

Machine gun ewes made for a happy Valentine's

It's been a few weeks since I've put together some words here, and the reason can be summed up in one word.

Sheep— more specifically, 'lambs'.

Man, I've seen so many births these past weeks that I'm counting them in my sleep. (Get it? Counting sheep in my sleep?)

I think I'm delirious.

It's been a trying lambing this year. There have been so many deviations from the norm that I'm to the point where I ask, "What's next?"

Every year, I take off the same two weeks for the lambing.

It's a math thing. The ram is put in with the ewes on the same date every summer— September 1, for those who want details. (For those who want to know what I mean about 'putting the ram in with the ewes', you might want to have a chat with your parents...)

Back to the math thing. The gestation period of a sheep is 145 days, so putting the ram in September 1, the lambs should arrive 145-plus days later. That translates to the first two weeks of February.

I booked off 'vacation time' from Feb. 4-18, and was ready to oversee the onslaught of lambs those two weeks. (Calling it 'vacation time' seems so wrong.)

Being a denial-driven optimist, in my happy little world I also expect the lambs will arrive in evenly spaced periods, a few every day during the full two weeks, all between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m.

The first one to lamb, one of our older ewes, presented me with a beautiful pair of

Ted Brown



twin ewe lambs Feb. 2. I was so excited, a perfect start. I messaged the Brown family with the announcement "They've started!"

My family is always happy to hear that the lambs are on the way.

I got that set of twins settled in, and waited for the next 'delivery'.

And waited.

Seven days, correction, seven LONG days later, (after I'd spent an entire week of office 'vacation time' watching the rear-end of a flock of ewes for some indication that another lamb was about to be born) the next one lambed.

Once again the text message went out.

And again, I waited. And waited.

In the meantime, The Sidekick, who is my right hand 'man'.., er, woman, came home from work, sick as a dog. She settled on the sofa in front of the TV, and with the exception of an occasional coughing fit, was pretty quiet and totally unapproachable. (Actually, I didn't really want to be close to her anyway.)

Fast forward to Valentine's Day.

That morning, I was feeding the sheep

when I heard it— that tell-tale 'grunt'.

Another ewe was lambing! Finally!

I watched as the head appeared, and then it was born. I waited for the mom to clean up her lamb and she started to deliver her second one— suddenly I heard more grunting at the far end of the barn.

In a fast walk, I got to there to see another lambing in progress. In 20 minutes, another, and another, and so on. It HAD really started this time— in fact, it was so damned rapid-fire, I didn't have time to text the rest of the family— not that they'd believe me at this point.

By Sunday (Feb. 17) I'd delivered 51 lambs.

I tell ya, at times I felt like I was facing a machine gun loaded with lambs for ammo.

I was feeling the full effects of sleep deprivation while feeling sorry for my sick wife.

There are still five ewes in the group who haven't lambed yet. The season seems about two weeks late and I'm wondering if last year's drought is the reason— the dry weather impacted everything, which could have delayed the ewes coming in season.

Now I'm starting to feel rested, but come the end of March, I'll be back at it again.

That's when the second group— all yearling ewes— give birth to their first-born lambs.

At times like this, I look at the guy blankly staring back at me in the mirror first thing in the morning, and ask one simple question about becoming a shepherd.

"What on earth were you thinking??!"

Public forum set for tonight on farm assessment

Farm assessment will be on the agenda for discussion at a Public Forum for the local farming community later this month.

The Farm Assessment Public Forum, put on by the Town of Halton Hills Council and the Halton Federation of Agriculture, will be held tonight (Thursday) at 7 p.m. at the Civic Centre in the council chambers.

Mark Lindquist, the Provincial Farm Specialist for MPAC will make a presentation and be available to answer questions related to farm assessment.

"The Town does not mandate tax assessment and so this is a great opportunity for the farming community to have any concerns they have related to increased assessment addressed directly by MPAC."

Pre-registration is encouraged. Contact Danielle Edwards at daniellee@halton-hills.ca or call 905-873-2601 ext. 2345.

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three days without water, about eight minutes without
air, but only for one second without hope."*

- Hal Lindsey