

Bills and Nans

Back to the “Old House” days again: After that winter when the little log climber in the yard at our old house proved to be such a beautiful outdoor Christmas creche, it just begged to become *more* “stable-ized”. Finally, one lazy July morning we answered a newspaper ad and went to look at three Nubian goats (African natives with long hanging ears) for sale. The owners were so pleased with our enthusiastic attraction to nanny Rachel and her kids, Hansel and Gretel, that they offered them to us *free*. Only problem? Neither Sr. Syra nor I had any farm experience, but I got talked into beginning a crash course in Milking 101, right then and there! After several unsuccessful attempts, a few milk drops finally did get squirted out, class was dismissed, and the puzzled little goat group was loaded into our jeep.

Those first milking efforts back home were still pitiful, but the fecund doe patiently kept producing and producing. Eventually, Sr. Milkmaid got the pull of it, and there was plenty of delicious, healthy beverage for four and two legged kids to gulp down. The “barn”, of course, was that little log climbing house. But it was door-less, and the inhabitants had to be tethered to discourage truancy.

The three caprines loved to go for harness-free walks with me, and one day I decided to prod them up Bear Mountain. With my three “protectors” marching ahead, I felt very secure against any snake-attacks. Ha! --Guess what! The “scaredy-goats” began nudging *me* up in front of *them* as *their* valiant protector! The Sissies! -- Anyway, the rascals did continue to be frisky, unpredictable (yet gentle, loveable) playmates.

Some time after Peace Place had moved to its own property, we learned of a young family that needed the goat milk even more than we did, so we tearfully passed on our pets to them. Ah, but then, less than a year later, all except Gretel moved back with

us and everyone (goats included, of course) was smiling again.

Two of our former neighbors decided to get into the “Nupine” goat-breeding business, crossing Alpines (excellent tasting milk) with Nubians (larger quantity of milk), and suggested we do the same on our four acres of hilly pasture. To encourage the venture, they even donated one of their first registered goats to us. We joined “Heifer Project International” and regularly attended their local meetings.

Then came a wonderful surprise! The beautiful registered Alpine doe featured at one of the Heifer Project National Conventions was awarded to us! And since she gave birth to twins at the exhibit, those kids accompanied her to a very welcoming Peace Place! The mother nanny was cheerfully cooperative with me, and was a very easy, generous milker, but she had a strange prejudice against males and used all kinds of wiles to avoid them, especially come milking time. Hmmm.

Our “Nupine” breeding venture was rather short-lived; it was so much easier and cheaper to attain other good goats through donations and special sales than to buy expensive registered animals and to pay for our own registrations. So through the next years we enjoyed many Nubians, Saanans, Alpines, Togganburgs, LaManchas, Pygmies, Angoras and great goat mixtures thereof.

And what a bunch of characters! Like ol’ Saanen Phil who was the size of a small horse and oh so sweet. Also a ham. When visitors wanted *their* picture taken in front of *him*, he would quickly swing



around and strike a dignified pose in front of *them*. And every time the people-subjects *moved*, so did *Phil* -- hiding the puzzled visitors. He also tended to get odiferous during his rutting time, and when I returned from the pasture on those days, our four year old child would yell, "Oh no! You've been out with Phil again!"

When word got around that we had good goat milk at Peace Place, we received a number of visitors asking if they could buy some for themselves or some sick family member. The vet checked the sanitation of our milk process and was impressed, but he also cautioned that some customers' only interest in buying our milk could possibly be to fake dissatisfaction in hopes of winning a suit against Peace Place. At his suggestion we decided to just *give away* the raw milk we didn't need to those who come to request it. As it turned out, there were never any complaints about the milk, but many people thankfully praised its healing effects.

We also had several requests to dispense our medicinal liquid to ailing *animals* via their distressed owners. One special example:

A local breeder of Belgian horses was desperate. His mare's last few newborns had not survived, and now it was the mare that died -- while delivering a very frail foal. The vet directed the heartbroken owner to Peace Place. Unfortunately, our does were still feeding their young and had little milk to spare. Our most prodigious milker had been sold, so we begged her new owners to "rent" the goat back to us for a while.

With this doe's very generous contribution, plus whatever extra milk the other mothers added, we managed to keep the anxious horse breeder pretty well supplied with medicinal nourishment. In fact, it wasn't too long before the weak little colt began gaining strength. And she survived! The man was back in the Belgian Horse breeding business again! We hadn't charged the breeder anything, but several months later, a big

wagon loaded
with fresh hay
arrived at our
old barn, from
our grateful
“horse friend.



Animal birthings at Peace Place were always eventful and we tried to witness as many as possible. Complications were rare, but sometimes we two-leggers had to assist. A couple of for instances:

Multiple births sometimes happen so quickly that mothers can't get each baby cleaned up and breathing fast enough. One veteran nanny always stood up while delivering her goat kids, so when she had four ready to go, I had to grab each bag of baby as it was coming out, lest it get injured in the fall. What a privilege, goat mid-wiffery!

Sometimes we led very pregnant does to the little barn near the house. One Holy Saturday, bulging Ice Cream was moved there so I could keep vigil with her from the lofty perch above. As her pants and moans announced labor the next morning, Easter hymns began resounding from on high (from my tape player). Her ensuing bleats of begetting blended with the exhilarating music, and as the Alleluias burst forth, so did a baby, and another, and another, and another, and one more! Yes! T'was no surprise that Ice Cream named her quintuplets Root Beer, Butterscotch, Sundae, Cupcake, Cookie.

Unfortunately, the last come-outer didn't live through the week and the second laster was not strong enough to survive more than a month. The rest?? Hale, hearty, and handsome! Alleluia!

A more serious situation occurred when one of the gonna-be-moms was

physically unable to push out her offspring. Two of our volunteers, nurses, were among the attendees. One of them was drafted into inserting her arm through the opening to investigate the problem. Finding? There was only *one* BIG baby inside, and it was turned around!! Miserable mama was led to our little milk house and pushed up onto the platform there. To control the doe's desperate thrashing, one person grasped the chest, another steadied the forefeet, and I held the back feet.



Now it was our “obstetrician’s” challenge to invade the womb again and somehow get that body turned around. After many unsuccessful attempts the baby was finally ready to be delivered! Whew!! But as the mother labored to push, push, push, she suddenly backed up; her next mighty PUSH threw me backwards out the open door, and down the two stone steps -- seat first! Baby came out safely, Mother was finally relieved, -- and me? I grabbed for the horse liniment!

One exceptionally faithful, kind goat at Peace Place was buck Beckett. He and his niece, Millie, arrived at the farm as gifts from the Agnoli property. Both were very gentle, friendly goats -- with just one problem: they were skillful, effective pasture-breakers! They could spot the smallest,

most imperceptible fence rips and gaps, prepare escape hatches, and when the coast was

clear, slip out to explore the neighborhood. The escapees didn't mind returning to their enclosure, but their satisfied grins denied any compunction for their truancy. Even after our hours of security inspection and mending, wouldn't the rascals find another cleft, then another, and so on! We were ready to advertise in the paper and over the air: "Two highly intelligent fence inspectors for hire. Guaranteed to find every flaw that needs fixing!"

Never give up on reforming pasture-breakers, though. Maybe they overheard our plans, or possibly tired of trying to beat the security system, or most likely, just decided that they were getting too mature for such pranks. Which whatever it was, the guilty eventually softened to not-guilties and the truancy ceased.

Beckett continued watching out for his loving niece, chaperoning her most of the day. And whenever Millie-doe was getting close to baby-birthing, Uncle buck would lie protectively beside her until her fresh kids were safely delivered, licked off, and up finding the milk faucet. He stayed with her, too, throughout a later terminal illness.

At times when we grownups feel the need for a listening ear and an understanding heart, it can come from an unexpected source:

Louise was just a kid. But when some disappointing news slouched me into the pasture one afternoon, she read my need for a patient, understanding ear. As I boosted myself up on one of the goat-climbing surfaces, the usually shy little goat trotted over, gazed into my face, and leaped up behind me. Then as I started to explain the problem to my young counselor, her little head nuzzled my neck, then tucked it's way under my arm. I felt understood, consoled, -- and humbly grateful.

The Louisville (Kentucky) Zoo was expanding its African Exhibit to include a petting area. Since Peace Place had a number of goats of African origin, we were asked if

we could/would donate some to the Zoo. Well, vets from that zoo came and picked out a number (dozen?) of our very best Nubians and Pygmies, including a pregnant doe, and hauled them away to their new home. It was so very hard to bid these “specials” Good-bye, but we promised the puzzled caprines that we would come to see them as soon as they were settled in their new home.

-- And yes, we certainly did take several trips to the Louisville Zoo. Guess where we headed first! We found our old friends together in a very pleasant, attractive area. All were in excellent health and spirits, greatly enjoying all of the children and adults who came to pet and love them. New babies were born there, and some of the smarties were taught tricks! “Donkey” (renamed “Doc” by his fond keeper) was the best acrobat-comedian. Do you think that deep down they really missed Peace Place like we missed them?