

Wyoming Tribune Eagle, June 23, 2016: Appreciating my late-in-life bounty.” Casper Star Tribune, June 25: “Grateful for my late-in-life bounty.”

“This has got to be the windiest place in Wyoming,” visitors comment as they arrive at my doorstep. Yes, it’s a windy knoll that anchors my new abode, but my (now defunct) wheat farm is here, which I plan to return to productive use, hopefully as hemp farm. At present a rancher’s cows graze on the land; also I just secured a contract with an energy company that hopes to put wind turbines on this and adjoining landowners’ parcels.

Since this is my first springtime here, I tried my hand container gardening. Three raised-garden beds have sprouted spinach, lettuce, potatoes, and more. Eight round containers hold one tomato plant each, most bearing small fruit already. I grew them from seed, and they remained indoors for the first three months of their budding existence. Containers of strawberries, geranium, begonias, and wildflowers round out my collection. In back the Platte County Resource District planted three rows of trees as “living snow fences.” These are watered and fertilized through a drip system. A timer clock regulates all this, installed with help from a Cheyenne friend.

The raised vegetable beds were meant to discourage wildlife, yet something jumped into the outermost bed, leaving tracks that destroyed its carrot seedlings. I suspect a juvenile coyote, for it left dog-paw-like imprints. It couldn’t have been my dog; she was inside the night it happened.

One evening I found Abby furiously barking at the garage; when I checked, I spotted a baby rattler pressing itself against the cement. A few hours later it had retreated atop a rock pile. Still later Abby barked at a coiled water hose. From now on, how do I uncoil a water hose or straighten the log pile Abby loves to disturb? Slowly and carefully and ready to run. The critters were here long before my house imposed itself on their environs; the least I can do is mitigate what harm has come their way through my intrusion.

Back to Abby. Some readers expressed alarm when a previous column mentioned my dog barking at cows and chasing mule deer and pronghorn. I’m happy to report, last winter in Texas, Abby was put through the paces, both by my son whose cows graze within feet of the house, separated by a cattle guard, and the man you’ve come to know as Texas Todd. The latter, a dog owner, took personally Abby’s inattention to voice commands. Actually she has known voice commands all along; it’s just, when she is excited, she forgets to heed them. We worked on that.

Returning from Texas to Windy Acres, Abby now leaves the cows to their devices. As for the wildlife, well, she recently ran home with a muzzle full of quills that suggested an altercation with a porcupine. A veterinarian had to sedate her to extract the quills. I worry she’ll tangle with a rattler as my son’s dog once did while in my care. Because Walter was out of the country, I had to take the dog to emergency vet treatment.

The pronghorn browse early in the morning and Abby watches, softly growling, through the sliding glass-door. Mule deer wander by in the evening; again, I make sure Abby is

indoors at the hour of their foraging. They seek out vegetation but thus far have left the baby trees alone, probably because these are closer to the house than the deers' comfort zone.

Abby continues to be terrified of thunder. Even a distant rolling will send her to the only room in the house without a window, a bathroom with sky light, where she presses against the tub, panting and trembling. Lately, though, she sometimes ventures forth to find me; if I happen to be playing guitar, she'll wedge her muzzle into my armpit until I relinquish the instrument. I oblige and stroke her, for, when I first got her, she refused to be touched.

You may think that I go it alone out here, but that's not so. Whenever I ask, my rancher neighbor will stop by to help evaluate a concern. The builder continues to make himself available when a problem arises. A Cheyenne friend has been generous with her time, patience, and expertise. She is retired military and addresses anything from landscaping to laying tile. Since I am a klutz with power tools, one time she hauled out her table saw with stand to cut the boards for my raised-garden beds.

True, adult children live far away, but phone calls and emails are always a treat, including those from readers who laud or castigate or share an experience. They add immeasurably to the tapestry of my existence. So do Slater Women's Club, the Cheyenne Guitar Society, and, of course, my church-home of UUC. How can I not feel humbly grateful for this late-in-life bounty?