

Wednesday, January 4, 2012

A Shepherd in Winter



As I lay nestled under the duvet listening to the morning weather - “-23 with a wind chill of -30” – I chant my winter shepherd mantra – “What the hell were you thinking?”. At -40 I add “I could have been in a villa in Tuscany right now”. I drag myself out of bed in a house that was built in an era when upstairs heat and insulation were considered optional. Fleece PJs and fluffy socks – a TSC vision of loveliness.

If I am lucky Bob has the stove going before I get downstairs. There is oatmeal for breakfast with a bit extra for the chickens. I am training them to come when they are called with oatmeal bribes. (see the former post) If you think that you look like a fool herding sheep without dogs, try chickens.

Now the ordeal of getting dressed for chores: insulated coveralls, my dork hat with ear flaps, neoprene gloves, neoprene boots, ice cleats. If I ever give up farming I could find employment as a dominatrix.

A stilt legged shuffle to the barn. Oh, you say, the warmth of sheep wafting over me when I open the door. No, the barn was built by the same folks that thought heat in the house was for wusses. It is a drafty, old bank barn where we house very few sheep but keep the hay, the water and the feed. The sheep are in paddocks with run-in sheds scattered around the barnyard. Water sloshing over my coveralls freezes instantly. I recite the mantra again.

I look over the breeding groups: a red butt here, a blue butt there. It is starting to look a lot like Christmas and the tune comes to mind. I am jostled by the sheep as I fill feeders; the guardian dogs are prancing in the snow. I am starting to wake up, to warm up.

Like with childbirth, I know I will forget all of this when I see the lambs frolicking in the spring pastures. A pushy ewe dumps the bucket down my boot; here comes the mantra again.

Cheers,
Laurie