

Born (To Live) In A Barn
By Maggie Leman

Dan and I had such grand plans for our new doe, Fourteen Carat Savannah. She arrived from Washington State as a 12 week old doeling and we watched her grow and planned her entire life. She was to be our foundation doe, matriarch of generations of Maggidan's champions. We had her bred to the only PGCH buck in the state and anxiously awaited the first of many litters. But this was not to be, she went into labor a bit prematurely, due to pneumonia, and the single kid was lodged at the cervix. Off we went to the Vet College for emergency surgery where the doctors got the kid out alive but Savannah died on the table. So here we had a single doe kid that cost us over \$2000.00 to produce. She was a precious bundle to be handled with velvet gloves and utterly protected. No rude barn raised kid was this one; she was our kid and reared under the ever-watchful eyes of her 2 owners.

At the time I worked at the Vet College so taking little Georgia to work with me wasn't an issue. I wanted her feeding schedule to be as close to natural as I could get it; small feedings many times a day. I never really thought about how I was going to teach her to eat real food and it was tough getting her to even try hay and grain, she starting nibbling at it when she was about 5 weeks old, whereas all of the dam raised kids were trying it out before they were even a week old and eating with gusto by 4 to 5 weeks. She grew up to very people oriented, watching TV with us on the couch, riding in the car. She hardly ever saw our other goats until she was weaned at 10 weeks. Then we decided she could go out in the barn with the herd. We didn't really realize it at the time but that had to be a very rude awakening for little spoiled rotten uneducated Georgia, she truly thought people were her herd!

She got bashed around and learned fast to just stay away from the other goats, even the other kids. She didn't join in their games and never ran with the "brat pack". But she did okay over time, still very attached to her "people herd" and became a loner in the herd. We figured she would move up in the herd hierarchy when she had her first kids, like so many of the other does did. She was bred on schedule, had a single buckling all by herself on her first kidding, and she was a great mom. Surely now she could become a full-fledged member of the herd. But no, Georgia still didn't seem to really know how to interact with her fellow goats and raised her kid and all of her following litters on the outskirts of the herd. Her kids did fine, they had the other kids to teach them the rules to goatie games. Georgia would browse away from the herd and as close to her people as she could get for all of her life. She slept alone; she ate at the end of the feed trough. She was only truly happy when she could have her people around.

It didn't take long for us to realize where we went wrong with Georgia; we learned our lesson! Goats have got to be goats to be happy. They need to learn to be a goat from a very early age. No one can teach them better than OTHER GOATS. So now our bottle babies rejoin the herd at 3 or 4 days old. At that age all of the older herd members are very forgiving of indiscretions, and gently teach any brand new kid the proper way. New kids do fine on 4 feedings a day, and are MUCH better off learning how to play goatie games with the other kids and learning to be properly courteous to their elders. They learn fast who is the herd queen and how to stay in her good graces. They learn to eat what goats eat by watching other goats, what to avoid and what is delicious. Don't worry though, they don't ever forget you are Momma and people have a special place in their hearts, but first and foremost they are GOATS, happy herd-loving GOATS, just as nature intended them to be.