

Finding Paradise

Linda Burk, September 2023

Jake and Sarah were happily settled on their newly acquired farm in Canby, Oregon. They both thought it was paradise. Jake decided that at 58 years old it was time to retire from his job with the gas company in Pennsylvania. Sarah was ready to retire from teaching after 30 years. Their dream was to move to a more eco-friendly place and raise sheep. Both had researched the best breed of sheep and were glad to add ten ewes to the 185,000 sheep in Oregon. They wanted to add more animals but decided to start with Blackie, the trained sheep dog, and a donkey named Daisy who grazed with the ewes and protected them from coyotes and other predators.



Jake's favorite activity was flying his ultralight plane. He and Sarah spent many hours in the air surveying the land to find the best acreage to buy. The place they found had a 10 room farmhouse, a barn and a large shed on ten acres of pasture land, a pond and some woods with a variety of old growth trees. Their move from Harrisburg went smoothly. The franklin stove had kept the house cozy as they adapted to the cold wet winters of Oregon. Jake and Sarah were glad to see Spring come and the horse trailer with the delivery of the ten Suffolk ewes. Sarah knew it would be heartbreaking to sell the lambs, and vowed not to get attached to them. They had Jewish and Muslim friends who would purchase the lambs for holiday meals.

A loud rapping on their door startled them. As they peeked out the window they saw a scruffy old man with a rifle. Jake cautiously opened the door. "I'm your neighbor, Joe" the gravelly voiced old man mumbled. "One of my sheep was killed by wolves. I saw a couple of wolves in your woods and I'm aiming to take them out." "Wait a minute" exclaimed Jake. "How do you know it was a wolf?" Joe just shook his head. "The neighbors are getting together tomorrow to get rid of those varmints!" yelled Joe. Jake asked "Did the wolves eat the whole sheep?" "No just killed it and left most of it."

"Where did this happen?" "Up on the ridge" "Could it have been a coyote?" Asked Jake "I doubt it. The wolves are moving through to Hells Canyon." Joe was irritated with all the questions and slammed the door on the way out.

Jake understood how valuable wolves are to the ecosystem and was troubled with this plan. He knew the wolves would never leave any of the lamb uneaten. He talked it over with Sarah and decided to take a ride in their ultralight plane. They flew for several hours checking out the neighbors herds of sheep. About dusk they flew over Joe's herd and spotted a mongrel dog running toward the sheep. The dog jumped on a lamb and grabbed it by the neck. Shaking it to death the mongrel began to eat it. Sarah pointed the rifle at the dog as the plane circled lower. With one shot the dog was killed.

Early In the morning Sarah and Jake drove over to Joe's farm. The men were gathered and ready to hunt for the wolves. Jake quickly explained what they saw yesterday. Jake and Sarah were astonished when Joe leveled his rifle at them. "That was my best hunting dog you

bastard.” Jake got in front of Sarah and calmly told Joe to put down the gun. Old Joe was so mad and grief stricken that he pulled the trigger, Jake fell clutching his leg. Sarah flew over to Joe and grabbed the gun. Joe was stunned. The other farmers grabbed Joe and told him to calm down. None of the men tried to help Jake. Sarah quickly stopped the blood from the flesh wound. The men slowly left without saying a word.

The next day as Jake and Sarah were eating lunch Jake said “Maybe this was a bad idea to move here.” Hearing a knock at the door Sarah sighed. “What next?” When she opened the door a woman was standing there with a steaming apple pie. “I’m Joe’s wife, Alice. I’m sorry we got off on the wrong foot. Joe is too embarrassed to come over. We aren’t bad folks. I told Joe his old mongrel dog has been killing our lambs for years, but he would never believe me. I hope we can be good neighbors. We need each other, especially around lambing time.” They invited Alice in and shared the pie. Alice told them many stories about their time as sheep farmers.

Jake and Sarah decided it wasn’t quite paradise, but a good community of folks with delicious apple pie and willingness to help each other is close to paradise.