

Feature Bio – “Papi” By Char Hakes

Papi, short for “Papyrus”, was raised on one of the big llama and alpaca breeding ranches in Montana’s Bitterroot Valley. The ranchers surrendered Papi, among some other llamas and alpacas, to *Safe Haven* in 2004 when they decided to get out of the rapidly declining business.

Soon after, Papi was adopted out to a wonderful family that had llamas and sheep. The family continued interacting with their

critters as usual and this went well for a while. Eventually, much to our surprise and dismay, Papi began showing signs of aggression toward the owners, often charging after them. Despite their stereotype as being poor guard animals, this feisty alpaca was out to prove everyone wrong!

Early one morning in March 2008, I got a phone call that Papi had jumped on one of his owners and knocked her down. If her husband had not been there to whack Papi with a bucket, she would have been severely hurt.

I discussed the situation very thoroughly with Papi’s shaken owners, who had by then isolated Papi in a pen by himself. The plan was that I would pick him up and take him to our vet in Missoula to be euthanized. Upon arriving at their place, we discussed the situation one more time and confirmed the plan.

However, on the long drive up to the vet, I had a change of heart and decided that *Safe Haven* would give Papi one more chance. We’re always telling people that alpacas are



Papi – A Suri Alpaca

too small to be good guard animals, but I think Papi wanted to prove us wrong. I had a sinking feeling that he was trying to guard the sheep and got way over zealous and bossy about it.

Since he's been at *Safe Haven* this second time, Papi's demeanor has improved and he generally gets along with his current herd. But, he still can be bossy around the other critters. When I begin haltering other alpacas in his group, for example, Papi must be haltered first and tied. Otherwise his guarding instincts kick in, resulting in a commotion that could have easily been avoided.

I always have to be on alert around Papi and we do not allow anyone to get close to him, especially children. Papi is a permanent resident who has been given a second chance. AND – he better not blow it! We are doing our best to learn how to control Papi so he can enjoy Sanctuary life to its fullest.