

Life Changes

by Laurel Greene

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For this energetic, retired environmental chemist, life has never been busier. Judi Bisson met her husband, Mark, amidst the urban sprawl of southern California; they married and then both decided the urban life wasn't what they wanted for themselves or their children. Mark had previously experienced the beauty of rural Virginia on a trip to a Christian camp in Highland County. He talked to his wife about it and the dream of starting a better life in Virginia began for both of them. That next February the family took a week long trip to Virginia. It was pouring rain in Roanoke when their flight landed and the snow was a good six inches deep as they drove into that same Christian camp in the mountains of Highland County, Virginia. Unaccustomed to cold, Judi wasn't sure about how she'd make the transition, but nine months later - after looking at house after house in the Charlottesville area, Judi Bisson called her husband back in California: "I think I've found it." "That's funny," he said; "We just got an offer on our condominium today too." Judi goes on, "About eight years ago we packed up everything and drove across country with all of our possessions packed into a moving truck and dreams of a new life filling our heads. On that journey it seemed like everything had God's hand in it. That's why we named our farm Hope of Glory, because Christ in us is our Hope of Glory, from Colossians 1:27."

The couple arrived with a dog and a cat and their belongings and created their idea of an ideal life, away from the city. Judi home schools their son Nick and cares for their animals while Mark works as a chemist for the Commonwealth of Virginia. Did we say Judi cares for the animals? Seems like she saw an ad for alpacas, went to an alpaca show and fell in love with them. Currently, the ten acre farm is home to 22 alpacas, with 8 cria (baby alpacas) due this spring, 5 Nigerian dwarf goats, 10 ducks, 36 chickens, 4 cats, and 4 dogs - two of the dogs are Great Pyrenees, which protect the alpacas.



In the farm store Judi shows her alpaca's ribbons. In the same room you'll find for sale yarn, crocheted teddy bears, beautiful alpaca baby blankets, finger puppets, roving, and a wonderful selection socks, some guaranteed for life. Many of the items for sale are by Peruvian women who hand make these products for their livelihood. You may recognize Judi from her stall at the Scottsville Farmers Market. (Photo by Laurel Green)

Asked why she likes alpacas, Judi promptly came up with a list of reasons, ranging from the fact they are calm and cute and allow her to meet interesting people, the whole family enjoys related activities - building, feeding, shows, to the more complicated questions of their interesting genetics and the fact that you can't always predict the outcome of breedings. She loves their exotic look, size, personalities, and comforting humming sounds. Judi is a mine of information about alpacas: they are in the same family as camels and llamas; they are originally from Peru, Chile and Bolivia. They are shorn once a year, in the spring, and gestation is normally about 11 ? months, with a single birth. They are small, about 36" at the withers and weigh about 100 to 200 pounds (in the same weight range as the two Great Pyrenees dogs.)

From an environmental chemist in southern California to a Scottsville farmer - that's quite a change. Then Judi took it a little further. Not only does she sell her own yarn at local farmers markets, she's opened a farm store, located in her home at 86 Old Spring Hill Road, Scottsville. The store is open by appointment, just call 286-2121. Her yarn is

available, (undyed, 100% alpaca, of course) and so are items from local artisans and a variety of items hand-knitted by poor women in Peru who rely upon such outlets for their income. Here's a perfect place to find gloves, scarves, baby blankets (wonderfully soft and warm), bears (crocheted or furry), hats, puppets, Christmas ornaments, socks (with a life-time guarantee), goat soap, soil supplements (a manure tea), chicken and duck eggs, roving, raw fleece and sheets of felt.

Judi and her family participate in a number of activities in the area, including Old Farm Day at Pleasant Grove in Palmyra (where alpacas appear, too), Open Farm Day at her farm in late September, Sedalia Fiber Festival in Bedford on May 16, and classes planned in knitting, crocheting, and wet felting - and of course, the Scottsville Farmers Market.

You'd think Judi has enough of animals, but no. In 2005 she expanded to another business, "Critter Sitters at Hope of Glory Farm". The pet sitting business has clients from all nearby counties and towns, and offers three services - boarding at the farm, visits to your home, or overnight stays at your home. She also does farm and house sitting where care is provided for domestic and farm animals. Judi can care for animals with special medical problems needing shots and IVs and for animals on special diets that need to be prepared and cooked daily. She treats all animals like they are her own, waters plants and gardens, brings in mail and newspapers, and generally provides a presence in the home where she is sitting. Actually, your animals might not even miss you! So call Judi for an appointment at the farm store or for critter care - 286-2121.



It's easy to see why Judi Bisson fell in love with alpacas. She describes them as cute, friendly, exotic, friendly and with great personality. Photo courtesy of Judi Bisson



Photo: Miel and Encore are friendly and playful, and not at all camera shy. Hailing from high in the Andes, these members of the camelid family are at home in Scottsville - with a little help from fans in the hottest part of summer.