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## COMMENT

# Alas, poor Hemi, I knew him...

By Ted Brown  
[tedbit@hotmail.com](mailto:tedbit@hotmail.com)



A Ted Bit

In the days leading up to Christmas, we had a sad loss here at Brown Farm.

Last Saturday morning, I entered the barn to find Hemi, our senior ram, had died in the night.

His death wasn't a surprise—he'd developed a condition, and even after sending blood samples to the University of Guelph Animal lab, the results were inconclusive.

In a flock of sheep, the ram is the most influential animal in the barn. His genes impact every ewe he is paired with, and the quality of the resulting lambs from that pairing are the yardstick one measures him by. And though livestock are not pets to the farmer, they develop personalities. We feed them, greet them twice a day, and work with them as partners within the farm operation.

Hemi was our second ram, following in the hoof prints of Dodge (as in 'Dodge Ram', get it?) and was named Hemi to continue the Ram parody. Hemi arrived two years after Dodge, and the moment he landed, we knew he was different.

He was big for his age—and hellish aggressive. Dodge's laid-back manner came from having broken a leg early in his life. I handled him extensively until the leg mended, and he simply never forgot. Hemi on the other hand, arrived in a flurry, hell bent for leather. With a major chip on his 'shoulder' he was determined to let the world know he was 'the boss.'

Rams are an interesting species. Their social makeup dictates that they establish an 'alpha male' in other words, the boss, as soon as they come in contact with another ram.

When Hemi arrived, he became the alpha male—except of course for me. In his eyes, he accepted me as his alpha male. Hemi was the most aggressive ram in the barn. After Dodge

moved on to another flock, we brought Angus into the flock. Angus and Hemi were like night and day. Angus is a pussycat beside Hemi. He was also, in Hemi's view, the Number Two ram.

Except for the two months they are breeding, our rams have their own separate side by side pens in one corner of the barn. One day, Hemi decided to assert himself and pounded his head (which was like an anvil) against the side of the pen next to Angus. I stood in awe, as he snapped a 2 by 6 with his head—across the grain! I had to line the pens with plywood, so the two rams couldn't see each other.

The Sidekick wasn't very brave around Hemi. He'd stand in the pen, pawing the ground, snorting a bit, knowing full well she was intimidated by his 220-pound presence. And though I was the 'alpha male' in his eyes, I'd certainly never turn my back on him.

As the years passed, Hemi mellowed. He'd stand on the edge of the pen, reaching over to me when I fed him, so I could scratch his ears. He'd trot over to me for some attention when he was in with the ewes—something unheard of when he arrived.

As he faded away in his pen last week, I'd kneel beside him, and hold him, while stroking that massive head that had challenged many, and won so many battles.

Saturday morning, when it was over, I admit I shed a tear—he was a significant addition to our farm, and I'll miss him.

As I entered the pen Saturday morning and saw his lifeless body resting in the straw, I was reminded of that poignant line from Shakespeare's Hamlet.

"Alas poor Hemi, I knew him..."

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