

Feature Bio – “Salt”

By Char Hakes

During the nine wonderful months we had Salt with us at *Safe Haven*, we sadly never captured him in a photo. Little did we know that we would lose this charming fellow so soon after he arrived. Even though he was 20 years young, he was full of energy and spirit. He was a tall, white llama with one brown eye and one blue eye – a very distinctive look – and just the sweetest disposition. He came to us with his two brothers, “Cocoa” and “Shorty”, during the summer 2008 when the fourth member of his herd was killed by a wolf and the owners wanted to get the remaining three llamas out of harm’s way. Llama attacks by wolves in certain parts of the Bitterroot Valley had been on the rise and the risk of a repeat wolf visit was just too great.



So it happened in March 2009. I had been sick for a few days and our right-hand volunteer offered to feed all the *Safe Haven* animals for me for a couple days. On the second day, she reluctantly called me around 2:00 pm to report that Salt was down and two other males were climbing on and harassing him. She said it looked like Salt was dying. I went right over to the ranch and shooed the boys out of the pasture so I could tend to him.

Three weeks prior to this episode, our veterinarian, Dr. Rollette Pruyn (we all call him “Rollette”), had to pull one of Salt’s back teeth because the root had been sticking out of his gum. We had to keep an eye on him to make sure he was eating. Each day I gave him several cups of llama pellets and either alfalfa or grass hay. After about five days in the barn I finally let him join the rest of the herd in the big pasture. I kept an eye on Salt, and although he became thin and dehydrated, he still had some sparkle in his eyes. After all this, I was not surprised when I got the call.

Rollette could not make it to the ranch until later that afternoon, but directed us to give Salt some Banamine to relieve the pain. We brought him water and some soft “pellet

mush” we made up, but he was mostly thirsty and preferred to drink out of a puddle. I noticed at one point that he was looking in all directions, apparently saying his good-byes. This is something I’ve seen failing llamas do so many times. At least Salt was walking, though somewhat wobbly, and getting up and down by himself when we left him at about 3:30 pm.

I headed back to the ranch with my granddaughter at 4:30 pm and tried to keep Salt as comfortable as possible – a few times thinking he was going to snap out of this. Rollette arrived at 6:30 pm with his assistant. They noted his temperature had dropped and his lower lip hung down. Upon checking his mouth further, Salt had no teeth left to eat with. We could either tube feed him for the rest of his life or put him down. I knew Salt wouldn’t like to be tube fed and I had to let him go.

Rollette and his assistant waited while I went home to fetch my trailer and when I got to the ranch, Salt was ready. Rollette gently put his arm around Salt’s neck and guided him into the trailer. I watched as the serum was injected, as he went down and as the assistant held his sweet head in her lap. As Rollette listened to Salt’s heart slowly fade, my heart just sank.

Cocoa and Shorty were lying down in the big pasture and watched as we drove out the gate with trailer in tow and me crying my eyes out. We will miss Salt’s great personality and his undoubtedly unique view of the world through his beautiful, mismatched eyes. But we are grateful we got to share even a short nine months of his life with him.

Rest in peace, you sweet old guy. Your memory will always be in our hearts.