

Grody Goat

Bob's friend Vern had a passel of kids, five or six of them anyway, and at the time that I was training his little brown filly they were all small. They decided I needed a mascot for the barn so they gave me a grey pygmy goat. He was a tiny thing when they first brought him to me, just barely weaned. Bob called him Grody and the name stuck. He was so small he could trot right through the wooden slats in the barn gate and escape onto our back lawn. The slats were about a hand width apart. To teach him to stick with me I put a collar and leash on him and tied the leash to my belt as I went around doing barn stuff. He lived in an empty stall when I wasn't at the barn.

I'd had him about two months and he had figured out to stay in the barn area when I was around, so he could wander by himself without being tied to me. I was out cleaning stalls and needed to go to the house for something. I had barely gone in the door when the sound of Grody screaming had me running back out. If you've never heard a baby goat they sound just like a little kid, even when they bleat it sounds like Maaa! No wonder baby goats are called kids.

Anyway, Grody was stuck in the gate. His belly had gotten wide enough that he couldn't get through the slats anymore. He was screaming bloody murder and trying to wriggle through. I went over and pushed him back in, and after that he had the run of the barn yard.

Grody had quite the personality. He thought it was entertaining to scare new people. He would sneak up behind them and bite their butt, or stand on his hind legs and threaten to butt them with his horns. When we would go out of town we would ask our friend Danny to feed and water the horses for us and Grody would bite him every time. He never once bit any of us though.

Those little mini goats just get wider and wider until their belly is about as wide as they are tall. People always thought Grody was pregnant. He had been "fixed" (neutered) so he didn't stink like most Billy goats.

Grody versus Patches

That was not the only time Grody's belly got him into trouble. He grew to weigh about sixty pounds and probably fifty-five of it was belly, the rest was horns. We had brought our stud horse Patches over from the arena to breed our mares at the barn and it was his first day there.

Goats are smart and Grody was no exception. He had gotten into the habit of waiting for us to grain the three mares and their foals that we were keeping in the barn yard. We fed them in mangers hanging on the fence. Once we walked away Grody would go stand under their necks, raise up on his hind legs, and chuck them under the chin. They would move away and Grody would steal a bite or two of grain.

In the horse world stallions are not the boss. It's the lead mare who runs the herd, and stallions are there to guard the others, keep them in their herd, and chase any usurping males away. Even in a domestic herd it's often a more determined and clever gelding, or a boss mare, that runs the show. Not the stallion. As a consequence, the mares wasted no time showing Patches who was boss when he showed up that day, and he had to wait to eat at the last manger.

Grody stole some grain from the other three and then sidled over next to Patches, who ignored him, until Grody chucked him under the chin. Without missing a beat Patches grabbed a mouthful of the skin on Grody's back and chucked him high into the air and across the barn yard. The fat goat flew at least twenty feet and landed on his side.

Bob and I were standing by the barn watching all this happen. We stared in awe as the goat flew through the air. We were shocked that the horse could even pick the heavy goat up, much less throw him so far. I was sure Grody would explode when he came back to earth, but there was absolutely nothing we could do about it.

Grody landed with a loud thud, sending a cloud of dust into the air. He didn't have time to contemplate his survival and re-group though. Patches had followed him across the corral with his ears flat back and murder on his face. With more agility than I had seen Grody demonstrate since he was a tiny thing, he hopped up and started running. His mouth was open wide enough his teeth were showing, and his tongue was sticking straight out. I was sure he was trying to holler but no sound was coming out. Landing had knocked the air out of him and there was no time for him to catch his breath.

Now that we knew Grody would live Bob and I couldn't breathe either, for laughing. Goats are very agile and when Patches would get almost close enough to take a chunk out of him Grody would

dodge, change direction, and they'd be off again. Poor old Grody never did get enough air to make a sound; he just kept his mouth open in a silent, desperate bleat.

Finally, Grody thought of running toward us. Patches stopped chasing him when he ran behind Bob and me. He was a very humble goat for a while; even the mares weren't bothered by him for a week or so. As you can imagine, Grody never bothered Patches again.

Grody and Karlee

That same summer I was babysitting my niece and nephew in the mornings. Karlee was three at the time. She was a lithe little kid with wispy blond hair, who was cheerful and busy, rarely holding still. She loved the barn critters and always wanted to be out with them. Grody and the horses were free to wander the corral during the day. I didn't want her out there with them and the goat if I wasn't around, and was constantly telling her to stay out of the barn yard. It was actually Grody I was more concerned about than the horses. He liked to butt people for fun, and he weighed at least as much as Karlee. I kept threatening her with Grody, saying he would get her if she tried going to the barn without me.

Ask anyone and they'll tell you that the Hollingsworth side of our family is stubborn. I know I am, and Karlee was at times too. She could play at the barn and Grody would ignore her when I was around, so she thought I was fibbing about Grody "getting" her. I thought I was too.

I was cleaning up our breakfast dishes in the house one morning and heard Karlee's cry for help. She had a squeaky little kid voice normally, so the fact that I could hear her holler all the way in the house was significant. Being an ambitious and curious kid Karlee had more than her share of accidents when she was small, and had recently been stitched up from another escapade.

I tore the door open and looked toward the sound. Karlee was clinging to the top of the big wooden gate that we drove the truck through when we were hauling hay, or needed the trailer. She hadn't been able to undo the lock so she had attempted to climb into the corral by going over the fence.

Every time she would begin to move, either over toward the back yard, or into the corral, Grody would slam the gate with his heavy horns and make it sway.

Being the stubborn Hollingsworth that I am, I said, "I told you not to go to the barn," and left her on top of that gate to figure out how to rescue herself. I went back into the house to finish the dishes. When I got back in the house Bob asked me what was going on and I told him. He was furious with me for leaving that "baby" on the gate and went out and rescued her.

Karlee has never forgotten that day. I think it scarred her for life. But it did keep her out of the barnyard. She never ventured out there by herself after that. Many years later I was lamenting leaving her there and she said, "The best way to learn is trial by fire."

Damn Goat

When Grody got older he liked to play with people for fun. If a stranger came into the barn yard he would trot over to them and stand on his hind legs, challenging them to a fight. His horns were thick and wide. They curled over and almost touched his neck.

Sometimes people would take the bait and grab his horns for a pushing match, especially the big burly horsemen who frequented our barn to talk race horses with Bob. For a little pygmy goat Grody was incredibly strong. Goats are made for pushing with their horns, and hitting things with them. Even a sixty pound goat could hold his own pushing against a person, and frequently won.

He also liked to sneak up behind strangers and bite them on the butt. He was clever about it too. He knew when people were watching and would pretend he wasn't even paying attention to them. As soon as they were distracted, or caught in a heated discussion, he'd walk behind them and grab a mouthful of pants and hide.

He started to get quite a reputation, and we found that visitors to the barn had already been warned about Grody. They would keep a wary eye on him even if he had never bitten them in the past.

Bob would often enlist the help of his good friend Danny to help us haul hay, or fix something at the barn, or do chores for us if we were away. Grody could always catch Danny unaware. He would either butt him when he bent over, or bite his butt when he had his hands full. Needless to say, Danny didn't like Grody very much.

One time when we were on a horse trip somewhere else and Danny was feeding critters for us, he had quite the day. First, he needed to pick up some things from the barn so he shut the horses in and backed his truck in the corral. He was loading stuff up and heard a weird noise so he went to check out what it might be. Grody was rubbing his horns against Danny's truck door. Maybe he thought they'd look better with blue paint on them. Danny chased him off with a stick but goats think chasing them is just a challenge. They aren't intimidated by it.

Grody bided his time until Danny pulled his truck out of the corral and came back in to feed. Danny let the horses out and lifted about half a hay bale in his arms to go put the hay in the three mangers. Since his arms were full Grody took the opportunity to bite him on the butt. Well, Danny couldn't do anything about it without dropping anything, except attempt a feeble kick at Grody. The second time he got bit he did drop the hay while trying to kick the goat.

Then he picked the hay back up and headed for the mangers. After dumping the hay in them he grabbed the rope off the horse walker and tried nailing Grody with it, but the goat was too agile and smart for that. Danny gave up after a few minutes. Winded, he went over to fill the water trough. He waited for it to fill, still holding the rope, and keeping a wary eye on Grody, but the goat was now over by the horses stealing their grain and hay leaves.

Danny assumed the goat had forgotten about tormenting him and bent over to get some hay and other litter out of the water trough. Grody butted him in the butt and made him dunk his face in the cold water. His hat came off and got a soaking too.

I'm sure he was cussing Grody loud enough for all the neighbors to hear by then. He glared at the goat, trying to come up with a way to get back at Grody without spooking the horses, since he was now over by them again.

The hay mangers were made out of barrels with one side cut out and bars welded at an angle to hold the hay in. The horses would reach their nose through the bars to pull the hay out. One of the barrels had a bar missing. Horses like to shake their mangers to make the hay leaves fall down – they like those best. No matter what we tied the mangers to the fence with the horses would knock them down occasionally.

Sis, Mom's buckskin mare, was shaking her manger and Grody hopped up so his front feet landed in the bottom of the barrel. The manger came off the fence and fell over Sis's head, since the bar

was missing. Now the barrel was hanging in front of Sis like a huge necklace and her head was sticking out the top of the barrel. She wasn't happy about it. Sis spun around, snorting and blowing, and spooked the other two mares and foals into running around the corral.

Grody ran over to Danny for protection. When "things go to pot" (another phrase of Bob's) the goat knew it was safest where the people were. Danny was too worried about the horses to care about the goat anymore.

It was several minutes before the horses settled down enough for Danny to get close and help Sis out. It took him a while to lift it off her head without her snorting and taking off. Eventually, both he and the horses came through it unscathed.

When we got home Danny wasted no time telling us his story. Of course, in his version there were more expletives than words when speaking of that "Damn Goat!"

Grody Departs

There's more than one reason goats are de-horned when they are little. We discovered our mistake when Grody was about six years old. Grody had always been fairly pleasant to be around, and didn't bother Bob or me with his biting and butting, so we didn't mind him. He was entertaining to have around. But when he turned six he started to get ornery. He took it into his head to disassemble the barn. He would butt things for something to do. First he started on the regular doors that led to the tack sheds. He smacked those until they were cracked and hanging off the hinges.

Then he started on the stall doors. They didn't have ordinary hinges. They were heavy-duty strap metal welded to the door frames. The doors themselves were made from two-by-sixes set into angle iron. Grody would slam those regularly, I suppose because he didn't have another goat to fight with? I don't really know why destroying the barn got into his head. He would keep at a door until the hinges cracked, then he'd move on to the next one.

He took out three stall doors before Bob put his foot down and said Grody had to go. Bob asked around town and the fire chief said he wanted a goat to eat the weeds around his place. It was then that I discovered Grody had quite the reputation around town. The fire chief backed his truck up right to

the gate and had a big cage in the back of his truck. From his manner when he came into the barn yard it was clear he had been told Grody was mean.

Grody followed me up to the man's truck, friendly as could be, and jumped up into the back of his truck to get the grain I set there. We talked about Grody and I explained he likes people a lot, but he also likes to break things. He was glad to find out this was a goat his kids could pet and not avoid. I don't know for sure how long they kept Grody but I did stop and pet him when we would ride up on the east part of town. He seemed content.