



The Joy Of Alpacas

By Mike and Julie Safley

Alpacas live closer to heaven than any other living creature. At midnight in the Andean Altiplano; you can see forever as the shimmering alpacas leap from the icy mountain tops to the diamond set sky of the Sierra. They will reappear at dawn. Alpacas are magical.

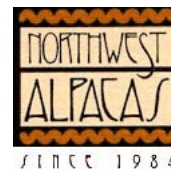
On many a morning we have stood on our front porch and watched the alpacas melt in and out of the mist as the sun rose, kissed their soft cheeks, and warmed their cria. The alpacas' magic image becomes alert as you walk toward them and they engage you with their long, honest gaze.

Alpacas are one of Mother Nature's favorite creatures and she has blessed them mightily. Alpacas are always respectful of the environment, never disturbing the earth with their padded feet, eating the tops off the grass and leaving a little for those that follow. As spring turns to summer, ever generous, they offer their warm fleece to be made into soft clothing for their masters' comfort.

Mankind is not always gentle, sometimes wreaking havoc on the natural order. But for five thousand years, man has loved the alpaca. Mother Nature has been quick to punish those who don't protect and nurture the alpacas. Consider this ancient Indian myth about the origin of the alpacas.

According to the Aymara and Quechua speaking peoples of Bolivia and Peru, the earth was long ago made up of two, superimposed worlds, the upper and the lower. The lower world was populated with enormous flocks of plump, sleek alpacas that belonged to the Apu, or mountain god, and they were tended by his beloved daughter. The alpacas of the upper world were far fewer in number and were inferior in quality, with only short, hairy fleeces.

The Apu's daughter often had difficulty in protecting her alpacas from the region's numerous predators, so he arranged for her to marry a young herdsman from the upper world who could help tend the flocks. The Apu's daughter and her husband lived contentedly in the lower world. After awhile, the young shepherd grew homesick and told his wife that he wished to return to his own world, and to enrich it with the inner world's alpacas. The mountain god's daughter agreed and, collecting her flock, began traveling via the springs and lakes to live with her husband in the upper world. Her father's one condition to his daughter's marriage had been that her husband must take good care of the flock, and especially a tiny alpaca that always needed to be carried. The daughter's husband proved to be lazy and one day he dropped the tiny alpaca on the ground, leaving it to fend for itself. When his wife saw this she took flight and ran to the nearest spring, dove in and began swimming towards the inner world. The alpacas followed her, although a few were prevented from leaving by the herdsman. Ever since, the alpacas of the upper world have remained near springs and lakes where they continue to yearn for their mistress – who, to this day, has not returned. (*Gold of the Andes, Volume II*)



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So why do we own alpacas? The truth is we have never asked our alpacas for anything they wouldn't provide. They are gentle with our children. Each year they pay our family's bills. The alpacas slow us down and point the way to simple things that make us smile. They live with us in obedient harmony. Once in a while we are asked by one of our females to help her give birth and maybe nurse the cria for a few days until Mother Nature brings them both together, starting life's cycle over again. We really can't imagine a better way to spend our time here on earth.

If you don't own an alpaca, ask the question, "Why?" of someone who does. Each answer will be genuine and probably a little different. When you bring your first alpacas home you'll have your own reasons for caring for them which will add to the magic that alpacas create.