

OBSERVATIONS FROM THE PASTURE

Superannuation

Five years ago Jane Dunstan and Shari Templeton, then editors of The GALA Newsletter, asked if I would be willing to author a short column for the newsletter. They suggested that the column be called *Observations from the Pasture*. I don't know whether the subsequent contents were what they had anticipated. Rarely do I know what my primary topic will be until shortly before I sit down to write. The rare exceptions occur when I become interested in a topic requiring significant research ... this issue's column is not one of those rare exceptions. I did not realize that the column had reached the five-year mark when I had decided to touch upon the topic of superannuation. It somehow seems fitting, particularly since I am talking about the superannuation of the lama caretaker rather than of the lama.

The thrust of this column is to discuss actions one can take to prolong the ability to care for llamas, not how to plan for the eventuality of not being able to care for them. With respect to the latter, Lars Garrison has done an excellent job outlining the responsibilities of the geriatric lama-owner in his article *The Geriatric Lama-Owner* which may be found at www.llamainfo.org/id35.htm. He took on the difficult task of discussing how we should plan for the day when we are no longer able to care for our llamas. He reminds us that part of our current care of our llamas should be a plan to provide for their care when we are no longer able to provide that care. We are also reminded that we cannot predict when that day will come. In re-reading Lars's article I find that I have not made adequate preparations. I urge that you access Lars's article, read it and ask yourself whether or not you have made adequate preparations. To be blunt, none of us can assume we will be given adequate warning that it is time to make preparations. Did I just hear someone mumble something about the road to hell being paved with good intentions?

I had just turned 59 when our first two llamas were delivered. Our herd and our desire to maintain a herd for as long as we can manage it have grown significantly since then. Llamas have become a very important part of our lives and it is difficult to imagine life without them. I am now at an age where I know that the aches and pains of old joints are only going to increase and my energy level will begin to diminish. Thus the issue has become ... what can I do to prolong the period over which I can reasonably maintain our herd? After some reflection, I have

come up with the following: (you may have other suggestions ... let's hear them)

- Listen to my body, my spouse and my medical professionals about my capabilities and limitations. I have had the tendency to push my body to its limits and will most likely continue to do so (I enjoy the feeling of physical fatigue, as opposed to mental fatigue, after a day of hard physical labor) ... but I need to be mindful that those limits will be changing.
- Don't listen to well-meaning ageist friends and acquaintances who think I should limit my physical activity. If Jeanne and I had listened to those of our acquaintances who, when we announced that we were acquiring a farm and were going to raise llamas, thought we were too old for such nonsense, we would now be sitting in rocking chairs wondering why we were not having any fun. The phrase "use it or lose it" comes to mind. We still are getting admonitions about our activities and our age. I find that the perceptions of others reflect their experience and limitations, not yours.
- Keep our herd size within manageable limits. Our goal for the size of our foundation herd was 20 - 25 llamas. This size seems to work well for us.
- Train our llamas. We use our variation of the "Mallon Method" and it works well for us. Having Jeanne remind me not to get "greedy" (you will know what that means if you have attended any of John's seminars) helps a lot. It is amazing how much energy you can save if you do not run around chasing llamas.
- Carefully choose your tools. Several come to mind. Several years ago we acquired a chute from Carol Reigh. We subsequently constructed a "vet room" and bolted the chute to the floor. Having a well-designed and well-installed chute has proved to be a big stress reducer for both us and our llamas.

I enjoy going out into our woods and selectively cutting down trees for firewood. Not only do I get good exercise, I am also improving the health of the woodlot for future generations which I find very gratifying (this mental boost also serves to extend the period over which I will be able to maintain our herd). When I was buying my most recent chainsaw the service technician suggested that I base my decision on which saw to acquire by how it felt when I was holding it. He mentioned that what works well

for one person may not work well for the next. He then left me alone for about 15 minutes while I tried a variety of saws. There was one saw that clearly stood out in this regard. I can work all day with this saw and not get tired. Similarly, I like to split my firewood the old-fashioned way, with a splitter axe. I treasure my axe because it works well with me. By letting it do most of the work I can split wood for hours without tiring ... incidentally, splitting wood is akin to scooping poop ... a good way to achieve serenity ... and

greater serenity contributes to a greater likelihood of being able to work with your lamas longer.

Finally, guarding one's health is the best way to increase the likelihood of prolonging the period over which you can maintain your lamas. As we start this New Year I would like to leave you with this thought taken from my second column: "... love yourselves by listening to your bodies. If you have a sense that all may not be well, do something about it."