

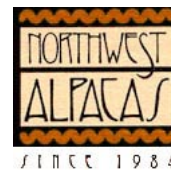


## **A Conversation with Don Julio Barreda**

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By Mike Safley

1994



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Arequipa's El Tourista Hotel provokes a colonial image created by pink stucco walls, framed by high arches, open to broad verandas which give way to green lawns and giant, gnarled shade trees. The hotel, one of few still owned by the Peruvian Government, is set in Arequipa's finest residential neighborhood. During my recent visit to Peru, Don Julio agreed to meet me for lunch at El Tourista. Much to our surprise, just as the waiter delivered cold lemonade and beer to our table on the veranda, Dr. Walter Bravo appeared from an arriving taxi.

Walter was in Peru to screen the alpaca import, on behalf of the ILR's alpaca registry and screening committee (ARSC). He was on his way to the quarantine station in Tacna and agreed to join us for lunch. For the next few hours, I was the beneficiary of fascinating oral history of Peru's alpaca industry.

We talked of Don Julio's first alpaca experiences, the creation of his herd, and the genetic selection techniques he employed building the herd; how the land reforms tore apart Peru's commercial alpaca herds, and the suri's current circumstance in the Altiplano. We also spoke of what the future might bring for alpaca breeders worldwide.

I took the opportunity of our lunch to persuade Don Julio to be the guest of Camelids of Delaware (CODI) and Pet Center, Inc. (PCI) in Michigan at the Peruvian Elite alpaca sale, September 2 through 5, 1994, and to attend Alpaca Fest International in Spokane, Washington September 10-11-12, 1994. In Michigan, he will present the alpaca which were bred at his "Estanza," Accoyo, and exported for sale to the U.S. At Alpaca Fest, Don Julio together with Jodi Sleeper, will judge the ALSA sanctioned alpaca show. ALSA has recently certified Barreda as an alpaca judge. This show will mark the very first judging of North American Camelids by a Peruvian judge and will feature ONE THOUSAND OUNCES OF SILVER as prize money for the winning alpacas.

The ceiling fans of the El Tourista slowly stirred the air as Senor Julio Barreda, who turns 75 years of age soon, began telling the story of his herd's creation. "About 10 years prior to my gaining autonomy over my family's alpaca herds, a disturbing trend had been set in motion. Buyers of alpaca fleece, which up to that time was predominantly of the darker colors, began to require that 10 percent of any lot purchased be white fleece. Year after year, this percentage was increased. You need not be clairvoyant to visualize the outcome of this revolution in the market place," says Don Julio, "the results were disastrous!"

Why, you ask? "Growers bred only for white alpaca, so the wide variety of color which historically characterized our herds, disappeared. With it went the fineness, density and lustre which made our alpaca both beautiful and productive." Don Julio continued by explaining, "The white alpaca which repopulated the herds were of low quality, the result of a selection process which focused on only one color. Barreda finished by commenting, "By the middle 1940's the alpaca industry was a mess!"

The resulting "mess," as Don Julio termed it, became the subject of study by the young man who was about to assume responsibility for his family's alpaca herds. He could find no bibliographic information about alpaca breeding. People who had been in the business for many years were interested exclusively in the old ways. They believed their alpacas to be the best possible and no longer cared to learn how they might improve their stock.

Don Julio's uncles bragged of fleeces weighing many kilos, but he doubted their claims since the only

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scales they ever used were their arms. Shearing took place every two years, and this practice yielded five to seven percent less than if the alpaca were shorn annually. The plain fact, as Don Julio saw it, was that fewer than one alpaca in ten measured up to the breeders' boasts of high production.

Don Julio took it upon himself to visit every major alpaca ranch in the Puno district. He began, in secret, to draw up a plan of action. Finally, in 1946 he was awarded his patrimony--Accoyo and the Barreda family alpacas. He immediately began implementing his secret plan of action, which contained three dynamic steps.

### STEP ONE - "DISCRIMINATE THE TWO VARIETIES"

Don Julio believed suri and huacaya could not, at that time, be considered separate breeds because they were being raised in total promiscuity. A huacaya would readily produce a suri and vice versa. "At some point I got discouraged," says Barreda, "and began to think that it would be decades before I obtained separate biotypes with fixed characteristics." His experiment was also ridiculed by breeders who believed, among other things, the product of mixed breeding produced better fleece characteristics. They laughed at the fences Don Julio built to separate the breeds, saying they were wasteful. They also felt his system of pasture rotation and parasite control was unnecessary.

"I persevered; intense analytical observation had told me that the product of interbreeding was not heavier, finer fleece. It is true that at first look, intermediate breeds may appear to have a more voluminous fleece, but this did not mean it was heavier or finer," said Don Julio. "Finally, after less than a decade, I began experiencing the payoff--my cria, both suri and huacaya, were born with characteristics which accentuated those of their parents. The intermediate phenotypes began to disappear." Don Julio believes the success of Step One was primarily due to his use of well-defined males, both suri and huacaya, which were born only to his herd.

"The experience of my first decade of alpaca breeding has served me well. I believe that when any herd is started it, should begin only with the finest machos." To emphasize this statement, Don Julio went on to explain his experience at Step Two of his plan.

### STEP TWO - "RAISE PRODUCTION"

This meant adding more density and weight to the alpaca's fleece. Don Julio found that a large part of this goal was established during Step One, "Since each cria born was proof of his sire's quality."

"In pursuit of this second goal, I decided to purchase "refresadores" (refreshers), machos from the best farms in the region, hoping to accelerate the process of increasing fleece yield. But my experience with this approach," says Don Julio, "was so negative that I decided to stick with my own males."

While visiting the other farms to purchase the refresher males, Don Julio learned that the breeders were primarily interested in the weight of the fleece. "Most of them were working with strong to medium wool breeders," he says. Few if any were trying to improve the "texture" or fineness of the wool.

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“I believe that the world-wide prestige of the alpaca’s wool is related to how delicate the texture is,” says Don Julio, who follows up the preceding statement by pointing out the intense competition of alpaca breeders world-wide, and stating, “A small mistake in the matter of fibre fineness could imperil our (Peru’s) national production. New farms in more developed countries can count on sophisticated technology and infrastructure whose sole aim will be the best possible product from both suri and huacaya. Peru needs to be vigilant in this message of fibre fineness and texture.” With this perspective, Barreda conceptualized Step Three of his plan, fine fibre in high volume. STEP THREE - “FINE FIBRE”

The final step, after discriminating the suri and huacaya breed and adding fleece density to each, was to focus attention on improving the texture of the alpacas fleece. “I’ve kept pedigrees for all my machos,” says Don Julio. Each pedigree indicates both the fleece weight and micron count of the fleece harvested during the alpacas first two shearings.” He showed me these pedigrees and attached to each were beautiful locks of fleece. All the breeding males used at Accoyo are selected from his “Royal Family,” maintained for the exclusive purpose of generating herdsires. This “family” makes up about 20 percent of the entire herd. While cria can be culled from the Royal Family into the general herd, cria from the general herd are never added to the Royal Family, regardless of their quality.

This method of selection has created an alpaca herd which produces on average the following fleece specifications:

| Age             | Micron Count | Fleece Weight |
|-----------------|--------------|---------------|
| Baby, 12-14 mos | 19-21        | 5 to 7 lbs    |
| Tui, 24-28 mos  | 20-22        | 8 to 10 lbs   |
| Adult, 28 mos+  | 25-26        | 8 lbs, plus   |

These averages for fineness exceed the micron count of the smaller Royal Family’s bloodstock. Some of his machos yield 15 pounds of fleece at their second shearing. Don Julio believes that his average alpaca’s fleece is about two (2) microns finer, in each category, than that of his competitors’ animals.

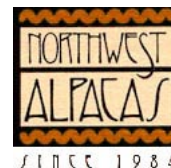


The breeding operation at Accoyo has always been much smaller than those of the larger co-ops. Its focus is the production of herdsires, for sale to other alpaca breeders. Don Julio’s herd numbers about 2,500, while the SAIS Marangari co-op in Cusco maintains Peru’s largest herd, which numbers over 60,000 alpaca.

With his plan of action fully operational and bearing fruit, Don Julio’s alpaca became known far and wide.

As a young Peruvian veterinarian student, Walter Bravo visited Accoyo to observe first hand the success of the program. Alpaca from Accoyo were winners in alpaca shows throughout the Altiplano and in the towns of the Puno district. But all was not roses and ribbons. Yet another threat to the alpaca herds of Peru was on the horizon--land reform.

The second course of our lunch, chicken soup with rice and peppers, arrived. Don Julio paused and began talking to me of the Peruvian Land Reforms. As surely as the Spanish conquistadors had virtually eliminated Peru’s proud camelid herds, the land reformers would eliminate the alpaca of Don



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Julio's world.

The land reforms broke up the large land holdings and livestock herds, handing them over to the peasants. These misguided programs placed the alpaca in inexperienced hands. Alpaca, both suri and huacaya, were again kept in the same herds with the peasant's llamas. The alpaca's quality and production regressed, creeping back to a darker time.

Don Julio's beloved Accoyo was parceled out and his animals were given away. When the Government agents came to collect the alpaca, his rage was so great that he tricked the agents into believing the males of his Royal Family were all gelded and suitable only for the meat packing plant. They were shipped to slaughter. But fate intervened, and after an intense negotiation, the government agents relented, allowing Don Julio to retain a small portion of his original herd. Now panic set in as Don Julio raced to the slaughter house, hoping to save his Royal Family. From what had been several hundred of Peru's finest herdsires, Don Julio saved several dozen. As he repurchased his bloodstock from the butcher, he began making plans to return his herd to its previous prominence.

Don Julio Barreda has a passion for alpaca. The land reformers couldn't deter him, and their predecessors, the feared Sendero Luminoso (shining path) gorillas could not stop him from raising the world's finest alpaca. He has persevered against odds that we in America can hardly imagine.

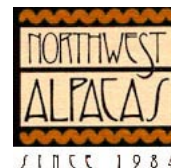
Today, at 75, Don Julio is preparing to bring a small portion of his bloodstock to America. He believes that this current import will allow the genetic purity of his alpaca one more avenue by which to perpetuate itself.

I had invited him to the U.S., and I was concerned about his health. I asked him how he had held up after these many years of trial and tribulation. He told me the following story: "Last November on my annual trip from Arequipa to Accoyo, which is near Macusani, I was about 40 kilometers from home when my truck suddenly became ill. Since it was closer to Accoyo than to Macusani, I decided to walk the final distance. By the time I arrived at my front door, I knew that my health was in good order and my heart strong, but I was still concerned for my sick truck." Walking 40 kilometers might not sound like much until you consider the altitude, about 15,000 meters, or the grade, uphill. Alpaca ranching seems to have been beneficial to Senor Barreda's health. I hope the same holds true for the breeders here in America.

### PRESENT DAY PERU

Lunch is not a meal taken lightly in Peru, and as our third course arrived--pork chops, potatoes, corn and beans--I began to appreciate the need for the Peruvian tradition of siesta. Don Julio began speaking of alpaca in present day Peru. He observed that he is particularly concerned for the suri population of Peru. Suri, long raised at higher altitudes in harsher climates, have declined in population. Don Julio would like to see them moved to lower elevations and milder climates. He believes the textile manufacturers should develop specialized products which capitalize on the suri's unique fibre characteristics.

He also believes that the condition of the huacaya in the hands of the Indians has declined. The fibre of these animals, which are allowed to mix with the llama, has become coarser over time. Don Julio has begun lending his machos to the peasant herders with the hope of improving their production.



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I asked Don Julio his opinion of the alpaca's prospects in Australia and the U.S. He brightened considerably and explained that he felt the North Americans would lead the alpaca to world wide prominence. He believes that foreign interest in the alpaca has already begun to focus renewed attention and respect on the alpaca in Peru. Peruvians breeders are regaining their enthusiasm for the alpaca. Fibre prices are up and alpaca shows well attended.

As dessert was being served, thick black coffee with steamed milk and rich chocolate pie, I asked Don Julio what impact the new Peruvian imports might have on American alpaca herds. He told me he believed the cria of domestic dams bred to Peruvian males would equal their sires' fleece quality within four generations. He felt that Americans had the unique opportunity to achieve colored alpaca with fleece comparable to the white Peruvian animals. Colored animals are something, much to Don Julio's regret, not very available in Peru today.

Don Julio also feels that the salvation of the suri will be the climates of North America and Australia. The colored suri, which makes up only 1 to 2 percent of Peru's herd, might also return to prominence in the U.S. He believes that American and Australian breeders will develop the combing and carding processes which will enhance the natural beauty of the suri's fleece.

As to the future of the worldwide alpaca industry, Don Julio believes that success will depend to a large degree on fibre fineness. We still don't know how fine of fibre highly selected alpaca will produce over time. If the alpaca did indeed spring from the vicuna, couldn't we expect fleece with the same delicate potential?

Don Julio wanted to invite all alpaca breeders to Michigan and Spokane for his seminars and a personal introduction to his life's work. I know you will enjoy your conversations with Don Julio every bit as much as I did.