

[Note to readers: Names and identifying characteristics for children and other persons mentioned within this text have been changed in order to maintain anonymity.]

Hop-Alongs

Rabbits were often favorite pets at Peace Place. Big ones and small ones, floppy-eared and peaked-eared ones, all kinds of hoppers. Each child had its own pet which was heaped with lots of affection. As soon as the kids got off the school bus here, they raced out to the hutch in the pasture to play and talk with their nose-twitching pals.

A year or so after our first batch of hares, three large floppy-ears were homed in a cage on our front porch (once part of a garage), that is, until Fred came to stay with us! Because this loveable, mischievous boy was wont to sneak out of the house at night, I positioned my bed across his bedroom door. Yet, early one morning, the rascal somehow managed to evade his guard. When I awoke... who knows how much later? ...the search was on!

After too many minutes of failure, and just as panic began setting in, voila, the discovery was made! The grinning triumphant escapee was sitting Buddha-like in *the rabbit's cage* among the active rompers! We never *did* figure out how he managed the escape from his room, nor how his corpulent body squeezed through the cage door. After an exhausting tug of boy back out of hutch, it was decided that both boy and bunnies would be safer if the hutch were moved to the pasture.

The last couple of years at Peace Place, rabbits were raised not only for pets, but also for sale. It was a relatively easy project; new come-outers were plentiful and sales were good. One time it was decided to let the rabbits run around on their own during the day, and when they regularly returned to their hutches in the evening, they were tenderly tucked into their cozy cages. We didn't realize how much fun rabbits could have, not

only playing with each other, but with the CATS, too!! Their favorite game was a sort of tag, and as one of the young men remarked, "I never before saw a *rabbit* chase a *cat*!" ...But then some of the rascals had to spoil it all by visiting "restaurants." After enough complaints from the neighbors about their garden flowers and vegetables being depleted, the rabbits lost out-of-cage recreation privileges.

Hee-Haws

One day we met a large donkey for sale. He was of very advanced age, looked weak and unhealthy, and showed signs of previous abuse. So of course we bought him. What a grateful, gentle, companion! When the vet was asked to estimate the beast's age, he just shook his head from side to side, answering, "Old, very, *very old*." Hence, the moniker Methuselah, and as the children noticed how all of the other animals respected this wise patriarch, *they* appreciated the gift of older creatures (yes, including humans). Happily, Methuselah got around quite well up until his quiet death some years later.

Our next donkey experience was just as rewarding: Here was another pathetic victim of abuse, and of course we had to rescue her, too. "Her" wanted a simple name, so this little jenny became known simply as "Jenny." Poor, sweet thing could hardly walk. She had sores from being harnessed and forced to carry too-heavy loads, and bruises from probable beatings. She didn't know how to graze. What an experience for the children and us to watch her patient adjustment and gradual healing of body and spirit! She wasn't strong enough to ride, but she liked to walk with, be brushed by, or just petted by her new "family."

In time Jenny began grazing in the back pasture, and whenever I strolled out there for morning meditation, Jenny could be seen munching grass down in the valley. As I squatted down on a cement block uphill and began to sing, Jenny stopped and lifted her

ears. The fascinated donkey's favorite song was "Peace Is Flowing Like A River"; at the first strains, she would climb the steep hill, get behind me, and gently rest her donkey head on my shoulder.

At one point we thought Jenny was healthy enough to breed, and an eager jack was brought in to woo her. But poor girl, her former abuse had probably destroyed her ability to reproduce. Meanwhile, the impatient jack became too rowdy to be around the children, so the jack's owner suggested that our jenny move to the jack's home territory. ...Soon the couple was riding the horse trailer to Breezy Ridge Farm 3-4 hours away.

With the little donkey's arrival there, a kind of miracle occurred! As soon as the jack exited the trailer, he made a quick dash to the side of the beautiful rare African zebra that was being boarded for the Louisville Zoo. The zoo vets had been unsuccessful in their attempts to breed the zebra, and thought that the skittish animal might do better at Breezy Ridge where several other of their zoo animals were boarding. When impulsive Jack started aggressively flirting with the zebra by biting her legs, shy, shy Jenny ran over to bite *his* legs!! The message was "Lay off that lady!" And it worked!!



From that time on, the Zebra (forgot her African name.) followed Jenny everywhere, even allowing her the unique privilege of sharing her food pan... while Jack stayed a respectful distance away.

Several months later, when I came for a visit to Breezy Ridge Farm, I spied Jenny grazing with the zebra. Upon hearing a familiar voice call her name, the little donkey

stopped and perked up her long ears. Then came the song, “Peace Is Flowing Like a River” and immediately Jenny... and striped companion!... loped over to me to be petted! At last word, no baby donkey, but the zebra was bred! Was Jenny asked to be godmother?

Hummers

Another especially nice novelty at Breezy Ridge was friendly camels. The dromedaries loved attention, especially the young’uns that nuzzled us and followed us around there. Why not one at Peace Place?? That consideration was all the incentive we needed to begin building a small, but tall metal barn between the back yard and animal territory, and adding an 8’ x 6’ loft for me to sleep-watch from on high. But by the time the barn was finished, we began to have second thoughts about our adopting the *big* guys, especially after some of the humpies were discovered devouring the glass skylights in their barn!

OK then... why not a smaller version?? Actually, Sr. Syra had been LLAMA-wishing all along, but so far their availability and price had been way out of sight.

As we began planning other uses for the handsome new structure, an excited call came announcing that a doctor who boarded some animals at Breezy Ridge wanted to donate the fresh male offspring of his llama to us! (Only condition: that the animal be castrated, lest he later become puberty-pushy.) But how to feed a mama-less llama? With our goats’ milk, of course! Were we excited or *what*??!

Sr. Syra decided to entitle our coming new attraction Casy -- for CA-rol and SY-ra. Next we considered barn-buddies for him. To a sheep farm two counties away our family-packed car drove to pick out two female woolies. A few mornings later, we took a child with us to fetch the now five-day old llama. By afternoon we were riding home with

our precious cargo and me scrunched in the back of our little car.



Casy + (sheep pal)

Casy roomed with Sr. Syra in the house for maybe 10 days. Yes, really! Gradually he was introduced to his companion lambie pies and his new home. From my little barn spy-shelf I could chaperone the animal behaviors below. I was surprised and almost disappointed... no ruckus!... just calm, cozy togetherness all night long!

Our first grader needed something for “Show and Tell” at school. Was hers an unreasonable request... to bring Casy to school? Of course not! The teacher and principal gave us enthusiastic permission to bring him to the school playground the next day (school floor too slippery). Well, when llama and we arrived, ALL of the school children

turned out to greet the curiosity. One by one they came up and gently petted this docile, flattered celebrity. One excited little boy shouted, “Look at the *camel!*” The other children’s jeers changed into cheers after we complimented him for being so smart; “How did you know that this llama is a cousin to camels, since llamas are classified as cameloids?”

Then came time for this male to become an “it.” Now, the veteran vet had never performed the operation on a *llama* before. He was so confounded by the unusual anatomy, that he had to run back and forth between his patient and our in-the-house phone to get step by step directions from a Louisville Zoo expert. Finally, a very exhausted, perspiring Doc triumphed! ...And Casy was no longer a potential father.

Throughout his growing up years, this star continued to shine, enjoying many visiting admirers. Casy’s favorite fans were the classes of school children that regularly came out to Peace Place for picnic/field trips. He loved to give his excited friends soft nose kisses. In fact, the Romeo became so popular that the vet suggested we take out llama insurance lest someone come and try to steal our precious rarity. However, the youngster exuded such self confidence that we never bothered... and then in a few years *he* became *our* insurance.

Casy grew and grew and grew and grew... and by the time he reached adult llama-hood, he was assuming important responsibilities. Though deprived of training and example from his llama elders, he sensed the llama duty of protecting all the animals on the ponderosa. At least twice every day he stretched his long neck and loped his long legs to inspect every corner of animal territory, then proceeded to take care of any problems. Whenever anyone arrived on Peace Place property, he strode to one of the gates and stood guard. No-one got past Casy without our, and hence his, explicit permission. Later

his supervisory duties were shared with his cat-pal, Flency. That responsible feline patrolled with him, she at fence-top. Then they would get together and share information nose to nose. (More about Flency later.)

Our loveable llama especially enjoyed caring for the newborns and growers... of every animal breed and category... relieving the grateful moms so they could take a little G and G (Get away and Graze). He also sat with pasture pals that were sick, afraid, or lonesome... especially during their pre-delivery or weaning times.

Sometimes Casy took his protective instinct too far. The vet will never forget the day he came to vaccinate all of the animals against rabies. He had ordered me to round up the animals before his arrival. The goats were herded into the barn with Guard Casy. And when this guard's charges maahed loud protests against the shots, it was Casy to the rescue! I hope you realize that llamas rarely use their defense weapon of foul spit, but Casy figured this emergency was worthy of the ammunition and shot right into the eye of the unsuspecting, unarmed doc. No wonder this was the last visit to Peace Place the vet chose to make!

Despite his growing sense of responsibility, he big guy never lost his playfulness and love of attention. Only problem was, he didn't know his own size and strength! If you weren't watching, the tease would sneak up and give what he considered a little nudge for attention... but that nudge could knock you down! In fact, when two friends visited our animal kingdom, Casy sneaked up on one, gave her a hefty little Hello-push, threw her off balance, and launched her into a painful landing. It wasn't until the women got back home that the stricken arm was pronounced broken! ... "Sorry Casy, regardless of your intentions... fun? flirtation?... you just decided it was time to move on to another good home!"

And move he did... back to his birthplace at Breezy Ridge Farm where he continued to love and serve. Many human and llama tears were shed as he rode away, but not too long after, the tears dried to grins. Casy had smilingly found himself a great new responsibility at Breezy Ridge. He became a very caring, efficient, protective shepherd, rounding up two flocks of sheep and taking them to the barn at night. If Casy didn't show up with his charges at the regular time, they knew to look for him lying protectively by a weak newborn. As soon as Casy was satisfied that the problem was taken care of, he sought out other left-behinds. With Casy on the job, very few lambs died, and everyone's jobs were greatly eased. This good shepherd loved it when we visited Breezy Ridge and watched him show off his prowess... but then he was content to see us leave.

Casy left such a good impression and we so missed his wonderful llama-ness, that it wasn't really surprising that several months after his farewell, we became smitten by another young llama at Breezy Ridge. This was a three month old female beauty whose luxurious coat of white and black resembled that of Casy's. She played and played with us there, and of course begged to come home with us. But she was too mature to pack into our car, so she made her journey to Peace Place via horse trailer. The name "Dulcinea" (you know, Don Quixote's sweetheart) described her sweetness and she was nicknamed "Dulcy" for short.

Dulcy was bottle-fed regularly and grew healthily from the nourishing milk supplied by the caprines. This hand-feeding encouraged people-friendships, and let's face it... "the only child" was getting spoiled.

Three months later, a surprise call informed us that the farm had just bought a small herd of llamas from the Colorado Zoo, talking the keepers into including a youngster. Why of course we did! You *knew* we'd take the chocolate colored little llama

companion for Dulcy!

“Yum-yum” ...that’s how she looked, that’s how she acted, and that’s what she was soon called... was not yet weaned from her queenly mother, “Tara.” Mom stayed long enough at Peace Place to see her daughter graduate to grain feeding. Tara had been rather stand-offish and very protective of her “little” girl, so it wasn’t until she had left for Breezy Ridge, that Yum-yum bonded with Dulcy and became more sociable with the rest of us.

As the two young lady-llamas matured, the caretaker took the responsibility of match-maker, and sent an affable senior male, Doc, to breed them. (In case you didn’t know, the gestation period for llamas is 11-12 months; the adolescent does not have to be fully mature for breeding since its mammary system keeps developing through pregnancy.) But after docile Doc was here a few months, he succumbed to Lyme Disease. Apparently the deer that often jumped the fence into our pasture had donated their droppings, and the residing ticks found their way to the wonderful old llama. He left behind many people and animal mourners.

Some time after that, a rather large buck was temporarily pastured with the lady llamas for company. Who could have predicted that this gentleman *goat* would try to *breed* the lady *llamas*? He kept persisting in his efforts until Dulcy had had it and kicked him hard enough to break his neck! Now what?

It was suggested we try using a well-behaved “experienced” male *alpaca* (smaller version of llama) for wooing the young females. And so Pecos was brought to Peace Place. He was very agreeable, and, though friendly enough, he usually preferred not to be petted. Pecos had a gentle persuasive way with the ladies, and every year we could expect new babies.

Although Dulcy came into heat regularly, she never did become a mother. But Yum-yum was very fertile, and produced a baby every year. The first annuals were named Luscious, Delicious, and Precious. And of course grandchildren, great grandchildren, etc. ensued.

Our best llama trainer was an adolescent who first came to us for some Respite Care at the request of her Social Worker. She was an avid horse lover, and we regretted that none were in residence here at that time. But the would-be equestrian became so entranced with the llamas... and they with her, that she was quite easily able to harness and gently lead some of the females.

The proud trainer requested another visit here. Greeting two of her best trainees on her return, she asked if they would like to enter a parade. Although they were not familiar with such events, these flattered pets promptly slipped into their gear to start practice. Up and down the road marched the proud trio, heads bowing to the surprised onlookers.

Delighted with the girl's progress, the Social Worker decided that her charge was ready to try living at home, except for weekends at Peace Place. Come Friday afternoons she happily re-engaged in animal training here. Outcome? A mature, confident daughter ready to be welcomed to full time living with her grateful family. (Sure the llamas were lonesome, and the upcoming parades were left llama less, but ya can't deny people-success!)

Before we leave our Hummers -- Why that title? Yes, it's in appreciation of that soft pleasant hum of contentment or bid for attention typical of the Cameloid family. Mmmmm.