grow crops. Many introduced livestock into this region to eat the nutrient-rich grass and provide the world's finest beef.

During this same period, farmers and stockmen who lived in Logan County controlled the prairie dogs on their land so the cattle could remain productive. Left unchecked, prairie dogs breed, overpopulate and soon destroy the native buffalo grass. It is replaced by weeds or other plant species livestock find less palatable than the grasses that were replaced.

When the prairie dogs continue to thrive and reproduce the ground sometimes remains bare and the precious topsoil blows away in the wind. There are accounts of numerous days that are reminiscent of the Dust Bowl days of the '30s on some of this barren land.

Located in Logan County the region of grassland runs from the western edge of the county to the eastern border

Insight

John Schlageck

- approximately 40 miles long. It stretches nearly eight miles wide along this band - more than 280 square miles of grass. Buffalo, blue gamma, side oats and little blue-stem grasses thrive here on the High Plains - all favorites in prairie dog town.

Like many of his ranching neighbors, Logan County stockman Lynn Kirkham knows prairie dogs are vagabonds and cross roads, under fences and into new territory. He understands they continually move thus exacerbating the problem.

"Prairie dogs come in and establish their colonies, dig holes and eat the vegetation," Kirkham says. "When the prairie dogs come in here and establish themselves it almost looks like a moonscape."

In Logan County, an average cow/calf pair requires 10 acres of grassland. In a pasture with prairie dogs, this number can increase to 15 acres to feed each cattle pair.

"With prairie dogs on your land, you can't run as many cattle because there isn't as much grass," Kirkham explains.

Another western Kansas stockman, Cameron Edwards, Logan County, is a fourth generation farmer/stockman. Like so many early inhabitants of this part of Kansas, Edwards' great-grandfather purchased their land to serve as a ranch and to raise cattle.

"We've tried to do everything we can to keep the prairie dogs out," Edwards explains. "They eat the grass that our cattle should be eating. Prairie dogs are to grassland like weeds are to cropland."

Not only do they compete for the grassland but they damage the environment and surrounding beauty of this unique High Plains landscape. So it comes down to those who do not want prairie dogs and ferrets versus those who want to use them in this region of Kansas.

What is the solution?

The key is to have a good control method for the prairie dog, and to keep the native grasses in place that also allow for livestock production.

"We've had prairie dogs out here as long as I can remember and we've been able to keep them at a manageable population until now," Kirkham says. "If everyone out here would control their prairie dogs, we wouldn't have a problem."