

Sandman, the Happiest Buck on Earth  
By Maggie Leman

Sandman was born on September 9, 1996 just days after one of the strongest hurricanes to strike our area in 30 years. Bless his mom, Topaz, for waiting! We were so proud of him, a beautiful caramel buckling with a sterling pedigree, we had such plans!

He went into the showring 5 times and never stood less than first in his class, he had a tremendous front end, showing great width and was a big boy for his age. Several people asked if we wanted to sell him, but the answer was always no. For as he had matured we noticed his rear end width didn't match the width he had up front. We were sure he wasn't really what our does needed in the way of a herd sire, and we have a policy of never selling a buck we wouldn't want to use for ourselves.

So what to do? He wasn't overly friendly, he wasn't going to make a good show wether, and he certainly wasn't a cute baby anymore. But we knew of a useful option for our Sandman, and that was to make him a "marker buck". Cattlemen often use "Gomer" or "Sidewinder" bulls to mark cows in heat. Gomer bulls have had a vasectomy, just like they do for men; Sidewinder bulls have had a surgery that reroutes the penis to the side, preventing penetration when they mate. Some goatkeepers use a studly acting wether or doe as a marker. But wethers aren't always reliable, many completely lose all "studliness" after a while and some does would NEVER be seen flirting with a wether. We decided to have Sandman vasectomized and put him out with the doe herd as the ideal solution. He would have all of his equipment, all of his stinky essence to entice even the shyest doe; he would just be shooting blanks.

Now this isn't the cheapest surgery, but it is being done more and more as goatkeeping becomes more popular and AI becomes more widely used. It is often the same cost as castration for an adult buck. We have a nearby veterinary college and I got something of a deal if I would allow him to be one of the "teaching animals". The surgery went smoothly, we brought him home to convalesce for about 30 days to be sure he absorbed any sperm he had stored and to wait for the pathology report to come back. The tissue that was removed was sent to Pathology for confirmation that it was the indeed the vas deferens, the tube that carries the sperm from the testicles. Actual recovery from the surgery was just a day or two of walking carefully, much less time than from an adult castration surgery. As time was nearing for his introduction to the doe herd, word came from Pathology that Sandman's surgery had missed the mark! So another surgery was scheduled and to make a long story short, that one missed the mark too! A third and (the doctors swore LAST) surgery was scheduled, this time using a laparoscope, performed and finally the Pathology report came back as it having been a success. After the required waiting period, Sandman went to be with his harem. The failed surgeries are not the norm, but it goes to show it can happen. So if you decide to make your own marker buck, remember to have the veterinary surgeon submit the removed tissue for verification.

Sandman proved to be a most reliable marker, a devoted man of the pasture, and incredibly gentle with all of "his" offspring. Sandman would let us know who was the "girl of the day" and she would be slipped out for a short elicit rendezvous with the buck of our choice. Sandman was always waiting at the barn door to be sure to cover that foreign scent with his own and chastise his beloved for straying. We got the remarkable chance to watch what a buck is really like when allowed to lead a near natural life amongst all the members of the herd. We learned he preferred mature does to teenyboppers, spurning nearly all of the most ardent younger does no matter how hard they tried to entice him. He was gentle with the kids and taught the young bucks a few things about being courtly to his ladies. This is not saying we advocate turning a buck in with the herd, but it gave us a good answer as to why young does are not likely to be bred too soon in the wandering herds of their native land. Even there they wether most extra males and only keep enough bucks to get the job done, in the interest of herd tranquility.

For the last few years as the spring kidding season would wind down and the heat of the summer set in he would show no interest when a doe would appear to come into heat in and he would virtually ignore her. But come the first every so slightly cooler nights of late summer and early fall, Sandman would be waiting for the right scent to waft through the barn. Suddenly passions would awaken and the breeding season was on, Sandman showing the way to a new generation of Maggidan's Minis.

Sandman was on the job for us for over 10 years until this spring, when his bum leg and arthritis forced him from his harem and their hilly pasture and into our deluxe retirement home for goats with special needs. He now lives with Hebe, our retired herd queen and Dakota one of our elderly and now sterile bucks. If we listen hard we can hear them talk of past exploits as they enjoy their days in the sunshine looking over the herd they helped create.