

I fought the lamb...

As most who frequent this page are aware, The Sidekick and I have a flock of sheep.

We've been raising sheep for a few years now, and have become fairly knowledgeable of their little quirks and personalities.

Our decision to become shepherds was a natural progression. I grew up with dairy cattle, having to milk them twice a day, and harvest a whack of feed to maintain them for the entire year.

I knew we'd never return to dairy, for both financial and feasibility reasons.

So we flirted briefly with a few beef cows, and soon discovered that beef cows ain't like dairy cows—they're mean and can be downright dangerous.

Hence, we looked at sheep.

Sheep are like miniature dairy cows, having very similar traits, nutritional needs and health problems.

And unlike a beef cow, who weighs about 1,600 lbs, a ewe weighs about one-tenth of that, at 160 lbs., and doesn't have any attitude compared to a beef cow.

With the exception of our ram, who weighs around 220 lbs, I figured that sheep are the least dangerous animal in the barn.

Besides, apart from the ram, I outweigh them. And unlike cattle, they not only weigh one-tenth of their weight, they also consume one-tenth the hay, and consequently, produce one-tenth the manure.

So, barring the B-rated sci-fi movie 'Killer Sheep' which we saw late one night on satellite TV after consuming too much wine, The Sidekick and I were pretty confident going with sheep, figuring they were downright safe. We'd never fear for our safety in the barn.

Wrong.

This past weekend, one group of lambs had reached that age when they and their mommies had to part. It was weaning time, and this little group of eight lambs, about 65 days old, were about to move to their own pen, sort of like when a toddler moves from a crib up to a big-boy bed.

The Sidekick and I learned a long time ago that when moving sheep, slow, quiet and easy is the best route—not a rodeo. Shouting, prodding, and just being impatient goes nowhere when handling any livestock.

So with this little group, I opened the gate to their pen, and stepped in-

side to the opposite side to coax them out through the gate.

Sheep are naturally cautious, and don't like to venture beyond their known space. Stepping out through that gate was certainly foreign territory, since they'd spent the first 65-odd days in that same pen, with their moms.

We also have learned that if one lamb takes a bold step out of the pen, the rest will usually follow.

So it happened, one brave and adventurous lamb stepped out, and walked slowly through the gate.

The rest followed—except for one.

She lost courage, and bolted back into the pen. I stepped in her direction to head her off, reaching out my right hand to stop her. As she tried to squeeze past me, my fingers grazed her face—and my index finger slipped inside her ear.

She kept going—with my finger in her ear.

And she bent that finger backwards.

That calm, patient, slow and easy atmosphere was shattered by an outburst of profanity as I felt my finger bending over backwards.

As the 'kung fu' lamb circled the pen and ran to her siblings, The Sidekick quickly returned from closing them into their new pen.

"What was that all about?"

"That \$%^&* lamb bent my finger backwards," I stated. "She could have broken it."

The Sidekick has a look for times like that—a little bemused and a tiny bit condescending.

"Like, a 40 lb lamb could 'injure' you?"

Hmm, that seemed a bit ludicrous to her. But later that day, when my index finger knuckle was swollen up the size of a tennis ball, well, there was only one thing to say.

"I fought the lamb, and the lamb won..."

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Ted Brown



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