

MIRACLES AT HALLCIENDA

FROM ECHOES OF EDEN

BY ALICE EBY HALL

Besides motherhood, I can't think of much that brings a person closer to God than watching Him work with us on our farm. Prayer is my constant companion as I minister to my animals with healing medications or deliver stuck goat kids, piglets, or lambs. The answers I receive are truly miraculous.

**Miracle 1**--Goat does are penned in the buck barn for security before they kid. When they are pen-bred, they might be confined for three to six weeks, so an exact date for kidding isn't available.

Twin yearlings, Helga and Hilda, awaited parturition together. Hilda had kidded with twin bucks six days before visitors came, and they, of course, wanted to see the adorable new babies. In the process, Helga and Hilda escaped, racing gleefully across the hill to join the herd. Hilda returned in the evening for reunion with her new kids. Helga determined to maintain her freedom.

The following evening, when Helga bawled piteously as she followed the herd, we chastised ourselves for not roping her and forcing her to go back to the barn. She had kidded somewhere out on the 82 acres and had left her kids behind. I walked for an hour searching nooks and hollows, behind boulders and under branches. I didn't know where else to look, and Roger took over when I left for mid-week Bible study. On the way to Bible study, I prayed, "Lord, I know it's a long shot (but you're good at long shots), and if you don't need Helga's kid with You, I'd really like to find her. Please help me."

The next morning, after I parked the truck at the orchard on the hill, I followed the herd for an hour up hills, down ravines, through brush. Usually, a doe will lead me to where she kidded, but Helga didn't show much interest. She often turned toward the orchard, but when she thought I'd follow, she returned to the herd. After my hour of walking, I collapsed in the truck where my daily Bible study material waited.

As I read, I listened to the musical goat bells and occasional bleats, usually from Helga. Suddenly I became aware of dime-sized cries puncturing my consciousness. I left the truck and walked toward the sound. The cries came from inside the fenced orchard, but I couldn't see

anything. When I entered, I turned toward the tiny cries and found a husky red doe kid tucked into a ground squirrel run. Except for a top, it fit her like a coffin, and that's what kept her warm and protected through the chilly night.

I rejoiced in my find just as Jesus said the shepherd rejoiced in finding the lost lamb. I held her up for Roger Hubby to see from the house as I carried her to her mother, praising God all the way. Of course I named the baby Miracle. It took Helga five days to accept that Miracle was hers and stand to feed her, and that was only with her mother's help.

Yes, I had three generations penned together, and Miracle's grandmother, Adventuress, helped Helga adjust to motherhood. God is so good!

**Miracle 2**--"Take It to the Lord in Prayer" was one of my favorite hymns as I grew up, and it is an admonition I take to heart daily dealing with problems of the farm. Most prayers have visible responses, and some are memorable. Evaluating the answers gives me insight into how I should pray, and I glimpse the sense of humor of my Lord.

One memorable prayer taught me to pray specifically. I was marching my champion Nubian doe, Cleopatra, to the buck barn for service to her sire, Goliath. On the way I prayed, "Please, God, from this union give me a beautiful, strong, long-eared, red buck."

Five months later my prayer was answered, and I named my pride and joy Gamaliel. I planned that he'd have the same kind of impact on my herd that the first Gamaliel had on his student Paul, Saul of Tarsus.

However, I faced disappointment after disappointment, and when Gamaliel was two years old, it finally occurred to me that I should have asked for a "beautiful, strong, long-eared, red, FERTILE buck."

God likes specifics, and although I didn't think the lesson was funny at the time, I have learned to appreciate the humor of that answered prayer. I was given exactly what I requested.

**Miracle 3**--Marvin was more a response to my commitment to God than a direct answer to prayer. Marvin was a double grandson of Cleopatra, and he became the most well-known buck in America because he was 95% predictable in improving his daughters over their dams. Marvin was the single animal most responsible for the recognition power of the name Hallcienda.

About ten years after the genesis of Hallcienda Farms, my favorite Bible verses, Proverbs 3:5 and 6 kept running through my mind, "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart and lean not on thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths." (KJV) In response, I dedicated Hallcienda herds to the Lord "with the prayer that, as Your herdsman, I will understand and obey Your instructions."

Marvin was born ten months after I made that commitment. I intended to just sell him at the auction for meat, as I needed his mother's milk, but God guided me away from that choice. I gave him to one of Roger's agriculture students for a pet. He was raised in a bathroom in the suburbs and followed his owner to school. The boy loved that, as he was given class time to take the buck home! I dehorned and tattooed Marv as demonstrations for Roger's agriculture classes. When he was three months old and weaned, the boy's father insisted Marvin go somewhere else. We brought him home. He didn't know he was a goat and had to be taught how to relate to his own species.

When he found his permanent and loving home, started winning shows, and produced offspring that were also show winners, I knew the dedication of my herd to the Lord was being honored.

**Miracle 4**--Because I have so often relied on God's leading in managing my herd, I went into serious prayer when, in the 1990s, mountain lions eliminated over 80% of my animals. I told Roger that I thought perhaps all the losses indicated we should phase out the livestock. He looked horrified. "If we sell all the animals, I'll have to mow pastures and trim brush. I can't do much of that anymore." Apparently, the animals are to stay, and I begin to understand that the decrease in our herd size seems to match the decrease in our energy levels and abilities to cope with the herds' needs. I rest in my faith in God's reasoning.

**Miracle 5**--One of my most memorable answers to prayer involved my first two does, Thumper and Bumper. They lived to be ancient matriarchs of the herd, but they couldn't live forever. When they died, we buried them in the yard not far from the house. Roger buried Thumper nice and deep. I buried Bumper, and her grave wasn't quite as secure.

At the head of their graves, I posted a cross which read, "Here rest Thumper and Bumper, the inspiration and genesis of Hallcienda Nubians."

One winter day when Southern California was experiencing one of its infamous deluges, the goats and sheep snuggled comfortably in their sheds waiting for the storm to abate so they could resume their browsing and grazing.

I felt guilty about the red Duroc hogs, though. Five very pregnant sows had no access to shelter. They rooted and grazed in seeming indifference to the storm, but just to be agreeable, I opened our yard so they could use the sheds. They didn't choose to use the sheds. They chose to plow the yard with their strong snouts. Their muddy furrows started criss-crossing the yard haphazardly, and I knew it was going to look like disaster when the rain stopped.

The burrowing took them near Thumper and Bumper's graves, and those omnivorous pigs smelled meat. They did not share my emotional attachment to the two does, so digging them up only meant more nutrition for them. I was horrified!

In streaming rain I shooed the sows away, only to have them return. I tried to lure them to the exit gate with grain, but for the first time in my recollection, they ignored good feed.

I hauled rocks and soggy dirt to pile onto the graves, but the sows burrowed through it before I could bring another wheelbarrow load.

I stacked sheets of already wet plywood on the graves, but the sows tossed them into the wind with their powerful snouts and short, strong necks.

I knew crying was a waste, but I couldn't help it. I felt so badly about the treatment Thumper and Bumper were about to receive, even though they were not aware of it. I knew the situation was hopeless, so I lifted my tearful face toward stormy skies and pleaded with God. "You're the only one who can help Thumper and Bumper now, God. I know it's my fault their resting place is endangered, but please protect them and let them rest in peace."

I slogged into the house and collapsed, exhausted, onto the bed. Two hours later, I awoke refreshed to sunshine streaming through my window and a view of sheep and goats in the pastures. With trepidation I went out into the clean balmy air to view the damage. The sows had left the demolished yard and gone back to pasture. My surprise was pleasant and unbounded.

Furrows intersected the yard. Everywhere I looked, hog gullies marked where the sows had been, and they had been everywhere. The exception was the grave and the cross that

marked it. Straight furrows from all directions ended repeatedly at the first rise of the mound on the grave and then turned and went around it, making it look like the hub of their activity. If I hadn't seen that, I would have thought it was impossible. Hogs are truly "pig-headed," and there is nothing outside of God's power than can make determined swine change directions.

Again I looked to Heaven, this time laughing into the sunny skies, and I said, "Thank You, Lord, for protecting Thumper and Bumper. Truly a virgin birth would be child's play for someone who can direct and control swine." God laughed with me.

**Miracle BIG**--Of course, our son, Stephen, was the most important answer to prayer at Hallcienda. We were married in 1961, and for six years we really didn't want children. After seven years of teaching, I resigned so we could start our family, a feat that took twelve years. Yes, we were in our forties with almost nineteen years of marriage behind us when our son was born.

In the interim, a gynecologist told me, "You have endometriosis so bad, you'll never have children. We need to yank out that uterus. It's a useless organ anyway." I felt like suggesting he take breasts, too, since they're also "useless."

Besides being annoyed with the doctor's callous attitude, I was devastated, and I prayed hard in the car in the doctor's parking lot. "Seek a second opinion," was the response. The treatment was "the pill," which of course prevented the very thing I'd quit teaching to acquire and lowered my thyroid to dangerous levels. Thyroxin was added to my medications and caused piercing headaches. After 18 months, I took myself off all medication. Pregnancy still wasn't occurring, and we both resigned ourselves to leading full, creative lives without children.

Writing poetry has always been one technique I use to eliminate sorrow from my heart. After I put my negative feelings on paper, I promptly forget them. On December 17, 1978, I wrote "WHAT OF ME?"

Abraham and Sarah were faithful and trusting  
So that after many barren years of life  
They were blessed with a mighty fine son  
To end their shameful years of strife.  
Dear God, I try to be faithful and true.

I try to live as you would have me.

Will I, like Sarah, be rewarded in time

With a child to cherish and train for Thee?"

On December 28, 1979, only a year after I wrote my poem prayer, our son, Stephen Divine Hall II was born. I had forgotten I'd prayed so specifically for a child, and when I found the poem of the previous year, tears of gratitude accompanied my prayer of thanksgiving.

Stephen was a pleasure to train for the Lord, and the growth of his faith was delightful to observe.

God is so good!