



An Angus cow keeps her day-old calf close on Jim Brick's ranch east of Enterprise. February and March are the principal calving months for most ranches in Wallowa County.

Ellen Morris Bishop

By Ellen Morris Bishop  
Wallowa County  
Chieftain

**T**hree in the morning comes too soon this time of year. Boots don't fit and buttonholes seem too small. You feel weary and fumble-fingered in the early morning cold. You wonder why you ever stick with this ranching business, anyway.

But you know she's out there, that first-calf heifer that stood alone in the far calving pas-

ture corner, head down, tail held stiffly sideward, waiting uncertainly for motherhood.

Maybe, you think, maybe you're getting too old for this. Maybe you shouldn't have kept that heifer. What was her pelvic diameter anyway? Maybe next year you won't keep any heifers, maybe you'll try a different bull, maybe....

The kitchen door slams behind you louder than a cannon. Thank God the old truck always starts. You check for the calf kit, rope, flashlight, pull-

ing chains, toss the bottle of hot soapy water into the cab, scrape the three-hour-old frost off the windshield, and crank the engine to life. Next year, you think, next year we'll calve the heifers in the barn. Next year we'll feed in the evening and calve in the daylight. Next year....

The pickup creeps across the calving pasture. Cows blink and bow out of the headlight's glare, moving fluidly like fish in some dark pool, wide-eyed, worried, gathering their knobby-kneed calves

and stalking away, not trusting your intentions.

In the pickup's high beams the corner looms empty. Vacant. No heifer. No calf. slowly you arc the headlights northward. Two pinpoint of light gleam, low to the ground.

The pickup groans deliberately in granny gear, closer, closer. Pinpoint eyes see-saw back and forth, up and down. Two big eyes. And two little ones. You stop the truck, dim the high beams and sigh.

She's done it. You knew she would. Her

calf peers goggle-eyed into the lights as the heifer, oblivious to anything else, licks her wet newborn to life. The fading starry night lies silent except for the heifer's low murmurs to her calf, and muted munching from the pasture.

This is really what the cow business is all about, you think. This is worth the too short, too long, too cold nights, the tough deliveries, the Hurricane Creek winds, this heifer and her new calf. You share the joy of this birth. You bred a heifer to

calve easy, watched her grow, picked a bull with low calving weights and good genes. You deserve to savor this moment. And you wouldn't trade it for anything.

You reach for the calving book in your shirt pocket. Record the time, you think, and the date. But all you feel in the mellowing darkness is the lining of the small-button-holed shirt you donned inside out with your mind on bigger concerns. Well, on nights like this you can't get everything right, now, can you.

## February is: Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month

**Movie Showing- Join us for a FREE showing of "The Mask You Live In" February 27th at the Wallowa Senior Center at 6 pm.  
204 E. 2nd St, Wallowa, OR  
Pizza and drinks will be provided.**

**Our Wear Orange Day Winner is: Aleigh Weaver! Of Wallowa Jr. High  
Congratulations!**

### Common Warning Signs:

Checking cell phones, emails or social networks without permission  
Extreme jealousy or insecurity. Constant belittling or put-downs, explosive temper. Isolation from family and friends, making false accusations. Erratic mood swings, physically inflicting pain or hurt in any way. Possessiveness, telling someone what to do and repeatedly pressuring someone to have sex.

### Safe Harbors

401 NE 1st St. Suite B Enterprise, OR 97828  
(541)426-4004 or (541)426-6565  
Teen talk line (541)398-1425