

I've tried all week to sit down and write an essay for this week, but all I can think about it is the people of Ukraine. What is the alternative to letting Putin do just as he pleases? Where do our responsibilities and moral obligations lie? How does most of the rest of the world stop a power hungry individual who has control of a big country like Russia? What can we do?

I don't have any answers, but I do know that the irresponsible people in and out of the government in this country need to condemn Putin's attack on a neighboring country. I do know that members of Congress like Cawthorn from North Carolina need to understand that there are no "sorry I said that; I take it back" maneuvers when it comes his referring to his previous praise of Putin and denigration of Ukraine's President Zelensky. His pride in having visited Adolf Hitler's home in 2017 "a dream fulfilled" or something to that effect, made me nearly sick to my stomach. Instead, our government should be finding ways to help Ukraine. And, by the way, Biden isn't the reason for gas prices. Get over that idea.

On the home front things are as usual for this time of year. We are shearing our flock of ewes, clipping the fleeces of one pen a day, in between our four to five hours of barn chores every day. It is interesting work, and when the sheep are warm and the lanolin soft and shiny, it is actually fun. Yesterday, it was so cold, even in the barn, that shearing was hard. We skipped today, the blowing snow and strong northwest wind—plus the morning temperature of 0 F—discouraging us for this day. Instead, we spent this afternoon reading, and I am taking a few minutes to put this—inept as it is—on our website for this week.

Except for our shearing time, I am not in the sheep barn very much these days. My tasks are with the cattle. Five little calves make life interesting. Since our cows are tied, the calves have their own communal pen, and twice a day I let them out to suck and to clean their pen. When I go into the barn, there is a chorus of big voices and smaller ones—though the little calves have surprisingly loud bellows—announcing that they think I am late again, although I am not. The calves learned within a couple of days where to go to find the right mama, and miscalculation on their part is soon rewarded by a kick from a neighboring cow that has no interest in nursing calves at this point.

Closing the calves back in their pen when they have finished eating and I have cleaned their quarters is no simple matter. They seem to believe that crowd action will be sufficient to thwart my efforts. It is not, but I do get a good workout some evenings when they are particularly lively.

When I have finished cleaning behind the cows, feeding and watering them, and running water for the young cattle and the yearling ewes in the attached sheep shed, I head upstairs for the last task of the day. Our picnic table is stored there in the west haymow—the only open part of the barn, with bales taking up the rest of the space—and I sit down at the table and call the cats.

We have only one house cat, and we had no barn cats at all. Black Kitty visited every few days, and he hunted here sometimes, but for about three

years, there were no resident cats.

But, this summer, a “living rough” cat brought her two partly grown kittens here from a neighboring unoccupied place where she’d been seen often. They were very wild, and she was the most fearful of all. A little milk every morning and some dry cat food began to make them more accustomed to me, and by fall, they would come when I called them to their food dish. Finally, I was able to pet one of the kittens. Then, a few weeks ago, that feral mother let me stroke her, and last week, she jumped up into my lap and began to purr. She is obviously going to soon have another litter of kittens, something that I have been sure of since Black Kitty was here courting a few weeks ago. Now, even the wilder of the two kittens lets me pet her. She also bats me with her paws if she feels like it. Apparently, she is the free spirit of the bunch.

So, we have visibly fewer mice now, and I didn’t need to go begging for a barn cat. This last job of my chore day leaves me satisfied with the process. I go back downstairs, take the dogs, and go to the sheep barn where Runo is about finished feeding sheep. If I hurry, I might get there in time to take in the horses, but usually, I have spent too much time petting kitties!

For a brief time, I didn’t think about Putin’s invasion of Ukraine. But, then, it all comes back, and once again, I wonder how humans can be so unfair and cruel to their fellow human beings. And where does our responsibility lie in punishing this behavior?