

HUMAN-ANIMAL RELATIONSHIPS

I've just come in from trimming Atlas's hooves and since it always gives me such a good feeling, I think I'll write an "Animal relationships" article right now. My relationship with Atlas (who is an ox, by the way) is based on trust. He feels total trust towards me--I feel guarded trust towards him. He is "affection trained" and craves attention more than anything else.

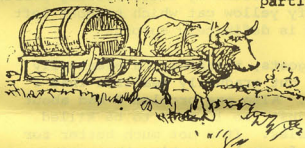
It's sort of a dance we do, Atlas and I, at hoof trimming time. For several days beforehand I make a note of what time of day he usually is lying down with nothing on his mind but an occasional burp. It's been 2 o'clock lately, so a glance at the clock and out I go, rasp and nippers in hand.

I approach from below him so that he can see me coming from a long way off. "Stay down, stay down," I murmur as I walk up and show him the tools. I'm in luck; he doesn't get up. He stretches out his head for the ritual greeting. I scrape the nippers back and forth under his chin. He sighs with pleasure.

I begin with his back feet...nip, nip--he swings his head around for more scratches. "No! Atlas." Nip, nip, he gives up and stretches his neck out flat on the ground. "Good boy, good boy Atlas," I say in that ridiculous squeaky high voice. (I'm glad no one but Atlas can hear me.)

He signs and moans softly. I can't tell for sure, but this rasping and nipping must hurt or annoy him in some way. He swings his head around and withdraws his foot. I know I shouldn't, but I give in and scratch the handle of the rasp up and down on his forehead. "Give me your foot, Atlas." I tug gently and he stretches it out, rolling over slightly in order to do so.

We dance in this way; I nip, he moans, I nip, he stretches, I scratch. At last the dance is done. I climb on his back, partly just to see if I can do it and partly because it's as close as I can come to giving him a hug.



-- Kathy Montan

JUST A REMINDER that we would welcome articles, stories, and drawings (black and white, if possible) from the kids within our membership. They can be short or long, fiction or non-fiction. Alas, children are seldom represented on the pages of our newsletter. Send contributions to Valerie Ingram, Route 2, Box 260, Canton, NY 13617 or drop them to her attention at the St. Lawrence University library.

