Hey Neighbor

For The Love Of Horses

By Frank J. Buchman

Goats have their place with horses

Our first goat cost 50 cents.

He was purchased to practice roping from a horse, but he soon learned to run right to the fence and bury his head.

He was big and black with horns and stunk to high heaven.

Our second goat cost $5.

He was purchased to practice tying, like for rodeo calf roping.

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As one would guess, both were billies.

The first one became a wether, after a friend offered surgery for two bits. It did not change the goat's body odor.

The second one remained intact, and the whole barnyard stank as did our string used to tie him and our hands whenever we practiced.

Two more goats arrived last summer for the girl's heeling rope practice.

They were small, black nannies with no horns and did not smell too bad. One might have thought of them as cute until finding their favorite place to play was on the car and pickup, leaving thousands of scratches.

We still like goats.

Our experience indicates goats make excellent companions for horses. Seabiscuit didn't seem to have that admiration; for those who saw the movie of the same name will recall that he threw a goat over the stall gate when they were put together. We are of a contradicting opinion.

Our horses like goats. Horses can be frightened and will shy from the wind, birds, shadows, people, dogs, cats, paper cups, beer cans, plastic bags, baby rabbits, butterflies, down tree branches or any change in the environment. Yet, no matter where goats show up: on top of the car, in the feed wagon, behind the tree, in the way, in a stall over night or anyplace they're not supposed to be, horses accept them, as best friend.

Dr. Shane DeWitt, equine veterinarian at Kansas State University, has on numerous occasions seen similar situations. "Horses are herd animals by nature, and they do best in a herd setting. They like and need companions, and it doesn't have to be a horse," DeWitt insisted. (Except, Seabiscuit the stallion had to have a mare as his companion, to be satisfied.)

While there has not been extensive research on companion animals for horses, DeWitt said, "Horses try to replicate their natural environment and social structure for their mental well being. They are genetically engineered to be with other horses or animals."

Many race horses and other top performance horses are given companion animals to help them not feel alone. The companions seem to make the horses calmer, more relaxed, feel better, eat more regularly and per-

Horses like goats for companionship. Twin kids and their mom triple the attraction for a little boy and his horse.

form at higher levels.

Single horses do very well with goats, donkeys and burros as companions. "However, each individual horse is different, and some have other preferences. It's a trial and error situation to find out which makes the best companion," the veterinarian said.

Some horses prefer to be with cattle. "This may be breed related as Quarter Horses appear to do better with cattle than Thoroughbreds," DeWitt noted.

However, there can be problems with cattle as the horses can dominate, herd, drive and kick the cattle. "There have also been instances of cattle injuring horses with their horns, which makes them less than ideal companions," the veterinarian added.

Diseases can also be a concern with use of donkeys as companions for horses. "They can pass lung worms to horses causing lung disease, so owners need to be aware of that in order to be able to prevent a problem."

Sheep, llamas and even pigs sometimes make good companion animals. Small or large, the size or color typically doesn't matter.

Most farms have dogs and cats, which horses usually accept fairly well, but DeWitt does not typically see them serving in the capacity as companions to horses.

"The horses do not assimilate the domesticated animals into a herd mentality," he explained. "Horses may also see dogs as predators, which they are in the wild."

Dogs live in packs in nature, but they seem to prefer humans to horses. Cats do not socialize in groups and usually are not attracted to horses either, the veterinarian continued.

Goats have frequently been used as surrogate mothers for foals. "It's not too hard to train an orphan foal to nurse a lactating goat, and it seems to work fairly well," DeWitt said.

When two horses have been together for an extended time, and one is taken away, the other horse often becomes lonely and depressed. "A companion animal, such as a goat, often works well to get the horse acting and feeling more normal," the veterinarian commented.

By the way, one of those car-scratchin'-nannies just had the cutest set of twins. The horses like 'em, but not as much as the grandson.

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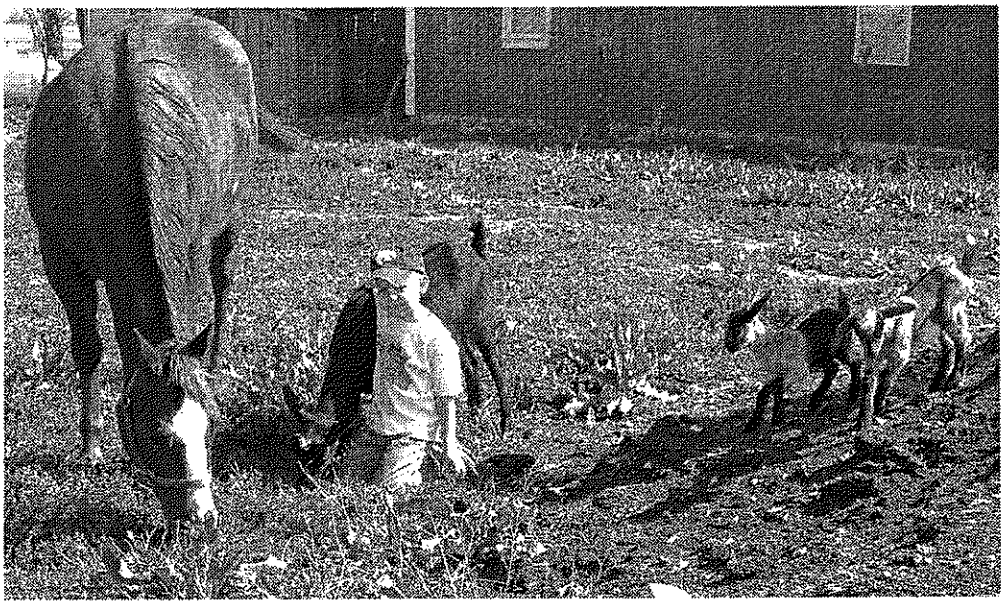

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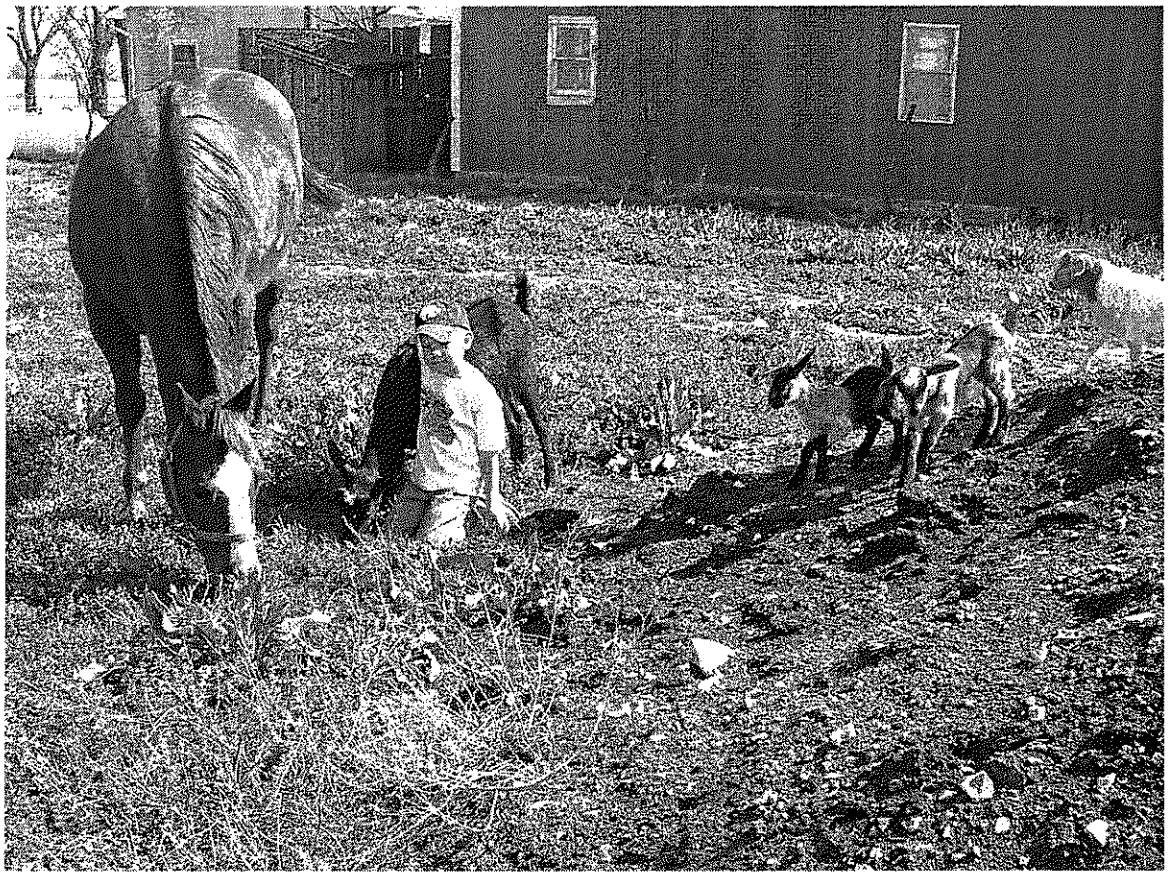

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