

# From the Bean Pile - On Anthropomorphism

By Marj Brady

**A**s alpaca owners and breeders we are frequently accused of attributing human traits to our animals. I'm guilty of it, maybe you are too. I'll go you one better, mine talk. Well, I speak the words but the sentiment is all theirs and sometimes some of mine say bad words, especially the girls.

The older boys are usually very polite and say please a lot especially during breeding season. The younger ones strut around saying, "Hey, hey! Look at me, look at me! Pick me! Pick me!" The geldings grumble and go back to eating. The yearling boys get all worked up and alternately try to breed or kill each other, sometimes they all just wind up in a big alpaca knot.

Shearing day is always good for some drama. My personal non-favourite is the drama queen who screams and cries and tells every one she's going to die and we're peeling her skin off, every year. Guess what, she survives in great shape, every year! Other animals almost always lie quietly throughout the process, some tolerate it very well, some aren't happy about it but none of the others carries on the way Queenie does, thank goodness!

Old Whitey, aka Ole PeePee Legs, has some kind of radar going on. She can be spotless throughout the entire winter



but the week before shearing, every year without fail, she decides to sleep with her hind legs in the urine that puddles overnight in the dip in her stall floor. The stall isn't over crowded and she manages to avoid the puddle for the five months that they sleep inside before shearing day, but the week before shearing ....ta da! Filthy pee-pee legs and trashed butt fleece. After five years I'm convinced she does it intentionally.

She was one of our original purchases and, unlike a lot of the older girls, this one is halter trained - she's trained to spit in my face when I hold up the halter. In truth, once we get the introductions out of the way she leads perfectly. She cushes for toenails because apparently she thinks it's helpful, especially when she tucks her left foot into her right armpit. She growls, gurgles and grumbles, and mutters curses at me under her breath with a bad South American accent. Some days it sounds like it might be middle Eastern European but I don't know who she's trying to kid - she was born in British Columbia not Columbia.

Old Whitey has given us trouble free, strong, healthy crias every year. As far as her birthing records showed when we bought her, no one had ever witnessed the birth of any of her crias - she's one of those sneaky girls who fires one out when you



turn your back for a minute. In 2007, after narrowly missing several of her deliveries, I made it my personal mission to observe and catch her in the act. I'm not proud of it and I won't do it again because in 2008 she gave us a surprise. Prior to me sneaking around after her in '07 she had given us four solid coloured white or fawn crias with no patterns. In 2008 we were "gifted" with a lovely little tuxedo male who has the dubious distinction of carrying at least eight different colours including grey and black and three or four different and distinct browns in his blanket.

By way of apology I gave her the next year off. I know all you more scientifically minded types are shaking your heads saying it's genetic, there must have been a tuxedo in somebody's gene pool, but I'm sure he's retribution for me spying on her in 2007. She's due in a couple of months - I hope she's forgiven me.

CQ

## About the Author

Marj. Brady has been breeding entertaining huacaya alpacas since 2003 and lives with her family on a small farm north of Stirling, Ontario, Canada.

