

Breathe ~ Relax ~ Breathe ~ Relax
On Showing Alpacas
By: Sarah Donahoe
June 12, 2014



I'm not one that likes to get up in front of people. I used to teach Critical Care Nursing and no matter how many times I taught a course or lecture, I still was uptight talking and teaching. I used to take a beta blocker (slows the heart rate and "adrenaline" rush) before I would lecture. It really helped but then about 30 minutes into the talk, my friends in the back would give me a mime for "have a drink" meaning "you need some coffee!"

I remember having two judges sandwich me (Jude Anderson and Jill MacLeod to be exact) and ask me if I was breathing. And

then they looked directly at me while I did! So I guess at some point, I was pretty nervous. Truth be known, standing in a ring on a Saturday afternoon with a fuzzy cute animal is about the least stressful thing you can do! Just putting it all in perspective, no matter how despairing it might seem at the time, my day is infinitely better than 99% of the population.

I do some day dreaming while I'm out there. I like to think about how excited the alpacas get when you return home and turn them out into their fields, especially late at night when it's pitch black. And about our two Great Pyrs, Tundra and Tacoma, hands down two of the best dogs ever! Then again there's that stupid grocery list that pops in my head every once in awhile. Fortunately I do auto free delivery/15% off via Amazon for a lot of food.

With every cria group, I procrastinate longer and longer about halter training. I'll go into the barn, hold the halter up and ask who wants to be halter trained. Invariably, they all walk out. Who am I to push them? Lately I've been doing a lot of crash course halter training just days before we leave for show. Then again my approach to halter training has been that the "training" starts back when they are born and you first touch them. Every encounter is a "training moment" and that putting the halter is just one more thing in general training. So by the time I get the halter on them, it can be a nonevent.

I think one of the most important things to remember is what I learned when I first starting riding horses. That is the notion that the tension you have is transmitted through your arm, down the lead line, and to the horse (alpaca). So if you have a death grip on the lead line, the alpaca will sense that and tense up as well. Alpacas will pick

up on the slightest bit of nervousness from those around them, be it other alpacas or us humans. Try the "less is best" approach while being firm when presenting the alpaca. Holding on to them for "dear life" sends the signal to them that this is really going to be bad!

That's not to say they don't still act up in the ring.....because they do and I've excused myself from a class before. But at least I will remember to breathe! With thanks to Jude and Jill!