

Goat Slang

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One of the first things I learned when I started working with goat owners was to NEVER, EVER use the words Billy or Nanny in reference to the goat. Being a good, obedient, little neophyte capriculturalist, I complied, but the truth is, the terms really do not bother me.

Billy, I presume, is short for Hill-billy, and I have come to respect the independent individualism characteristic of the "hillbilly" as well as the goat and the goat owner. If that is what Billy means, I certainly don't mind if bucks are called Billies. Besides, when I was growing up, my father used to sing me a charming version of Mary and her little lamb,

"Mary had a William Goat." Now how could anyone object to owning a William Goat?!

As for Nanny, the dictionary describes it as being a diminutive form of Ann(e) or Nancy. Nanny is also a term of endearment that refers to someone who cares for small children, lovingly. How could that name be an insult? After all, Mary Poppins, herself, was a nanny, and the three children who flew off with Peter Pan were cared for by Nana, their Great Dane nanny.

The goat often fits this role admirably. The goat was once known as the "foster mother of mankind", so the term nanny fits her very well. Through the years mothers have raised their children on goat milk. Even in fairly recent USA history some mothers have been known to raise their children right on the goat.

A doctor friend of mine relates a story about a mother who switched her baby from hospital formula to goat milk and maintains that there was no trouble making the switch once the

"restless Nanny" learned to stand still and not kick the baby in the head while he was nursing! (P. 168, Caught Up Into Paradise by Dr. Richard E. Eby, 1971, Tyndale House). Even if the "nanny" was "restless", can you imagine trying to let a baby human nurse any other kind of animal?

No, I'm not ashamed to know Billy goats and Nanny goats. They may not be as regal as bucks and does, but they have their useful places in serving humankind.

