

# From the Bean Pile - on Breeding Decisions

or.... “wishing for” and “getting” are two entirely different things!

by *Marj Brady*

**W**e all have plans and dreams when we start this alpaca life. We make our best choices, educate ourselves, trust in fate, hope for the best, roll the dice, work really hard and oftentimes it works out. Sometimes it's a complete disaster. Sometimes it's just okay and sometimes it's totally awesome. Personally I prefer it when we get awesome results although it doesn't always work out that way even if all the component parts should add up to awesome. Every year I try to select studs that will enhance and improve on my girls; sometimes that special boy isn't on our farm and then we outsource to hopefully get the improvements we're looking for.

Way back, very early in my alpaca life I went to my first alpaca show. At that show I saw a boy with the most amazing fleece – it was long and bright and crimped and fine and I loved it. I can still see that fleece in my mind's eye and I still love it. Even though I had very little hands on experience at the time, it was evident that this fleece was truly

something special. He won at that show but was only a juvenile, owned by a farm a long distance away from us and priced way out of my budget. Time passed the way it does, but he stayed in my head, and when he moved to a farm closer to us I was able to purchase a stud service to him.

You've seen before that things don't always work out as we intend and this story probably isn't much different. I bought the service to this boy with the beautiful fleece – it was still beautiful several years later. I bred him to one of my best girls, a pretty fawn who had given me some very nice babies but one who had also exhibited a definite preference to spit out white boys for me. I figured if I was going to get a white boy I should make it the best one possible.

We made introductions, she caught quickly and I began my lengthy wait. Hoping for a white girl but mostly just hoping for a healthy cria with awesome fibre. As was her usual practice, around day 345 she popped out the highly anticipated amazing cria when my back was turned. This cria was absolutely

nothing like anything we had had born on the farm before and not in a good way. He had an allover halo. Yes “he”, yet another white boy but not quite the total package I had hoped for. I toyed with the idea of calling him “Harry” if he'd been a girl he'd have been Angelina or something halo-relevant.

This boy has just turned three and was gelded last year. He's a sweet boy, quiet and easy to manage but he looks like a gremlin. He has long tassly ears and although his bite is fine his top lips are a little too long so it looks like he has no chin and yes, he still has an incredible halo. His body is too long, he has gigantic feet, knobbly knees, skinny little legbones and a heart shaped nose. He had the worst cria fleece histogram ever recorded on our farm.

There's no nice way to put it: The results of our male/female breeding record for off farm services just stinks. At around 75-80% male overall it's not so terrific for on farm either and frankly it ticks me off. Breedings we're doing for other farms with our boys have about a 70/30 girl/boy ratio – what do I have to do to get my guys to use their girlie sperm at home?

We entered the industry believing the law of averages would allow us to grow our girl herd at about the same rate as our boy herd. Unfortunately it seems that someone else has been having the girls I should have gotten, maybe they'd like to swap a couple boys for one of my girls.

I have one cria left to come this year and yes, it's from an off farm breeding to





a girl here who has produced some lovely animals for us when bred to our own boys. I'm hoping for a grey girl. What do you think? Have I jinxed it by putting it in writing? Maybe if I practice a little full moon hoodoo voodoo – sacrifice a virgin goat, spin around three times and recite some archaic Gaelic nonsense backwards using a Peruvian accent...maybe that will work or maybe she'll just pop out another white boy. Am I an eternal optimist or perhaps a little mentally deficient? If you were to ask me, in all honesty I'd have to say no, I'm pretty pessimistic and my brain cells are okay thank you very much.

It's a good thing that I love my boys – they're taking over the farm!

**CQ**

***About the Author***

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