

I began to write this update one morning earlier this week, when there was a light breeze swaying the trees and bringing with it the accompanying scent of fire. A bushfire a far way away had been brought under control the previous night but the wafting scent which greeted me was a reminder of the time of year. As I ventured down to let the ducks out I saw the dry dam — yet another reminder of the time of the year. It is predicted to be a hot summer and while we've received slightly over the average rainfall this year things are quite dry here already, it's partially a hangover from last year which was very dry. While there is still lots of growth in the paddocks for the sheep they have made it clear they prefer the juicy green stuff they were munching on a few weeks back compared to the sandy-brown feed it has now become.

Actually, it seems to have been a lot about sheep during this past month.

I babysat a special-needs lamb for a little while as she was on her way to our friends at Edgar's Mission. Saturday (pic below left) was born with a mobility issue, which meant she couldn't use her back legs. Her humans asked Edgar's Mission, which has experience with disabled lambs, if they would take her and see if they could help her. I was happy to act as the drop-off place and have a little lamb love from this gorgeous cherub. Already Saturday has begun to show encouraging signs of improvement

Last week I lost Katie to what it would appear to be old age — she was eleven-and-a-half (a sheep's lifespan is 10-12 years). Katie was the last surviving member of the five original sheep who came to call A Poultry Place home back in winter 2003 when they were only a few days old. While it is always sad losing a member of the family there are many precious moments I spent with her during those years which I have reflected upon in the time since her departure. I have many pictures of her life, this one (below right) taken back when she was still a bub and media star (along with her brother Chasey) during a demo against live exports at Parliament House in Canberra during the Cormo Express fiasco in 2003 is a favourite.



Within days of Katie's departure four new faces arrived to join the sheep flock. I had agreed to take Mim, Morgan, Olly and Winnie in early November. They had been adopted by a young woman, Lilly, who due to ill health could no longer care for them. These four have quickly fitted in and been accepted by the others. It was lovely to help out this young woman who obviously cared for them

for the past three years. Originally Lilly adopted two sheep but found out both were pregnant, one called Bess had twins — Olly and Winnie. Bess sadly died about a year ago. This is how Lilly described them to me when she asked if I could offer them sanctuary:



Oliver (Olly) is the big boy. He is bold and confident, and sometimes be a bit of a bully towards Morgan and Winnie. He loves a pat and a scratch, and when I sit down in the paddock with them, is always the first to come and sit with me. He can be a tiny bit skeptical about treats, which is funny, given his bold and forward nature! Winnie is Olly's smaller twin sister. She has a very lambish bleat, and a very lambish nature. She still hops and skips about when the mood takes her! She is a quiet and friendly sheep and likes a pat and scratch, but not as much as Olly and Morgan. Is happy to just sit beside me in the paddock and chew her cud or nap.

Mim is the most stand-offish of the four, and likes to connect on her terms. She is assertive and strong-willed, and it feels like a real honour whenever she would let me pat her. Every time I would feed them, she would chew the first few mouthfuls with her head lifted out of the bowl (the other greedy three would keep their heads down there, scared to miss any precious eating time!) and look into my eyes as if to say, "thanks for the food". I will miss that. Her son is Morgan. He is the smaller male. He has a soft, slow, gentle nature and likes nothing more than to doze while getting a pat or scratch. He is a very quiet and sweet boy. He will copy his mother's behaviour, but is much more placid and friendly that she is. He was always happy to hang out when I was in the paddock with them. A very special sheep indeed.

These four newcomers took a few days to get used to me but I have managed to say hello to each of them — the past two morning they each have allowed a quick pat on the head before they, and the rest of the mob, focus on the cabbage leaves I put into their feed trough.

Also during the month two other people experiencing poor health, due to ageing, asked me to take in their chickens. Mary, Margaret and Monique came from a woman in Canberra. Five others arrived yesterday from Sydney. In both cases they were sad to say goodbye to their companions but wanted the best for them.

Seventeen former battery hens have also taken up residence as well and are in the process of recovering. Their feathers are beginning to regrow, the combs getting redder and all are putting on



weight. It is always amazing to see how these girls react to being granted their freedom and witnessing the many 'firsts' they experience, like the first time they feel straw under their feet, the first time they can dustbathe, the first time they perch or go for a run.



The final newcomer is a cuddly little fellow I have named Christian. He had been dumped at a vet surgery where a friend works and when no one claimed him I agreed he could come and live here. It is the first time in 16 years I have had a male cat in my life and his seven sisters have accepted him. In fact his introduction was the least stressful of all the cat intros I have done here. He was named after a childhood hero of mine - Christian the Lion. Christian was a lion purchased in 1969 by two young Australians from Harrods Department Store in London and eventually went on to be released into the wild in Kenya through the Born Free organisation. If you've never seen this story you can check it out on You Tube.

So 2014 comes to an end — it's been an amazing year: just over 200 beings have been assisted by offering them permanent or temporary sanctuary; a number of people have been inspired after visiting A Poultry Place to reconsider what they put into their mouths; and, at least half a dozen childcare centres and schools have stopped having hatching projects after A Poultry Place agreed to take in rooster bubs from their last projects. Throughout the year I have been honoured to have been asked to speak on behalf of non-humans at events such as TEDx Canberra, the Living Green Festival, the Cruelty Free Festival, the March to Close Slaughterhouses and the Freedom of Species radio show. I've had the pleasure of working with a number of organisations I admire including Animal Liberation NSW, Animal Liberation ACT, Aussie Farms and NSW Hen Rescue. It's been great to see new sanctuaries spring up, such as Manning River and Disposable Heroes and networking with them and existing sanctuaries to save more lives. And again throughout the year I have been struck by the kindness of people who have contributed to the ongoing functioning of A Poultry Place by donating goods, money or their time to help out. When you run an animal sanctuary single-handed, funding it from your own pocket such gestures are appreciated.

All the best for the festive season I will be back in touch next year — the 14th year of sanctuary here at A Poultry Place. ●

TO VISIT A POULTRY PLACE EMAIL freechook@bigpond.com

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