

## Summer Breeze, Blowing Through the Jasmine of my Mind. By Sue Wilde

Llama people love to share their exciting llama stories, their funny ones, their maddening ones, their “well, I’ve been in the llama business for all these years and I’ve never seen this” stories. But often our painful stories are only shared with our nearest and dearest and sometimes not verbalized at all.

My dad, who ranched cattle all his life and grew to love llamas through me, taught me a life lesson one night. A newborn pygmy goat died in my hands and he said, “Well, if you’ve got livestock, you’ve got dead stock too.” A cold hard fact.

After almost 20 years of living with llamas I’ve enjoyed my livestock and endured and eventually celebrated my dead stock. When we have given our heart away to man or beast and we can see our heart worn proudly on their sleeve, the sunshine of it warms us up and keeps us smiling. But when that piece of our hearts is gone that hole it leaves behind can be painful, no other word for it.

When I first started llama shopping they were literally “flying off the shelves” (a pleasant memory!). I answered an ad in Llamas Magazine and the llamas were sold but the lady’s son had a few in Kansas. Kansas?? When I got the photos of Sitka and Summer Snow I had to have Summer Snow! The two girls came to Hartman’s in a VW mini van and onto Canada with some friends that had been showing in Nebraska.

A few years later Summer Snow produced a fabulous female, Enchantment, a clone of her mother that sold for \$27,000 at the Legacy Sale. Thinking that could never be repeated the next baby girl was as stunning, Summer Breeze! That next year Summer Breeze was also chosen for the Legacy Sale and I reluctantly let go too, a piece of my heart worn proudly on her sleeve.

Summer Breeze was a glistening pure white and caused quite a whirlwind at the sale. I gave out pretty jasmine tea bags with a flower to all the sale attendees as so that as the song says, Summer Breeze would be blowing through the jasmine in their minds! The song played as she came on stage and she sold to a dear friend who sent her back to the farm to be bred. I was happy to bring her back home and when she eventually went to Vancouver Island little did I know that within several months she would be returning home again! Her new owner had become ill so some of his llamas came to stay with me.

Having Summer Breeze back was such a “breath of fresh air”! I bred her and the next summer awaited the arrival of what was expected to be a dandy baby. Southern Alberta can be very hot and dry in July and August and that August was a scorcher – 90 degrees every day for weeks. The Sunday afternoon Summer Breeze went into labor was no different. After a quick check I could see she was in trouble. I called the vet who luckily wasn’t too far away and the student who was working for me came over also.

Summer Breeze was flat out by the time the vet arrived and although my barn is insulated, it was over 80 degrees inside. The baby seemed to be so twisted up the vet couldn’t decide quite how to untangle it. Finally he had 2 legs and could feel the head. Having never pulled a llama baby but many calves and foals, I was sure he would now be able to deliver the endangered cria. But he just pulled and pulled and couldn’t get it out. He pulled and he and Chris pulled and we all pulled together. I couldn’t understand what was preventing the birth. My attention turned to Summer Breeze. In the sweltering heat and the stress of the birth she seemed almost in a coma which alarmed me. I put an extra fan on her and we pulled again. Suddenly a light bulb went on in my head and my stomach twisted as I asked the vet, “Do you have two front legs?”

Summer Breeze was dead. The vet cut open her uterus and the beautiful black and white baby girl was dead too. I hooked onto my utility trailer

and in a daze, backed it into the barn and we loaded Summer Breeze and her baby to be thrown away in the neighbor's dead pit.

Had this really happened? The pain, the tears and the grief were confirmation. The email to my friend and his understanding reply made it a reality.

The next several births were fraught with paranoia instead of anticipation. My dedication to the llamas was in question. The guilt of not questioning the vet sooner plagues me still and the tears have never dried, even at this writing. But as my great grandmother always said, there is sunshine after rain and so there is. Last summer all the babies lived , even my adorable twin girls. Passionate Kisses, the 15 pounder who was raised by her mother is a fabulously pretty. And my baby, This Kiss, who at 9lbs was wearing my heart on her sleeve from day one is still proudly flying it like a kite in the summer breeze.

Providence heals us and helps us heal ourselves and forgive ourselves. It's not easy but sometimes a cup of jasmine tea and a cria dancing in the breeze is just what brings that little smile back and lets us give our heart away yet, once again.