

MILK ENOUGH...IF YOU CAN GET IT  
FROM ECHOES OF EDEN  
BY ALICE EBY HALL

When a person owns dairy goats, milking becomes part of a new way of life, whether or not that was envisioned.

Milking Nancy Caprice was an important lesson for me. It took me almost an hour twice a day using both hands on each teat. Now I can zip through most milkers in two to five minutes, and I can usually milk five does in the time it takes one goat to finish her grain ration. That's why a multi-doe stanchion is necessary. Nancy was milked on a single-doe stanchion, which has the advantage of isolating a doe for easier control.

A wooden six-doe stanchion was sold to me by the man from whom I purchased one of my original 22 goats, JoNubian Mitzi B. When it finally wore out, we visited several grade-A goat dairies and looked at their barns and equipment. Roger built my buck barn and my 12-doe stanchion after the patterns he acquired.

Our stanchion platform is not grade A, as we used fiber-glassed wood instead of concrete, but the stanchion mechanism is metal pipe. All 12 slots can be worked simultaneously, or one at a time can be opened and closed for the late, recalcitrant milker who dawdles at the door or flees across the field. All my stanchions have been designed to allow the person to sit beside each doe while milking. That position allows some control.

In the United States, people usually sit on the right side of their animals and milk into a bucket that is placed under her belly. Some people milk from the left, and some in other countries milk from the rear.

When a person watches someone else milk, it appears sometimes that the teats are being pulled. Teats are never pulled. The hand is closed around the top of the teat like a clamp so that no milk can back track into the udder. Then, one by one, the fingers close over the full teat forcing the milk closer and closer to the orifice. Finally there is enough pressure to overpower the sphincter muscle at the end of the teat canal that serves to keep the milk in the udder, and the milk squirts out under pressure. This is called positive milking. A kid suckling creates a vacuum, and that's called negative. Milking machines combine the two. Immediately, the finger and thumb gripping the top of the teat are released to allow milk to flow back into the teat, and the procedure is repeated until no more milk is available to fill the teat.

In positive milking, there is so much pressure behind the milk, it pings and twangs in an empty pail or forces air into milk that is already in the pail, causing it to foam like soapy dish water or bubble bath. A milker spends a lot of time in the barn, and it's a pleasurable time offering solitude and answers.

Nancy must have been immensely patient, or she would not have stood still so long and quietly even with extra grain. No milking since has been as difficult, and I've learned most of the milk-kicking techniques goats can use.

A goat can kick over the bucket with a sideways slide of a foot, a backward or forward slide of a foot, or a kick. A kick is when the foot is raised high and is brought down or sent out with considerable force. A kick that is brought down can result in a foot in the bucket or on the edge of the bucket, which tilts the bucket for dumping where it's not supposed to be dumped.

A **quick kicker** is lightning. It's almost impossible to tell when she is going to kick. One second she's standing placidly, and the next second her foot is in or on the bucket. If her foot is on the edge of the bucket, she casually adds just enough more pressure to tip it over. If a lid is on the bucket (goat milk buckets come with a half/crescent moon shaped lid to decrease by half the area exposed to dirt), she kicks it off and mutilates it in no time. (Which is why I don't use a lid any more.) A quick kicker can be controlled if one wishes to milk while his/her head is pressed into the flank of the doe.

A **clumsy kicker** is slow. She casually raises a foot as though she is going to scratch her tummy. There is time at that point to move the bucket. If that is not done, the downward motion of the foot is sudden and sure, sending milk in all directions. A clumsy kicker usually just needs time to find a comfortable position before milking is resumed, and then she'll behave without any kicking.

There's the **cross-kicker**. I still haven't figured out how a goat can kick over a bucket of milk when her hind legs are crossed, but she can. While I'm watching or holding the leg nearest the bucket to prevent loss of milk, the farther leg crosses over and zaps the bucket. It's amazing!

There's the **stretcher**. A stretcher will stretch her hind legs closer and closer to the edge of the stanchion. Then, all of a sudden, she acknowledges that she is going to fall off. She jerks her hind legs forward, and the milk is kicked all over kingdom come. A stretcher can be blocked by allowing the back of her foot to come in contact with the leg of the person milking. That gives her a sense of security.

**Parallel kickers** are interesting. While the handler is concentrating on watching and controlling rear feet, the parallel kicker impassively reaches back with a front foot and slides the milk bucket off the stanchion. Parallel kickers can be blocked if the person milking them places an elbow toward the front of the doe to block movement of her front legs.

**Jumpers** are worse than kickers because they use both rear feet at the same time. A jumper actually lifts both hind feet off the ground and brings them down together with her full weight behind them, like a pile driver. Unless the person milking can grab the bucket from under the doe before she comes down, the milk is surely a loss. Jumpers are rare, which is fortunate, because they are hard to control.

**Stompers** are difficult to milk. A stomper's feet are never still. They are raised and lowered swiftly, first one, then the other. Grace, one of my favorite yearlings became a stomper when she freshened, and I was at my wits' end, ready to sell her. I mentioned her to my vet during a visit, and he said, "Maybe she has ticklish teats." I gave her an antihistamine injection just before milking time, and within three days she had quit kicking completely.

**Wigglers** are annoying. They seldom actually kick the milk over, but their bodies quiver, they shake their heads, they turn to look at what is being done to them, they snap at nearby does. Milking a wiggler creates so much tension in the person milking that muscles ache by the end of milking time.

**Sneakers** are interesting. A sneaker seldom kicks the bucket while she is being milked, but she is quite capable of spilling the milk being taken from the doe next to her. How she is able to kick under a neighboring animal is beyond me, and keeping it from happening is difficult.

**Squatters** are impossible. A squatter infrequently kicks the bucket because she is sitting in it. It's really difficult to milk a doe whose teats are hanging in the milk already taken. One Nubian doe, Beauty, had several reserve championships, but most judges would not give her grand champion because of her lack of dairy temperament.

Whenever a judge felt her udder, Beauty sat on his hands. She did it at home, too, and so Beauty was one doe who was milked in a sling. The sling hung from the rafters and held her up by her belly, but it didn't really keep Beauty from sitting. She just scrunched forward until her hind feet nearly connected with her fore feet, teats hitting backs of knees, making milking impossible.

A lot of dairymen won't keep Nubians because of their "lack of dairy temperament," that is, their nervous behavior on the stanchion and their independent attitudes about placing themselves on the stanchion. That is partly because Nubians generally don't care to be handled as much as other breeds, and partly that's because other breeds, especially Alpines, pick on them.

Nubians' long, drooping ears are just too much temptation. Even sweet, docile LaManchas will nibble Nubian ears when they are stanchioned in close proximity. Any Nubian will wiggle, stomp, and spill milk if her ears are being pulled. The Saanens we milked were generally well-behaved, but when one would casually reach over and nip a neighbor's ear, the ensuing scramble often resulted in spilled

milk.

Biting is not usually a problem with goats. Being ruminants, animals with four stomachs, goats have no teeth at all on the sides of their mouths, and only bottom "scraping" teeth in the front. However, their molars are large and strong for grinding grain and bark, so fingers stuck in the backs of goats' mouths can have holes punctured through the fingernails. Besides, since goats are stanchioned, that is, their heads are restrained during milking, they cannot reach around to bite the person milking them. They can, however, reach the ears on the Nubian next to them.

Qiana, a rare doe who hated motherhood, was merely tied by a rope while I tried to encourage her kid to nurse impossibly large teats. I turned to look at Qiana to see how she was doing, and, in her anger and frustration, she bit me on the forehead. I'd never worried about such a thing since goats don't usually bite, and their teeth don't lend themselves to biting. But Qiana sank her bottom teeth into my forehead, pulled up, and I thought I was being scalped. That left quite a scar. I should have taken the time to put her on the stanchion.

Docility on the milking stanchion is how a dairyman measures "dairy temperament," and the animals with the best dairy temperament at Hallcienda were the Pygmies. It's a good thing they were well behaved on the stanchion, because those tiny teats took a lot of concentration. Of course, a Pygmy is so short that even a stomper isn't going to kick over the bucket. If she jumps or wiggles, it's relatively easy to block her large abdomen with a knee and keep her still. A squatting Pygmy is a real problem because she is already too close to the bucket. Allowing a Pygmy to stand with one rear foot on the leg of the person milking her elevates her for easier milking while keeping control of all her movement, and a Pygmy doesn't weigh enough to bruise the leg.

The best aspect of milking is emotional. When a herdsman is milking his does, he is relating to them on a very intimate, personal level. There is a lot of interaction between the two, and they learn to know one another's personalities well.

Bucks are loveable, and kids are adorable, but it's harder than anything to sell a milking doe because of the closeness that has developed between the herdsman and milker. The does seem to know when the herdsman is not feeling well, and they express their concern with sympathetic glances from solemn amber eyes. They lean gently on their owner to express empathy, and they behave their very best. There's no kicking, running away, biting, or stomping on the stanchion when the herdsman is melancholy.

Experiences like that help me appreciate the love God has instilled in every aspect of His creation. The warmth and caring between me and my goats only feebly reflects that which exists

between the Great Shepherd and those in His flock, and there is nothing in all of lovely creation as beautiful.

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