

2018: What a Wild Ride!

By Mark

The year started off with a wonderful affirmation: you all really came through for us, meeting Shii Koei's fundraising goal and making possible the "Duane Martin 2 for 1 Protein Program" in Gardner. Thank you, thank you, thank you!



After record moisture in 2017, 2018 ended up being the driest of our 11 years here. We received perhaps 10 inches of moisture for the year, which is the official definition of a desert. The dry and warm winter bled into a dry, warm spring, followed by tremendous winds and the biggest garden bug pest plague we've experienced.

We gave our beloved wether, Cholla, Maple's son, to some ranchers east of Pueblo in March. Cholla is a sweet boy, but he had no sense of his size, how dangerous he had become for humans and how intimidating to the other goats. We are so grateful he found a good situation.

April was very busy preparing garden beds with our newest addition to the Shii Koei team, Tilly-the-Rototiller! While she's still a bit of a bear to use, Tilly has made life so much better for us gardener types.

In May, a massive wave of grasshoppers devoured anything not covered. They were quickly followed by a strange creature called Blister Bugs which love to eat the spinach and chard family (and, fortunately, also grasshopper larvae). Harlequin Bugs, gorgeous multi-colored beetles, assaulted the garden in wave after wave from June thru October. Unfortunately, the only way to discourage their presence is to kill them by hand, one disgusting finger squeeze at a time.

May also, however, brought us two tremendous blessings in the form of intern alumni, Maureen Hanlon and Kaitlyn Duthie-Kannikkatt. Kaitlyn & Maureen were with us for 3 ½ months and made it possible for us to survive the toughest gardening season of our lives. We are thrilled to announce that last month they got engaged!



Kaitlyn, Maureen, and the inimitable Phil Collins

In June, Willow and her great-granddaughter, Luna, each had babies, triplets and twins, respectively. At first Willow would not feed her babies, we think because she didn't think she could properly manage three babies (let the weak one die first?). However after a few days of cajoling by us, all of the babies were fed. And poor Redwing, Willow's daughter (and Luna's grandmother), broke a leg while at pasture. Not knowing how to make a cast, we took her to our wonderful new vet in Walsenburg, Rosemary Nicoletta, who tended Redwing with such tender care. The leg

was in a cast for about 5 weeks. Redwing is all healed now, though she did lose a notch in the hierarchy.



The Spring Fire, photo courtesy of Huerfano County's own Heather Curtis Photography. Check her out on Facebook.

By the end of June, the bug plague lessened but the spring winds continued into summer, helping to spread the second largest fire in Colorado history. The Spring Fire came within a few miles of Shii Koeii, burning most of the trees and shrubs on nearby mountains. We were forced by the authorities to evacuate. With the help of the amazing Trujillo women, we evacuated the goat herd to the Trinidad fairgrounds, where

thoughtful staff supplemented our twice daily visits to milk, feed, and care for the goats. The humans were evacuated to Mark's mom, Marilyn's, home in Walsenburg where she generously and lovingly welcomed us and made us as comfortable as could be.

The fire postponed the Gardner and La Veta farmers markets a few weeks, and afterwards turnout was down at both. Due to the drought, the Town of La Veta made us move the market to Francisco street, a bit out of the way of regulars and visitors. We appreciate everyone who came out to support us and other vendors, thank you! And, although we had nothing to do with its establishment, and only got to participate a few times, we're thrilled to announce that Walsenburg now also has a thriving Farmers' Market on Fridays! Go Walsenburg!

With the trauma of the fire came some financial losses. However, we are grateful beyond words to all of you who gave so generously to stem the bleeding, providing us with necessary security for the rest of the year. Big hugs of thank yous to everyone for responding to our emergency appeal!

We are deeply thankful to report that, when we returned, Shii Koeii was still intact. The trauma of the fire stayed with us for a while. Luna, one of the mama goats, got

sick in response to the shock of being evacuated during the fire. It's taken a long while for her to completely heal.

But many people in the county had it much worse than we did. They lost animals, homes, outbuildings and thousands of acres of property. The current danger for people living near the burned areas, especially the town of La Veta, is that the spring and summer rains will cause hugely destructive flooding. The healing will take some time.

By the end of August we found a great home nearby for the three baby goat boys born in June. We kept the two girls, Alamosa and Andromeda. They're growing so well, and are very close to their moms.



Willow and Alamosa, aka "Mini Dubs"

Unpredictable weather throughout the growing season culminated in one 20 minute hail storm in August. From our porch we watched the hail shred every leafy plant in the garden. Some vegetables came back; many just died. The hail was far worse in Gardner town and much more so in La Veta. Baseball-sized hail combined with north gusty winds destroyed windows, cars and even the inside of homes!

But August also brought us wonderful intern alumna Tegan Tyler for a visit, and she was a huge help, both physically and spiritually.

We tried to find interns to help us for the second half of the year, but were unsuccessful. It was a bit tough, and we had to push ourselves nearly to breaking to get through the farmers' market season. But come October, we were able to plant the garlic, finish the markets (with invaluable volunteer help from Arielle Penrod of La Veta), and we thanked the earth for this year's bounty, and held out our hopes for another season of sustenance, came rain or shine.

We were sad not to welcome any new interns in 2018. We had people contact us but none followed through with an application. The interest in farming, in making a commitment for more than a week, seems to be getting more rare each year, not only for us, but most farms with which we're in contact.

We designed a system in 2018 whereby if we didn't have any interns, the two of us could get the work done. We often didn't have a day off and some days had some intense pressure. Though we got through it, we'd love to have some committed help. Maureen and Kaitlyn were invaluable colleagues. Maybe we'll see new or returning interns in 2019?

Come fall, we were extremely grateful that intern alumna Zoe Wood chose to spend a month at Shii Koeii so the farmers could take our annual break. Zoe learned to milk the goats in record time, and they loved her. She did an amazing job, is sorely missed, and we hope she will return soon.

I'm proud that we survived the travails of 2018. But, as is proven over and over, we are only here because of the support from all of you reading this. Thank you.



Zoe, Alamosa and Raul. Photo courtesy of Zoe.

Shii Koeii Community Grows By (At Least) Two in 2019 **by Val**

We began Shii Koeii 11 years ago for one primary reason: to live in loving, healthy community with others, sharing our lives and work together intimately. With co-founders Danielle Short, David Baird and Camila Espinosa-Short, as well as the various interns, apprentices and guests who've spent time with us here over the years, we have been blessed to see some of that dream fulfilled.



I think Mom's shirt says it all.

This year we are extremely happy to report that our community will soon grow by two wonderful beings who plan to spend the rest of their lives here at Shii Koeii: Marilyn "The Pie Lady" Robinson, Mark's mom, and Carl The Cat, Marilyn's feline companion.

Marilyn, aka Mom, will be selling her house in Walsenburg this spring. Mark and Val, and Mark's sister Jen, will spend much of the late winter and early spring helping Mom get her house ready to sell, and sorting belongings as to what to keep, what

to release, and what to store. As excited as we are about Mom and Carl joining us, our joy is nothing compared to that of Raul The Cat (no relation). Raul, our lonely bachelor mouser, became good friends with Maureen and Kaitlyn's feline companion, Phil The Cat, last summer. Raul was pretty disconsolate when his buddy Phil left so we know that he will be thrilled to welcome another of his species back to the land. During a recent sleepover, the lads got on very well.

The long-term plan is to build an addition onto our strawbale house which can provide Marilyn with a private apartment of her own. In the interim, we will dedicate the two bedrooms on the east side of the house where interns and guests have traditionally stayed to Mom's private use, and she will share the kitchen, dining room, living room and bathroom in the oval with us.

We look forward to the prospect of more strawbale building. It's an amazing process, extremely earth-friendly and something almost anyone can do, and we love to teach others how to construct something so cost-efficient, energy-efficient and unique. Our hope is to host several workshops over the next two seasons for putting up the walls, adobe plastering, and pouring adobe floors. You will all receive invitations to these workshops, which will include delicious meals we provide and camping on the land.

However—and this is a BIG however—we can't possibly farm Shii Koeii and do all the non-workshop building (site preparation, post and beam construction, rough-in plumbing and electrical, roof building) by ourselves. **We are reaching out to former interns interested in strawbale building and a more in-depth apprenticeship on the farm to see if they would be interested in joining us.** We also welcome interest from extremely responsible, caring folks with some previous farm or ranch experience who have not yet been part of our community.

One of our greatest joys, despite the challenges, has been **training and supporting the next generation of farmers and homesteaders.** We are hopeful that, through our own networks, WWOOF, HelpX, and some other possibilities, we will draw to Shii Koeii this year between 1 and 4 folks who really want to commit some quality time and effort to farming and building. We would love to have returning interns join us, as they already know Shii Koeii and so we could go deeper with them, in terms of knowledge base and responsibilities. Helping bring the next generation online as farmers/homesteaders is one of the most rewarding things we do.

We are very excited to return to the La Veta and Gardner Farmers' Markets in 2019! Gardner Market will begin its 9th year in May! Unless someone else comes along who feels passionate about it, we will continue to manage the Gardner Market, as well as the Duane Martin 2 for 1 Protein Program, and, if funded, the 2 for 1 fruit and vegetable program. We are not certain who will be managing the La Veta Market this year, but if called upon to do so, we will gladly serve. John Costea has done a phenomenal job the past two years so there will be huge shoes to fill. We



Not content to be a great market manager, John is also a wonderful documentarian of the market. Thank you, John, for this lovely photo of our bread and cheese!

will continue to manage the 2 for 1 program in La Veta, if we receive adequate funding.



First-time mama Luna did a great job with her twins!

And finally, we so look forward to farming this year. The goats are doing well. We will be milking Willow and Luna through the summer, and making cheese from their gorgeous milk. Mark has finished the garden plan, seed inventory, and seed order. Val is super-excited about expanding the flower presence in the garden. We are optimistic that, given this is our second season back since our sabbatical, both our weed- and pest-apocalypses may be behind us.

A Few Things We've Learned Along the Way.....

- ◆ When we place our faith in people and the natural world we feel—and are—safer.
- ◆ Never force a goat to do something. It will not end well for either of you.
- ◆ One rooster is plenty for a flock of hens. Some days, he's entirely too much.
- ◆ Persistence pays off. Keep showing up. Again, and again, and again.
- ◆ Always have a back up of essentials like water pumps, gasoline, faucet gaskets, toilet paper and coffee. Especially coffee.
- ◆ When we plan to do a work project outside on a winter day, it will snow. A lot.
- ◆ You can't eat a view and a 4 wheel drive will get you stuck further from home and faster (these specific pearls of wisdom are thanks to Tom Kowal, who lived in this valley long before we ever had heard of it. Boy was he right).
- ◆ We've never been burned by an IOU.
- ◆ When planting don't get stuck on a schedule. Wait for mother nature. But when she you gives you an opening, run with it.
- ◆ On that note, get the seed in the ground. Nothing else you do for your garden matters if you don't do this.
- ◆ If you need help, say so. Shout it to the universe. It may not come in the form you expected, but it will come.
- ◆ If you have one plant, bugs will devour it. If you have 20 plants, bugs will devour one.
- ◆ Peeing outside never hurt anyone. Except in rattlesnake season. If you're not looking.

- ◆ Bears are extremely polite creatures. Unless it's 2 o'clock in the morning and they're in the mood for chicken.
- ◆ Coyotes are also very polite. They will come and greet you before eating one of your chickens in front of you.
- ◆ When trying to scare a rabbit out of the garden, do not throw a rock at her unless you were hoping to eat rabbit stew for dinner.
- ◆ Huerfano County may be cash poor, but it's is full of wealth. We are rich in skills, artistry and spirit.
- ◆ When building with strawbales, do not acquire said strawbales until you are ready to build. The tarps of the world will thank you.
- ◆ Always, ALWAYS have someone hold the ladder.
- ◆ Don't build an adobe exterior wall at an angle. It will one day melt away in a single storm.
- ◆ Don't skimp on your driveway maintenance. Safe access lowers blood pressure.
- ◆ Community is the most difficult thing to create, nurture, and sustain that we have ever attempted. It's also the most worthwhile.



Marvelous Maureen, Carrie "How Can I Help?" Reece, and Mark eating God-knows-what

- ◆ With tender appreciation, this earth will provide a bounty of food for many.