

Some Things Never Change

Every year, it was the same. We would finish our Christmas Eve dinner with my parents and grandparents in our home at the farm. Then, as we ladies cleared the table and did the dishes, my brother, Willy, and the men headed outside for evening cattle chores. Without fail, the water tanks always needed to be filled that evening. Just a bit more time outside.

And when the men returned to the house, the presents were miraculously under the tree. Santa sure was a sneaky fella! The wonder never failed.

Some years, Willy's most-treasured gifts were Breyer® horses, handcrafted wooden barns, or a new truck and trailer for those toy-cattle roundups. As he grew older, the gifts grew with him. Custom spurs. A custom saddle. The tools he needed for life on the ranch in Oklahoma.

Now, as a parent, it's pretty special to see our own family traditions in the making. Our Elf on the Shelf, Charlie, keeps careful watch over our youngest, Caroline (causing a few middle-of-the-night panic attacks when we realize he "forgot to move" before bedtime). Christmas cookies adorned with far too much icing and

too many sprinkles, because "Santa likes sprinkles."

And handmade, glitter-adorned ornaments on the tree, including photos of our pony, Little Man, who appeared under the Christmas tree in my parents' living room when the boys were little — a Christmas gift from Uncle Willy and Aunt Tracie.

Yes, really. A pony. In the living room. Under the Christmas tree. Just try to top that gift.

Our resident cattleman, 11-year-old Nolan, has asked for nothing more than cattle-related gifts for years. When he was younger, he asked for photos of our bull calves, Ranger and Kemosabe. Last year, his list included half of the Sullivan Supply catalog. This year? All he requests is to finally get that indoor, heated washrack he's wanted for years. I mean, really. How can Santa deny those gifts? (And does anyone have a loan for ol' Santa? The older Nolan becomes, the more expensive that list becomes.)

When a young person is raised

in the cattle industry, that love doesn't end when the holidays roll around. It's just another chance to incorporate that passion into another area of his or her life.

Yes, the holidays are full of magic. And that magic includes caring for the animals entrusted to our care.

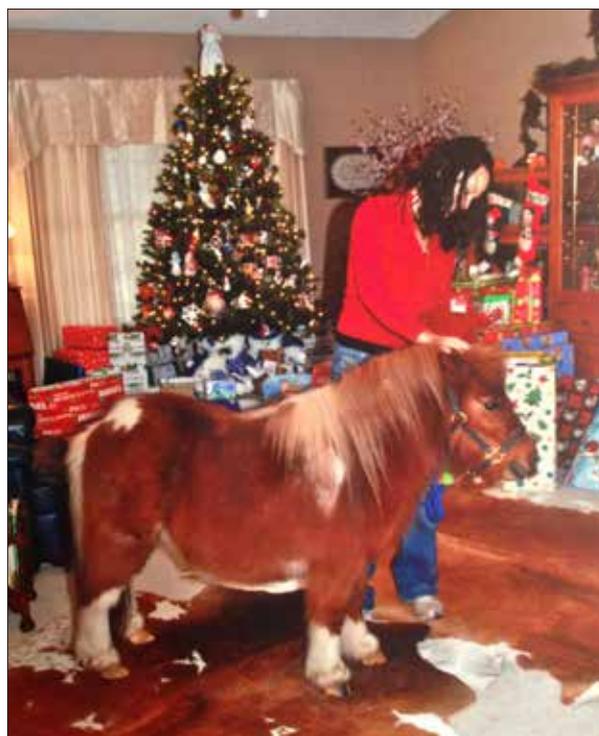
Without a doubt, this year, as in every year, Nolan will head outside with his dad to do chores on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. Because, regardless of the holiday, the cattle need to be fed. And the tanks may just need to be filled, as well.

From our home to yours, may your Christmas celebration bring joy and memories to carry you through the years. Maybe a pony under the tree. And full water tanks, too. **HW**

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When you're a cattle kid, Santa knows that trucks, trailers and ranching equipment will always be at the top of your list.



Certain Christmas gifts live in the memories for a lifetime. And seeing a pony under the tree? Well, that's one gift our boys will never forget.