

The Christmas Lamb

Hi _____

Freestyle Area - Let your parent know why you sent this story & what's happening that's new in your life.

Kia ora - For most of my childhood I couldn't read, write or talk. When I was 10 years old a couple of major changes occurred in my life & one of the outcomes was that I found the ability to read. Suddenly I could escape from my world which was full of upheaval and abuse into a world of my choosing by simply opening a book.

I didn't do well at school & so when I was in prison, I started to do re-do my school work. I've only recently finished my NCEA Level 2 English. Before doing NCEA I had no idea how to write properly or where to put all the grammar stuff.

Anyway - I guess what I'm trying to say is that I'm a long way off being a good writer & so I'm asking for your patience when I don't tell a story 'quite right.' Also, never think I'm judging in my stories especially like when I talk about gang stuff etc.

Finding ourselves & then being able to live the life we want to, can be a hard & long road. During my years I've seen so many of my whanau stuck in the 'same old same old' & of course I came across so many gifted & talented youth in prison. For this reason, one theme that does run through a lot of my stories is 'finding yourself.'

The other thing I want to add in here is that when I was a kid & then a young adult, I had no idea how many awesome & exciting things there are to do in this world - I mean how could I? I'd been a foster kid from 8 weeks old & all I knew was a whole lot of pain - but trust me on this. Take the time now, while you're in prison to explore your mind & make some plans & goals. This is definitely a journey you can share over the on-coming years with your kids.

Arohanui to you from Darby

The Christmas Lamb

Most of our farm is benign and peaceful. That is except for the shelter belt that runs for about a kilometre along our far western boundary. Along this boundary the scrubby trees from our neighbour's farm reach over and merge with our pines to form a dark archway all along the fence line. I find this natural arch useful for when I do my daily check, looking for sick or dead stock - as its easy walking.

Today the weather is bright and warm. But under this canopy of interlocked trees I always feel the need to petition for protection. The atmosphere is cold, hostile and still.

We stock Pitt Island wild sheep and their darker wool makes it harder for me to find them. Wild sheep know how to lie still and not make a noise as I pass by.

Some movement has caught my eye. I can see with surprise that a beam of sunlight has found its way through the canopy illuminating a white ram lamb. Having seen it - I stand and watch. I look for its mother. I listen for her - I try to feel for her. But she is not here. This lamb is alone. It is white. We have brown lambs. He is not from our farm. He must have made his way from the farm next door.

I scoop the treasure up and place him carefully under my top and jacket - next to my skin. I can feel how cold he is. When a young lamb bleats - it sounds very like a human new-born. This lamb makes the smallest noise that my ears - already attuned to, listens for. He is very weak.

My husband and I married late. We had hoped for a child. I hurry home with my prize and crank the fire up. I lay the lamb on a towel and roughly rub his body with another to get his circulation going. I make up some formula and gently tease his mouth with the teat I warmed in my mouth. I cradle and croon to the wee lamb.

Later in the afternoon my husband admires my care and skill as I care for the sickly lamb. He rubs my shoulders as I sit with it. I am in-turn admiring the lamb. It seems to be rallying.

It is Christmas day. We name the lamb, Christmas lamb.

During the night I get up every two hours to feed him and to make sure he is dry. In between times I lie there listening out for the smallest sound. My eyes are wide open in the night.

He does okay. Until about 5.00am. I hear a bleat. I know about lambs and the sounds they make. I can tell a lot from a bleat or baa. This one wasn't good.

Like a shot I was out of bed. I took care not to wake my husband. He works hard and needs his sleep.

My lamb was having trouble shitting and that is not a good thing. I get a warm wet cloth and rub his bottom. He makes a pitiful sound. My heart sinks. A few - maybe four or five golden pea sized pellets come out. But it's not enough.

During the day he gets worse. As his pain grows stronger - I get an indescribable fear. This lamb is perfect. He is beautiful and so innocent. In yet he is dying painfully. It doesn't make sense. I can't figure out how this could happen. And I can't help him. I can't ease his pain.

When my husband comes home. He looks sad when he sees the confusion and pain in my eyes. He is sad both for the lamb and for me. He knows how I feel about it. My husband likes to protect me from anything unpleasant. But he's wise enough to know that he can't. We live on a farm.

When the lamb started a rapid pain filled series of bleats. I sought out my husband. He was already prepared. The gun case was open. I laid my white ram lamb gently on his towel on the sweet-smelling grass under the hot sun. I talked to him as a mother would. I told him he was the bravest and the most beautiful lamb. I held him and turned my head.

One minute he was alive. A shudder, and then gone. He is in my husband's arms. His little legs with his perfect little hooves are sticking out - motionless.

I had to hang out some washing on the line the next day. A couple of the pig dogs had jumped the fence. They were prowling around the spot where I'd laid the towel. Their lustful tongues were lolling, and their eyes were glazed – just another death to investigate.

Just another dead little lamb.

Kia ora. When I wrote this story, I had the young boy who drowned in the Mediterranean Sea in September 2015 in mind. The boy's name was Aylan Kurdi & he was three-years-old. One image that stayed with me is seeing young Aylan's body being carried up the beach with his wee legs sticking out.

A few years ago, my husband & I had a small farm on the Chatham Islands. Having grown up in suburban areas I hadn't had a lot to do with farm animals and stock. One of my seasonal roles was to watch out for any abandoned lambs & then rear them. I soon learnt that sheep are awesome creatures. Sadly, this made it harder for me when our stock became sick, attacked by dogs – or when they needed to go into our freezer! One lamb in particular haunted me & this story is about both him and Aylan.

Why? It wasn't until that I got to know our stock that I realised that they all had their own personalities, but I'd become so desensitised to farm animals because to me they were simply 'food.' A part of me also recognises that I'd also become desensitised to all the refugees I'd seen on telly – until I saw Aylan's little body.

The other thing I had in my mind when I wrote this story was the media. Many of us Opals know first hand how the media can treat you & so to see young Aylan's death & his body displayed for all to see struck me as disrespectful – not because we didn't need to know what was going on (because we do) but more that his death was just a big news story & that nothing would change to help these people, because in another week or two, there would be some other big news story & Aylan would be forgotten. That's what our hunting pig dogs looked like as they sniffed about where we'd killed the Christmas Lamb, they looked like the media, greedy & insatiable.



This is a picture of 'The Real Christmas Lamb' – he was actually a little black sheep as we stocked Pitt Island Wild Sheep (Marino Saxon Cross) – I just made him white in the story.