

Ansel Ruseford

At age 7 or 8 Ansel's dad, an attorney, brought home from work a day old orphan ewe lamb a client had given him. He had been given a Beagle pup for his birthday several days earlier, watching the bonding and playing of a pup and the lamb was deeply satisfying.

By the age of 12 Ansel had a flock of 30 crossbred ewes with their lambs being sold at a sale barn ½ hour from his place. The place consisted of 40 acres surrounded on 2 sides by big woods and on the other two by large cattle outfits whose headquarters were several miles away.

Because of the isolation, they had a problem with a large pack of feral dogs. The Beagle pup grew however into a great protector of the sheep. Had a well-lit, well fenced corral to enclose the ewes at night. The dog quickly learned to corral them himself at night fall. And slept adjacent to the pen every night. If dogs were attacking he raised holy hell- noise he could hear from his open bedroom window. He would charge out half dressed with a .22 semi-automatic rifle mostly wounding dogs - which would deter them from returning for 4 or 5 months.

After 4 years of no family vacations (because Ansel wouldn't leave the sheep) his mom put her foot down and rented them a cabin in the mountains of West Virginia for the Labor Day weekend. With the Beagle guarding at night and a friend agreeing to care by morning and night Ansel felt pretty comfortable leaving. Returned 3 days later to find the dog gone (later learned he had been stolen by rabbit hunters) and the friend not having shown up to check the sheep. And all 30 ewes dead.

Skipping ahead exactly 15 years Ansel is teaching at a neat college in the mountains of Virginia. However his wife, Carol is restless and Ansel am finding he doesn't care for faculty meetings among other things.

Carol had been teaching elementary school so they had enough money saved to buy an abandoned 100 acre farm in the mountains on the border between Virginia and West Virginia. Carol loved animals but her experience was confined to horses, dogs and cats. So the first thing Ansel did was to pick up 2 newborn orphan ewe lambs from a sheep farm about 20 miles from them...

P.S. Ansel will leaves you with a quote from Ivan Doig's "Dancing at the Rascal Fair" a novel about a homesteading family over 3 generations outside of the Ringling Mountain. Family ends up running over 4000 ewes. A summer Sunday morning grandad and 8 year old grandson sitting on the porch. The boy says "grandad when I grow up I'm going to raise sheep." The old man pauses a moment, looks at the boy and says: "Well son, if you're looking to raise sheep, there is one thing you got to remember: You need to be thinking about them even when you're not."