

Celebrating the Cria ...Twice!

By Sharon Parsons

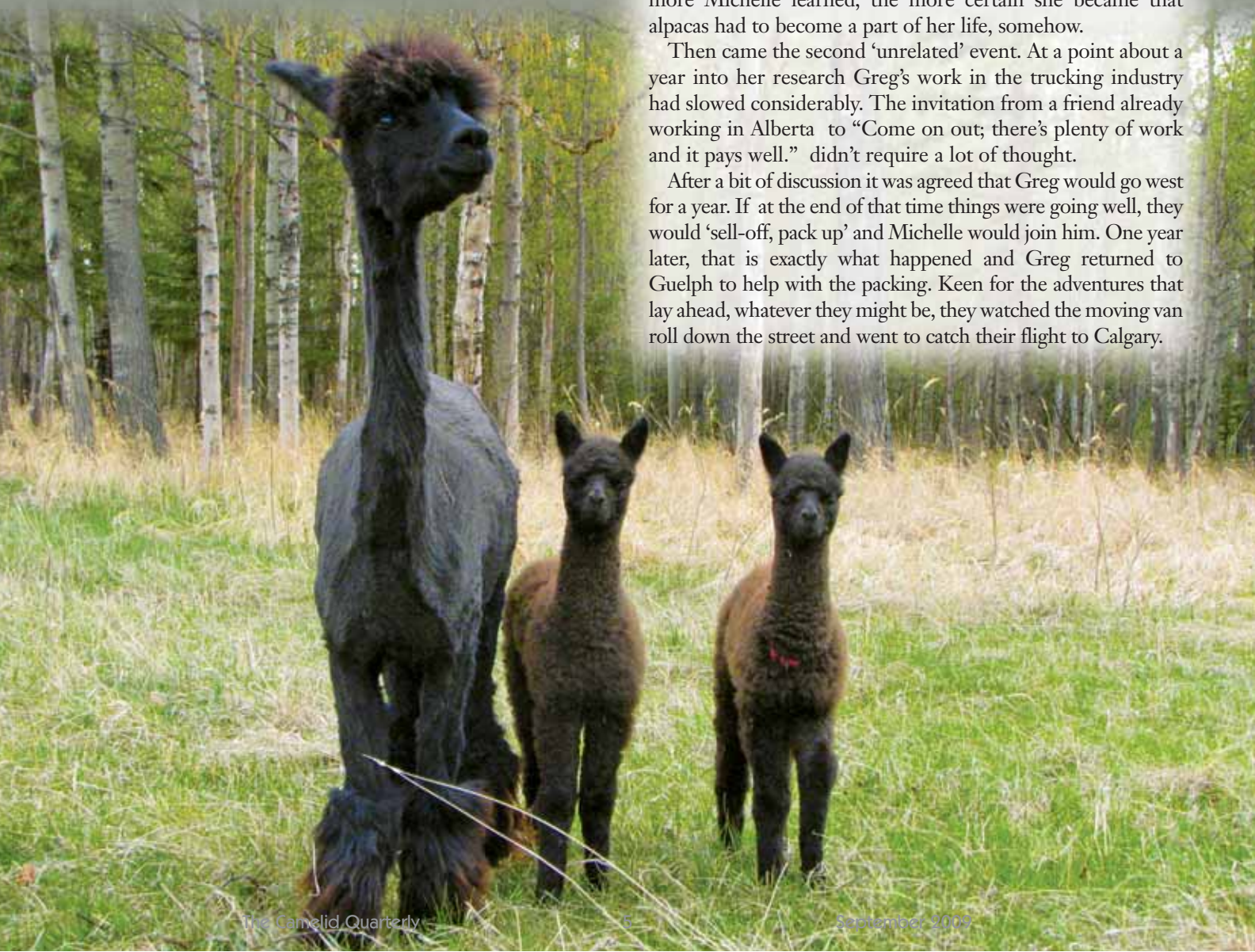
Five years ago the terms “crimp, conformation, cria and orgle” would have meant little, if anything, to Michelle Rympel and her husband, Greg Studzinski. Five years ago they were living on a half-acre plot of land forty-five minutes outside of Guelph, Ontario, Canada. The next thing Michelle knew, on a cold, windy morning in May, she was leaping from a vehicle, that had not yet rolled to a complete stop, and making a mad dash for the pasture.

Let's back up for a minute. It was a series of seemingly unrelated events that had brought Michelle and Greg from 'Point A' to 'Point B' beginning with a television show. Michelle happened upon a documentary on cougar attacks including an attack on a herd of alpacas. Fortunately the breeder was making use of guard llamas and the outcome was not as disastrous as it could have been. Alpacas? Guard llamas? The uniqueness of the animals, and their potential as a manageable, income producing livestock, was all Michelle needed to get the ideas flowing.

For the next two years, including every lunch break while at work, she was on the internet, doing research. The research, of course, included visits to and discussions with alpaca breeders like Margaret MacDonald of Blood Moon Alpacas, and Lauraine and Bob Bijou of Alberta Rose Alpacas. The more Michelle learned, the more certain she became that alpacas had to become a part of her life, somehow.

Then came the second 'unrelated' event. At a point about a year into her research Greg's work in the trucking industry had slowed considerably. The invitation from a friend already working in Alberta to “Come on out; there's plenty of work and it pays well.” didn't require a lot of thought.

After a bit of discussion it was agreed that Greg would go west for a year. If at the end of that time things were going well, they would 'sell-off, pack up' and Michelle would join him. One year later, that is exactly what happened and Greg returned to Guelph to help with the packing. Keen for the adventures that lay ahead, whatever they might be, they watched the moving van roll down the street and went to catch their flight to Calgary.





*Who is more surprised?
Baby Serena meets the newborn twins,
Pandora and Prada*

They had already decided they were going to blend house hunting with a well deserved vacation and planned to use bed and breakfast accommodations instead of motels. Their first stop was in Pincher Creek, near Waterton Lakes National Park and the border between Canada and the United States. It was here Michelle saw her first bald eagle and learned to fly fish. After a quick trip across the border into Montana, where Michelle saw her first large (1,500 acres) cattle ranch, they began making their way north, toward Edmonton, continuing to stay at bed and breakfasts along the way.

There were the adventures one often associates with 'family vacations'; getting lost, ending up on a forestry trunk road that seemed to take them 'the other side of nowhere' and sleeping in their vehicle. Fortunately, after that cramp-inducing sleep, they were rewarded at the first restaurant they found with the best steak and eggs...ever.

Eventually they arrived in the Edmonton area only to discover that everything fitting their dream bore a 'Sold' sign. In the end they bought a townhouse, so they would have something to call home. While waiting to take possession Michelle and Greg continued their search. During the trip from Edmonton to Breton (to look at another property) they had stayed at a bed and breakfast in Pidgeon Lake. It was as they were heading back to the B&B that the next unrelated event occurred.

Greg spotted a private 'For Sale' sign at

the side of the road. Michelle was tired, had had enough looking and wanted to drive on but Greg insisted they take a quick look. That quick look became Fancy Fleece Farm. It had everything: out-buildings, fenced pastures, a treed area for shade, a pond - even a house. At sixteen acres, it was considerably larger than what they had left behind in Guelph. The only things missing were separation fences and alpacas.

Two weeks after moving in, while Greg returned to work, Michelle was on the hunt for alpacas. She first visited Mooseberry Meadows, home to Donn and Jerry Baker. It was a worthwhile visit even though every alpaca Michelle inquired about was 'not for sale'. This, however, reassured her the time she had spent in research was time well spent and that she did have a good eye for quality alpacas. In the end the Bakers redirected her to Karen and Les Wells of Sweet

Northern Farms. Which brings us to one of the main characters of this story.

One of the alpacas Greg and Michelle purchased from Sweet Northern Farm was SNF Black Pearl; a beautiful black huacaya born in 2004. She had been bred before her arrival at Fancy Fleece Farm and, in 2006, delivered Ferrero, a light brown male. Pearl is an alpaca with personality; she doesn't like to poop in the barn, spitting is not her 'thing' and she is an incorrigible flirt. Even while pregnant, with obviously no interest in mating, she continued to sashay past the males to tease them.

On to the next unrelated event.

In 2008 Michelle was the lucky bidder in the Pacafiesta Stud Auction, for a breeding with Tell Vivace, a champion herdsire from Tell Tale Farm. Pearl was the willing recipient and, after passing her spit checks, everyone settled back to await the outcome.

In the meantime Michelle had become quite adept at caring for the farm and the animals while Greg was away at work. She had even made it through the winter plowing snow and hauling water while pregnant herself. Then, when their daughter was nine months old, Greg injured his back and had to take time away from his job. At the same time a position became available at the Village Market in Westeros and Michelle and Greg traded places.

On this brisk May 12th morning however, their thoughts were concentrated on Pearl; she was already 375 days pregnant, well beyond the average gestation period. At one point they had questioned whether she was indeed pregnant; with her tall, lean



Mother, Black Pearl, obviously ecstatic over the birth of her new twins.



five hour mark they received colostrum and after six hours they were nursing on their own. The girls, who have since been named Prada and Pandora, are mirror images of each other; the ear on one flopped to the right while on the other it flopped to the left. (The ears have since been wrapped and all is well.)

In five short years Michelle and Greg have gone from a small plot of land in Ontario, to full-fledged alpaca breeders in Alberta living the 'green dream'. They have also been gifted with one of the rarest of events in an alpaca breeder's experience; the birth of full-term, twin, perfect, black, female crias.

To learn more about Pearl, Prada and Pandora and Fancy Fleece Farm, visit Greg and Michelle at www.fancyfleecefarm.com

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frame and full fleece it was difficult to tell, just by looking at her. It had been confirmed, she was expecting. The cria was simply taking its sweet time.

As Michelle raced toward Pearl to check on her she spotted a small, dark, inactive 'lump' on the ground. As she drew closer she saw it was a cria and feared the worst; they were too late returning home and it had not survived the cold. Suddenly she spotted another dark 'lump' about fifteen feet away but this one appeared to be trying to lift its head. Michelle called to Greg for help

and, with each of them scooping up a cria, they raced for the barn with Pearl humming close behind. They got a heater going to keep everyone warm, put out some feed for Pearl and began to rub the cria with towels. It was then they realized the crias' covering was still sticky so they had not been on the ground that long. Time was on their side.

After the crias had been dried Greg and Michelle sat back, let Pearl be 'mom' and waited, and waited... it seemed like forever. Then, after four hours the crias were on their feet; at the



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Black Pearl and her twins



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