

Livestock

Ranch marriage faces highly charged issue

SOME couples have problems with communication, money, in-laws or (ahem) marital relations, but Hubby and I have a much graver issue. It's a touchy subject that only a highly skilled, ranch-raised therapist could help resolve: gates.

"Gates?" you ask. Bear with me as I explain. Better yet, let me take you on a



TAILS AND BALES

By ROBIN ARTHUN

virtual gate tour of our place. (Much like the ancient walled cities of yore, our gates have names.)

First, I'll show you the good ones: Better-Than-Chocolate, the Emerald Delight collection and a lovely matched set called the Red Marvels. The amazing thing about these manufactured steel gates is that they actually swing, and can be opened or closed without the shedding of blood, sweat or tears.

Next is the Orange Octopus, an ugly

electric drive-through device, that saves a lot of hassle. (You know: Get out of vehicle, open gate, run back into vehicle, spin gravel with tires to get through gate without horses escaping, threaten to sell horses to Alpo, race back to close gate. Repeat on return trip.) However, I advise against driving through the O.O. if your rig has a new paint job.

Up the lane is the John Wayne, an old-fashioned, suspended pole gate. It swings over part of the road and has to be lifted over the other part; nevertheless, its rustic charm negates any inconvenience.

Proceed with caution

Here and there, you'll find the EKGs: high voltage, taut wire gates. For some reason, none are close to the fence chargers, so one has to assume that they are powered up and capable of recalibrating one's heart rhythms. Word to the wise: wear layers of dry, heavy clothing and dry, thick leather gloves (those made from elephant hide work best).

Now, we come to the Wimbletons. These do the job but are so tight that, in order to open or close them, one has to first inhale deeply, then throw one's entire weight into the gate post, via the shoulder, while simultaneously exhaling with a roaring grunt, as in a first serve by Serena Williams or Rafael Nadal.

Over there is The Relic, which used to be a sturdy wire gate eons ago, but is now only a patched and propped-up pretense. It has yet to fool any but the stupidest cow, so I'm not sure why we keep it. Perhaps it has archeological significance.

Brace yourself for The Monster, a 35-foot-long, heavy, made-in-Hades contraption, which few mortals can close. As wicked as a Middle Eastern dictator, its barbwire strands coil like so many rattlesnakes and stick to each other like cheatgrass in socks. (If the cast of Extreme Ranch Makeover ever comes knocking at my door, I'll sic 'em on The Monster first!)

I'd show you the final gates, The Phantoms, but they don't exist. When we built those fences, Hubby stated his intention to put in gates "another day." While waiting for that glorious day to arrive, one climbs over poles or shimmies through wires, which may or may not be connected to the 4,000-volt charger.

Now that we've concluded the tour, my fellow ranch sisters are wondering, "Can this marriage be saved?" But the guys are stumped, asking, "Huh? What's the problem?"

Arthun writes from a 140-acre ranch near Worland, Wyo. Readers may contact her at tailsandbales@gmail.com or read her blog at hayseedfiles.blogspot.com.

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