



Source: Rajiv Chandrasekaran, 'Who you know, not what you know, that counts', *Sydney Morning Herald* online, 31/03/07.

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I had a habit of running away from home in my early teens. My father was often elsewhere—chasing money, scam deals, overseas, pulling us further into debt, aided by the evil grandfather in Queensland. The evil grandfather had very dubious underworld connections: violence, fraud and so on. In the early 80s, when I was about 12, my father got it into his head that a small farm for breeding prize-winning Angora goats was a good idea. With no money we moved from a small city at the bottom of Australia to an outer suburban area. And so began for me five years of high school hell—an agricultural public school teeming with rednecks, racists and homophobes. My dreams of a career in veterinary practice were squashed during the first hours of the first class assignment. To say I was not welcome would be an understatement. The bus rides from school to home were long and risky. My mother was often depressed, unhappy in her work and alone. And she was the one carrying the family. I remember she was often in hospital, undergoing this or that operation, dressed in a cotton gown, constantly pale and smelling of antiseptic. The arduous visiting hours in the Australian heat were punctuated by the scars on her back. For all these reasons, none of us was home very much. The farm was a mistake. The goats were a mistake.

*Head and Body Characteristics: The Angora is a very picturesque animal in which both sexes are horned. The bucks usually have a pronounced spiral to the horn, which comes back and away from the head; the horns of mature bucks sometimes reach two or more feet in length. In contrast, the horn of the female is comparatively short, much smaller, and has only a very slight tendency to spiral. The horn of the female seldom exceeds nine or ten inches. The ears are heavy and drooping.*

I spent a lot of my time in the company of the baby goats—the fresh new kids, watching them being born, the messy afterbirth, the exhausted does spawning little wet creatures that stumbled around on the dry hay. These were the playthings of my troubled youth.

*After identification with matching paint or ear tags, well-fed does and kids can be moved to group pens or holding areas. Twins and triplets should not be grouped with singles since stronger kids often rob milk from usually smaller multiple-birth kids. Groups should contain kids of similar age.*

Came one bone-searing December and the last remaining treasured possession my mother had at that point was an out-of-tune upright piano. Everything else of worth, save for the human beings inside the cream brick house with no insulation, had been sold or taken by debt collectors. Our family got by on a budget of withheld emotions. The piano was sold out of desperation on my mother's birthday. When the buyers drove up to the mortgaged 20-acre block they began complaining, swearing violently, about the state of the piano. They drove it away on an open truck and I had never seen my mother cry so hard.

*An angora is an attractive all-white goat with ringlets of*

*soft, fine hair. Goats' feet are adapted to heights and rough terrain. The hooves are small, able to draw close together and balance on tiny areas. The hooves grow continuously, therefore in domestic situations, must be trimmed as necessary. Goats have the ability to stand on their hind legs and perform intricate steps in order to strip off the top branches of greenery.*

At dusk, hidden in the ghost gums, the does would pick up the kids and throw them about. The temperature drops in the desert. There would be corpses in the morning. These mothers leave their dead behind.

*Breeding with intent to continually improve the genetics of a herd is a dynamic process.*

I could be found out there, in the ghost gums: a ritual of picking up a stick and banging it against trees, singing like I was a pop star, singing for my audience of bleaters.

*Goats, which are browsing animals, can be pastured with sheep and cattle, since each species prefers different plants. Goats can improve pasture, clear reforestation areas, control leafy spurge, and destroy multiflora roses, red cedars, sand burs, knapweed, hound's tongue, Canadian thistle, sagebrush, buckbrush, giant ragweed, sunflowers, and many other weeds.*

*While most goats are not aggressive toward humans, they are not always kind to other goats and in seconds can do serious or lethal damage with their horns.*

We had two breeders: Pride and Duke. They were particularly aggressive. They fucked and moaned and disturbed the cows in the next paddock. More impregnations, new dead kids on the block.

Our sheep dog ate the heads off chickens and liked to torment the Angoras until they found themselves pinned against the barbed wire fences with hair and skin shredded off. Yep, a vicious little bastard that I totally adored. The goats and the dog were still better breeds than those freaks at the agricultural high school; a place where experiments on animals were part of a daily routine involving splayed guts and mass decapitations and where, pathetically, unimaginatively, the woodwork teacher got himself caught with his cock up the arse of a sheep.

*Goats may need special four-foot-high fencing to keep them in and keep predators out. Goats like to go under or through obstacles. Five-wire electric fences, well-connected, with three wires hot and two grounded, make a good system. Small-mesh fencing may also be used.*

I don't remember seeing goats at the high school. There was too much blood in my eyes. I do remember that small kid tumbling onto the pile of rocks,

*unbreathing.*

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Jason Sweeney.*