

From the Bean Pile – On Brotherly Love

By Marj Brady



Boss Macho keeping an eye on his harem

I was going to write about shows and showmanship but started to get a little ranty so I stepped away from the keyboard in favour of shoveling some beans. Maybe I'll take a run at the joys of showing another day.

Instead I'll talk about boys. Not including our oldest boys, or this year's male crias, we have a boy group of thirteen males aged two to seven years. The marketers will assure you that you can expect to have a 50/50 split of male to female crias born. I'm here to tell you the marketers lie. In eight years of births the absolute best we've managed is 50% female - one year only. Most years have been 60-80% male. Most of those males have been white or light with the

occasional multi thrown in just to keep things interesting.

I figure someone owes me roughly eight to ten females. Never have I had a "girl year" but ever year I breed thinking, "Next year will be my girl year." My boys have made far more girls on their outside breedings than they have for me at home which is great for my clients, but not so good for my foundation herd. Strangely, the same holds true if I arrange an outside breeding to one of my girls, still more boys!

Our boy group, for the most part, gets along quite well but occasionally war breaks out, when someone decides to challenge Boss Macho. Boss Macho is

usually too lazy to do much fighting but every once in a while he decides it's time to whip the recruits into shape. I try not to worry too much. As long as all fighting teeth are trimmed, and no one animal is being overly persecuted, I let them figure it out. Besides, Boss Macho needs the exercise. He's not what I'd consider a high energy kind of guy and he spends a large part of his day peering over the fence at his harem and posing for the random passersby.

Recently his younger brother, Not-So-Macho, decided the big guy was out of line and took him to task. Not-So stood and yelled at Macho for a good fifteen minutes. Macho kept trying to move around and pass Not-So but to no avail; Not-So blocked him. Make no mistake this message was going to be delivered. There was no physical contact, just a lengthy diatribe. I was quite surprised at the dressing down t Boss Macho accepted from his sibling; I wish I could tell you what the issue was and why Boss was so tolerant. On a different day Boss had no patience for Not-So's opinions and we were treated to an alpaca smack-down.

Another of our males, our biggest boy, is our most placid. He doesn't fight, scream or chase and even when challenged, he's slow to respond. He's a year younger than Boss Macho and they've been pen mates for Big Dude's entire life. Big Dude watches, waits, listens and tries to move away. Finally, when he can't take anymore yammering and pushing and leg grabbing from the peskier boys, he sits on the offender's head. Big Dude weighs over two hundred pounds so it is quite an effective solution. Big Dude will also step in if he thinks one of the younger boys is being overwhelmed. It's a very passive intervention; he literally simply steps in and that is usually enough to dissuade Jerk du Jour.



Boss Macho giving jerk du jour, Not-So, an alpaca smack-down.



Do you ever watch your boys interact? The way the younger males learn to fight is almost like a dance lesson. When they're not eating or posing or breeding, fathers teach their sons. I push you here, you kneel. I bite you there, you lie down, I rise up to chest you, you meet me in mid-air. All the components of a major battle are included but no anger, just graceful, gentle direction.

Overall our boys' herd is pretty well balanced. Brawls are minimal and are resolved quickly. I think our layout helps with that – primary accommodation for our guys is behind the driveshed and, while they can sometimes see the girls at a distance, they don't share fencelines or stalling, much as they'd like to.

The male herd dynamic is educational, interesting and entertaining to observe. I love what my alpacas have taught me and I wonder what's next.

CQ

About the Author

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