

by Barbara Parry (originally posted on her Foxfire Farm blog, [Sheep Gal](#))

We're in the homestretch here, with just two ewes, Mystic and Zuni, left to deliver. I'm so happy, completely exhausted, but drawing new energy now that there's an end in sight.

As many of you know, I rely on the baby monitor on my bedside stand which serves as my ear in the barn. I fall asleep to the banter of 23 new lambs conversing with their mothers. Each morning I wake to soft rustle of lambs scampering at first light. It's getting harder to tell the sound of a playful lamb dancing in the straw from the sound of a ewe pawing the bedding in labor. At night I'm relying more and more heavily on the lambcam to check out the action in the darkened barn.

Here's more of Helena's story, as I promised earlier this week:

At dark o'clock on Tuesday morning, I got my wake up call to help Helena as she delivered a pretty pair, a white ewe and a black ram lamb. Both were strong and healthy, and mother quickly cleaned them up, and claimed them. Which is why it is so mysterious that in the light of the following day, Helena was clearly favoring her black ram lamb, giving her white ewe-ling the cold shoulder, though I suspect the light of day had something to do with it.



My good friend, shearer, and trusted resource for all things sheep, Andy Rice, came by to help troubleshoot. First order of business - was she was differentiating by sight or smell? We rubbed menthol on her nose and on the butts of the lambs. For about ten minutes, she went back and forth, sniffing both lamb bottoms, trying to sort out who was who. You could tell she was using her other senses to process, and, smart mother that she is, it didn't take long for her to sort it out. Once again, she began shoving the white ewe aside.

In past years we've had good results in training reticent ewes to accept their lambs by using a stanchion, a panel that keeps the mother stationary and allows the lambs to nurse without the mother able to see exactly who's feeding. Andy felt it was certainly worth a try. So we confined Helena in a stanchion, much to her chagrin. But those lambs eagerly jumped in to nurse, especially

the little white ewe.

I thought we were on the right path until later that evening I discovered that once again, Helena had gone on strike. She was lying down, udder tucked away, firmly sandwiched between her legs. I massaged her neck and cajoled and coaxed her to stand. As soon as she felt two lambs jump in to nurse, down she went. This battle of wills went on for hours. I checked her bag. It was fine. I inspected the lamb's mouths, no sharp teeth (in fact no teeth at all).

Near midnight, at wits end, after much cussing and several hours of getting her to stand only to have her refuse both lambs, I lost my resolve and released her from the stanchion. And darn it, she turned right around and shoved that white lamb!

I gave up and gathered the little ewe from the pen. Within minutes, Helena settled and eased into nursing the black ram. There was clearly no point in forcing the matter, at least not that night.

A hungry twenty-one hour old lamb wakes its mother every three to four hours by gently pawing with its hoof. I know this because I spent the rest of Tuesday night and the early hours of Wednesday playing surrogate mom for Helena's ewe.

Yes, I broke the cardinal rule. Desperate for sleep, I succumbed to the last resort and brought the lamb to the house, making a pact with that little ewe. I would feed her and keep her safe, if she would allow me a few hours of sleep. We both kept our ends of the bargain. Starved for warmth and nurturing, she settled right in beside me, tucked under my chin, in my sleeping bag on the bedroom floor. She politely kicked me twice during the night for bottle feeding. That aside, we both woke somewhat rested the next day.



Wednesday morning, she followed me about the kitchen as I made coffee, checking out the recycling bin, playing with the empty milk jugs. She investigated the shower curtain in the bathroom, chatted with the other sheep she could hear on the baby monitor, and piddled on the linoleum floor. And she never let me out of her sight. I couldn't tell if she was becoming imprinted to me or to the pattern on my flannel LL Bean pajamas, but, darling as she was, I knew she needed to get back to the barn. Sheep are not house pets and it's a mistake to keep a lamb apart from the flock for any length of time. Back she went.



Where do things now stand? We're making progress, taking each day as it comes. Helena is still iffy about this white lamb. She's accepted it to nurse, is almost fine about its scent, but the moment she sees it, swat. Bizarre.

Sometimes ewes reject lambs for good reasons, detecting defects or weakness not obvious right away to their keepers. That is not the case here. My white ewe-ling, who I've named Blaze, is

sturdy and smart. She's figured out how to avoid her mother's evil eye, hanging out at the back of pen, feeding whenever her brother gets up to nurse. I'm firm but patient with Helena. She doesn't have to like this lamb, but she does need to do her job. I do believe she'll come around.

Since I'm in the barn almost continually throughout the day watching for more lambs to drop, endlessly cleaning, filling feeders, topping off water buckets, I can keep an eye on Helena's pen and intervene if needed. At midnight barn check, Helena goes into the stanchion, for safe keeping.

It's a compromise, much healthier than rearing a bottle lamb, the best I can do for now. My black and white lambs, thoroughly bonded to each other, sleep nestled together in the straw beside their mom, a wooly symbol of the yin & yang of lambing.



Another set of twins, ewe and ram, arrived just before dinner last night to Aberdeen, a first time ewe. The x/y count is evening up, but the ewes are still ahead. Wish me luck, and we'll see what the weekend brings.