

Livestock

New mom all aflutter over avian flu



ON THE EDGE OF COMMON SENSE

By BAXTER BLACK, DVM

AVIAN flu, which has yet to appear in the United States, remains a frequent topic of television, radio and print publications. Oversaturation of frightening headlines can result in public apathy, but it can also heighten awareness in supersensitive people.

Susu is a new mother. A career woman with company health insurance and a loving husband. She read the books, took the lessons, watched the video and bore a beautiful baby boy named Leopold.

Leopold has lived his first 18 months as if he were Prince Charles' firstborn — cooed over, mentally stimulated, abundantly loved and protected.

Protected? Did I say protected? With every all-natural, Dr. Seuss-approved, boneless, childproof, soft and fluffy, nonallergenic, paranoid restriction followed to the letter.

One day, Aunt Bea invited Susu and Leopold on a trip to the zoo.

"He won't have any contact with the animals, will he?" asked Susu. "I've read about the threat of foot-and-mouth disease, rabies, tuberculosis, brucellosis and mad cow disease!"

Aunt Bea explained that the animals were all in cages, and they wouldn't actually get close to the inmates.

"Yes, but monkeys throw their droppings, ya know, and what if an elephant sneezed! He could catch elephantiasis!" Susu warned.

With a stroller packed full of tinfoil, raincoats, an umbrella and a blue plastic tarp, they entered the zoo. Leopold was wrapped in a hooded pullover. He looked like a tree frog in a tube sock.

The zoo pathway was lined with trees full of birds, squawking, cackling, whistling, hooting, shrieking and chirping.

"Oh no!" said Susu, clutching little Leopold. "What about avian flu!"

Aunt Bea reassured Susu that she was worrying too much. After they had moved from under the trees, away from the ornithic cacophony, she persuaded Susu to uncover Leopold's little head.

Standing in front of the rhino cage under a sparkling sky, Susu finally relaxed and stepped back to take a snapshot of Aunt Bea holding Leopold. Bea lifted Leopold high up in the air as if to show him his kingdom. Streaking from behind an errant cloud like a dive-bomber, a lone feathered straffer crossed above the family and lightened his load. Just as the camera snapped, the laser-guided projectile splatted noisily square on top of Leopold's baby-haired noggin!

The photo on close-up showed a startled Aunt Bea, a rhino horn and a smiling baby Leopold with what looked like a fried egg on his head. Handiwipes: \$2.39 a box. Photo: priceless!

Life's a highway

I like vegetarians. I like organic farmers, mule people, purebred breeders, heelers,

bankers, equine practitioners, county agents, cat lovers, cowboy poets.

I pick on them all, of course, because they all, at one time or another, hold their hand up in front of their face and dare me: "Bet ya can't hit my hand before I move it!"

But, some would say the most frequent subject of my poems and stories is cowboys. They're right. Unfortunately, it's like shooting myself in the foot. I've probably written 100 stories about

cowboys getting bucked off, run over, bit, kicked, stomped, thrown, butted, dragged and keg-hauled for every one story about some wacko environmentalist or animal-rights lunatic.

Nevertheless, I get an e-mail attack for carrying my dog in the back of the pickup on a TV show, a critical letter because I imply that farmed salmon is as good for your heart as wild salmon and indignant retorts from people who take themselves quite seriously. But cow-

boys, they just say, "Ya know that story where the cow jumps in the pickup with the guy, that happened to me, too." Which goes to show, as Jim used to say, "That you don't have to be humble to be humiliated."

How could you not like a vegetarian? It would be like not liking a monk, a Libertarian party candidate or a dairyman raising Jersey cows. Ya gotta hand it to 'em. They're swimmin' upstream livin' life the hard way.

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