



Sheep



Alina as a baby—is there anyone cuter, everywhere? We’re pretty sure there isn’t. Alina was just six days old when she and her mama, Shiloh, arrived here at Tamerlaine. It was a freezing January night when we got the call from Rancho Relaxo that two sheep had been rescued and needed a safe home immediately. The sun hadn’t yet broken the sky into the bleak gray of winter’s days, but our animal care team was out of bed and at the sanctuary ready for their arrival.

Right away, we could see that Shiloh was terrified of anyone touching her baby, and her baby was following her cue, hiding behind her when we came anywhere nearby. And it wasn’t just her baby Shiloh was scared for: she very obviously didn’t want to be touched herself, either. She was terrified of her new surroundings, of people, of everything and everyone. One at a time, each of us was struck by the bravery and love for her newborn that she showed by standing between us and Alina, despite her own fears. Some

would say her nurturing instinct was much stronger than her own survival instinct. We would say that like most moms, she really loves her baby.

For the first few weeks, Alina and Shiloh were isolated in their own warm barn stall. It was much too cold outside for Alina (thus the ADORABLE jacket she’s wearing in her cameo, here!), and she needed extra warmth of being indoors. We also believed that Mama Shiloh needed to be around us a bit more, rather than other animals. It would help her feel safe as she could better keep tabs on us from the barn!

Alina began trusting us much sooner than Shiloh, and with good reason. Alina had never known any other life. Shiloh, on the other hand, was a breeding sheep who could have had several babies taken from her before Alina. It’s no wonder she didn’t want us near her baby: she thought we might take her, too, as all her other babies had been taken. But Alina, despite her mother’s fear, began exploring a bit further from behind her mom’s woolly side. Like all lambs, Alina was born ready to play, kick up her feet, and have a wonderful time! Soon enough, she started greeting any visitor with head bumps. Her immediate reaction to an outstretched hand was a strange little sideways run, and a little lamb CHARGE! Of course, at this point, her soft little head was smaller than a palm.

When she was finally ready to meet some other animal, we started small. We let the pair out of their stall to wander the barn with some of our turkeys and cats. Sure enough, Alina began sponking around after them—until one of the turkeys turned back towards her instead of running. Then she was quickly back behind her mama!

Today, she is still the less shy of the two, and mama is learning from her baby! Alina still gives a “fist bump” with her head, but mostly because she wants ear rubs.



Her woolly coat is much longer, since she was too young and her wool too short to be shorn her first year. In fact, it's getting hard to tell Shiloh and Alina apart! The easiest way to tell? It's always Alina who comes to say hello first. Sadly, Shiloh will need a lot longer to forget her past life, although she gets better every day, and even follows Alina for some loving from our staff now and then.

Shiloh came from a small family farm. Alina, her baby was destined to be slaughtered for Easter, a Catholic holiday at which lamb is the traditional main course. Passover, a Jewish holiday, is often very close to Easter. Some Jewish traditions hold that lamb should be eaten the night before Passover begins. Yet both holidays revolve around the idea of a merciful god and celebrate events that illustrated how love led God to spare us a horrible fate. The idea of killing a baby lamb to symbolize either of these holidays is the exact opposite of that. Yet each year, about 4 million sheep are killed for these ritualistic meals.

Like all sheep, Alina and her mother have a close relationship. Flocks of sheep naturally see female lambs stay with their mother for their entire lives. Baby boys, however, go off at around 10 months. When a mother weans her baby, she will leave her for a period to adjust. Then, she returns to her. In nature, sheep form close families and defend themselves from predators by staying in large flocks—they look out for one another. Sheep are smarter than they get credit for. They can remember friends—sheep or human—for up to two years. And, they can even be clicker-trained like dogs to perform certain behaviors and respond to certain calls. What's even more amazing is that they are born knowing the secrets of plants: they know which are okay to eat, which would make them sick. They also know which plants will help them heal when they aren't feeling their best.

Sadly, farmed sheep don't get to engage in any of these natural behaviors. Instead, they are kept in overstuffed

pens with little to no natural stimuli. Families are separated with little regard to their emotions. In studies done to test whether sheep suffer from stressful environments, it was found that they definitely do. In fact, sheep exposed to production-like stimuli were less likely to go towards a feed bucket, even though it had been previously associated with positive reinforcement. In other words, they can and do suffer trauma that changes them and leads them to make decisions based on that trauma, and fear of more. Studies like this must make us re-evaluate the idea of using sheep for meat, or wool.

In the United States, more than 3 million sheep are raised for their wool, and a total of 5.17 million sheep were counted in the USA including wool, meat, and breeding sheep. Lambs like Alina made up 94% of meat sales in 2020. Babies as young as 6-10 weeks are sold as "baby lamb," while those 5-6 months are "spring lambs." It's a strange and inexplicable dichotomy: we use the term "little lamb" to refer to a naïve or innocent child. So, we know the nature of these little animals is sweet, kind.... innocent. Yet, these lambs are raised and killed so people can eat them. If Alina not been rescued, she'd have been part of that 94% statistic. Even those raised for their wool are eventually slaughtered, once their production slows down. The same applies to breeding ewes like Shiloh. Once she became too unhealthy or tired to have babies often, she would also have been sent to slaughter, too.

Sheep are docile. They're kind and go with the flow. They don't tend to fight back, and for this reason...they're considered very profitable and easy. And the many small farms that once raised sheep for purposes like meat or wool have been swallowed up by large conglomerates: factory farms. Sheep are used for meat, wool and more: their skin produces a waxy element called lanolin, which is commonly used in makeup, moisturizers, and even parchment paper. Although not popular in the United States, sheep's milk and cheese made from it is popular in other countries.



Which means that sheep are subject to the same cruelty as dairy cows: forcibly impregnated, given birth, babies taken from their mothers. Shiloh was a breeding ewe, which means this likely happened over and over to her. Having seen the tenderness with which she loves her baby, we can only imagine how terrible this cycle must have been for her to endure. Imagine: she would realize she was pregnant again, without having chosen to give birth to another baby that would feed into this system. She was helpless to stop it from happening to her, and from participating in the system by providing more sheep. Alina would have been separated from Shiloh within hours.

Alina would then have had her tail docked and her ears punched through with holes for tagging. There would be no pain relief given to her. Had she been male, there would have been one added, painful indignity: males are sterilized by having a tight band wrapped around their testicles to stop blood flow. This isn't a short process. Luckily, Alina and Shiloh are now happily leaping about at Tamerlaine instead.

Also luckily, they were not used for wool. To start, in the wild, sheep do not need to be sheared. They shed their wool naturally. However, domesticated sheep have been bred to overproduce wool—which leads to many of them die from heat exhaustion in summer, or to freeze in early spring, when their coats are taken. In the USA, about 210,000 sheep and 388,000 lambs died within the industry from causes other than slaughter. And, although 23.1 million pounds of wool were shorn in 2020, our country is definitely not the lead producer of wool.

As with other procedures sheep suffer for convenience and profit, *mulesing* is painful and terrifying. If Alina or Shiloh were wool producers, swaths of skin would have been cut off of them from under their tails. This is to prevent “flystrike” which is when a fly lays eggs in the wrinkly, moist flesh there. The maggots hatch and can feed on the sheep, often killing them. Most of the wool

in the world comes from Australia—a full 30%—where sheep are raised under brutal conditions. Yet, it wasn't until 2020 that Australian law decreed that pain medication be administered during this procedure. What's worse, is that sheep still get flystrike. The injury remains painful as it heals, which makes sense: layers of skin have been literally removed.

Shearers are paid by volume; this means they are not motivated at all to be kind or delicate with their sheep. In fact, a shearer may shear over 350 sheep in one day—there is no way to do this gently. PETA has exposed abuses at more than 10 farms on 4 different continents—enough to say it isn't just a cultural thing, or a lack of welfare laws; it's an industry-wide focus on production and volume. Sheep just like Alina and Shiloh were struck in the head, dragged, kicked, and more. Why? Because shearing a sheep is not easy. They are, by nature, prey animals.

Combine this with the fact that research has shown past traumas influence



Injured sheep after being roughly sheared. Photo credit: PETA AU

their behavior, and the repeated shearing will terrify them. Had Alina been born an Australian wool sheep, she would have been fearful and naturally struggled when held down. Shearers rush, and she could have been left bloodied and injured, as often happens. Shearers would have stitched up larger cuts, but without any pain relief. When Alina stopped producing as much wool...she would have been sent to slaughter. However, she wouldn't have been killed for Australian consumption.

In 2019, Australia shipped over 2.8 million animals, alive, on ships bound for other countries to be slaughtered. The demand is greater, so there is more



profit in doing so. Of that number, 1.9 million were sheep. They were destined for the middle east, countries such as Kuwait, Qatar, and Jordan. Because of religious restrictions, the sheep must arrive alive so that they can be slaughtered in specific ways. The journey takes about 3 weeks, on average.



Sheep being boarded onto a transport ship. When the Suez Canal closed in 2021, thousands of sheep were trapped, and many died. The ships were overloaded, illegally, and many more would have died had the Canal been blocked longer than 6 days.

The conditions are more deplorable than can be described in words. There is no sanitation. Baby Alina would have been one of *tens of thousands* of sheep stuffed so tightly together that they cannot even lie or sit down. There would be no escape for Alina from the mountains of wastes in which she would stand. Like most of the other sheep, she might not be able to reach food or water, even as she arrived into blazing middle eastern heat. In 2018, according to We Animals Media, an Australian news outlet documented the horrific conditions aboard an export ship bound for Kuwait. It was so hot, and the air so putrid, that many sheep were desperate for even a gulp of air or a sip of water. It was revealed that over 2,400 sheep died on that trip from heat. The dead sheep were not removed until the ship came to port. This means that the sheep on these ships must withstand not only their own wastes, but also living among decaying bodies of other sheep. Once this publicity came into play, the Australian government was

forced to do something. They banned live exports to the middle east...for the three hottest months of the year.

Soon after those months—despite the temperatures still soaring, especially for those in wool—a ship with 57,000 live sheep began the harrowing journey to Kuwait. As long as fewer than 570 sheep died en route, the government considers the conditions acceptable. But any of those sheep would be like Alina and Shiloh: naturally craving love and familial bonds, feeling joy and fear, playfulness and pain. Not one life lost should be considered acceptable because of the way a system works. Instead, that system should change.

Had Alina survived the journey, she would have been put on a truck and started another long journey to a slaughterhouse somewhere around the country. Or, like many others, she may have simply been killed upon arrival. The smell from these ships is evident long before they dock and remains once the ship leaves harbor. While people can walk by, the sheep onboard these ships have nowhere to go, and no way to avoid it. Disgustingly, many in-transit deaths result from sheep who have drowned in the deep recesses of the waste they stand (and swim) in.



On board a transport ship, a sheep pants for water and relief from the heat. Photo credit: Animals Australia

The welfare laws in the countries where these sheep arrive are not the same as those in Australia or other countries they come from. In fact, many inhumane slaughter methods specifically outlawed at the point of



origin are still practiced where these sheep wind up. There can be only one driving force to explain why anyone would ship these living, sentient beings to a place where it is understood pain and suffering await them, cruelty so unbearable, their own country has banned it: profit, to the tune of a \$7.6 billion industry yearly. There is no other explanation and frankly, even this one is unacceptable.

Australia isn't the only guilty party, although it has the most press. In 2016, the USA exported more than 100 million live animals according to a report by the Humane Party. Some of these trips lasted over a month by sea. Most, however, were by truck to Mexico or Canada. This was in part to get around our 28-hour law: this law states that no animals can go without the ability to move, rest, eat and drink for more than 28 hours. These countries have transportation laws that are laxer than ours. The exportation of sheep has, sadly, increased. The EU also engages in live export. And, during those summer months when Australia won't ship animals, Kuwait sources them from South Africa, in even larger numbers, on more crowded ships, with even fewer protections—to be specific: there are absolutely none.

Around 1.16 billion sheep worldwide produce wool. According to Common Objective, they make enough wool that every person in the world could have a new wool sweater *every year*. Wool is also used in rugs, and furniture. Lanolin, the waxy substance produced by sebaceous glands, has moisturizing properties that make it a highly prized ingredient in the cosmetic industry. It's obtained by extracting it from wool.

No matter what a sheep is used for, it wasn't obtained humanely. Perhaps because they aren't a common food source in our country most people don't often consider the suffering of sheep in the animal agriculture industry. They picture cows or pigs or chickens when we talk about factory farms. People don't think picture sweet, white lambs in large-scale sheds. People don't see them when we buy a wool scarf or coat. But we should, and you can help them to do so. Tell people these facts. And tell them about Shiloh and her baby Alina, and how happy they are spending their days together, frolicking happily. As they should.



Baby Alina and Mama Shiloh smile without a care in the world, living life the way it was meant to be lived!