

Gertrude My Killer Mule!
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Back again on my Fazenda in Motto Grosso Brazil. As so written in other of my narratives I tell of our life in the Amazon rain forest, attempting to establish a "Back to the land" colony for those interested in returning back to the land and a simpler way of life. We were poor before we left the States and went down hill from there. After the purchase of my 40 acres and its clearing, it was time to get on with real life. This is where the story of Gertrude My Killer Mule comes in.

We certainly couldn't afford any type of farm equipment, we didn't even own a lawnmower, of course, the nearest lawn was 3000 miles away, so that didn't matter to us. But, we really needed some type of implement to assist me in my hundreds of chores, thus the idea of a mule came to me.

You know, one tends to meet a lot of people out there in the vast Amazon jungle while crawling among the millions of thick vines and so it came to pass that I met Edwardo the one and only salesman at the local Mule Dealership!

Yeap, Edwardo saw to it that I got a real good deal on a used two wheeled buggy-cart and a 1200 pound white speckled mule which we named Gertrude. All this for only \$300; plus he tossed in all the accessories and delivery and a two hour training session came with the deal. Sure enough, Edwardo showed up at our main headquarters the next day and everyone came out to see our brand new Amazon Mercedes!

Without much talk our Edwardo began demonstrating the mules qualities. He walked around pointing out various features, the head, the tail and the top and the bottom, he knew we were total novices at muleing, however, within two hours I was up on that huge mule trying to make it move. Now when Edwardo was on it, it practically danced, twirled and I thought it might be able to climb trees, I was impressed. But now it stood there like a stone wall, absolutely refusing to budge and I was reconsidering my purchase.

However, Edwardo came over and explained to me, "Mester Megal, dis animal needs to knows the athorities, yu gots much to use uoyours powers toos teach it boss you ares." With this Edwardo handed me a fairly heavy stick and tells me to swat the animal on its rear and I did so. Nothing happened, I swatted it again, still nothing moved, I swatted it again, the mule snorted in defiance and bucked a little. Then Edwardo took the stick from me and said, "No Mester Megal, like this must sho mule yu series," and with this Edwardo smacked old Gertrude really a whapping blow. It worked; Yahoo, I was gone down the driveway in a flash and it didn't look like my Amazon Mercedes had any intention of stopping until it got back to the dealership and that was about 15 miles through the jungle!

This was the beginning of a very trying relationship between me and that mule and to put it simply, I don't think that that mule ever came to respect me, nor did I ever really acquire any deep positive feelings for the stupid horrible beast!

Let me tell you that mules are not all that dumb, in fact they're downright cunning I might say. I being a stupid soft hearted American didn't want to apply Edwardo's strong limbed tactics and

thought that maybe through kindness and generosity that I might win the mule over to my side...WRONG AND DOUBLE WRONG, AND NEAR DEAD WRONG!

Just one example here: One sunny morning I saddled up good old Gertrude and headed out to a neighboring Fazenda about three miles down the road. The roads were just bulldozer tracks where the earth is somewhat piled higher in the middle where the rains can flow off to the side. The edge of the road had been hacked down by long bladed machetes and this left thousands of small spear like trunks sticking up about three feet. Everything was just going fine when suddenly, this really mean good for nothing mule unexpectedly took off running about 30 miles an hour along the lower edge of the road right next to the spear beds. Suddenly it turned itself towards the dangerous pointed shafts and halted, dropped its head and I went flying through the air and landed belly down onto hundreds of these sharpened spear edged trees. I couldn't believe it! I felt like an Indian Guru trying to rise off a bed of nails, I was pierced all over, and honest I nearly was speared to death by the hundreds of standing shoots.

I was shocked and very stuck, but finally climbed out, slid down onto the road, plucked at least ten of those three foot spears out of my neck and chest and yes, I was bleeding! I can't tell you how fast my soft hearted foolishness changed to the reality of teaching this rotten killer mule--- who was boss!

I was fuming, and when the mule saw me get up, realizing that I did not die and was still alive and had hold of the reigns, I actually felt a fear come over it. Its eyes got huge as if surprised and knew that things were now going to change in our relationship...and so it did!

I bent down and broke off a really good sized spear trunk (about the size of a 2x4) and I began to beat the living crap out of that mule. It reared, it tried to get away, it attempted to turn and kick me and it bellowed out a screech that could be heard back at the ranch. It couldn't believe that this dumb Americano was actually hitting it. The thing that saved its life was that just then, the Inner-Jungle bus came roaring around the corner and began to honk at this aberration. The bus slowed down just enough to make me move out of its way. As it passed, I could see about 30 heads sticking out of the windows and everyone was yelling something in Portuguese. I took it as "Kill that ugly mule Mester Megal, yu bee dee boss," and I continued beating the heck out of my \$300 investment!

That was the first time old muley tried killing me and I figured for sure that would be its final effort, especially after the beating I gave it. Things went fine for a while but after a few months went by, its respect for me and my stick faded and once again we found ourselves in a difference of opinion.

This time it changed its tactics and attempted to blame outside forces on killing me. Again, we were totally alone walking easily down a lonely jungle road; headed to a peasant farm to maybe purchase a pair of pigeons. Things were peaceful and I was enjoying the sheer tranquility of this extremely awesome forest jungle. Suddenly and unexpected, it was as if this animal new when my guard was down, it leaped, reared and stood up on its hind legs so that I was hanging in the air and thought for sure it was going to tumble backwards onto me. I screamed, it screeched and tried to buck me off. Hey, I ain't no rodeo dude and in no way was going to ride this for those 10 seconds of rodeo history. I finally came to my senses and grabbed its ears and twisted them until it was subdued into a quiet stance. What the heck I thought, it's gonna kill me one of these days.

Ok, then I heard some chattering up ahead, off to my right high up in the trees. I listened and the noise grew louder. Then I saw something run across the road and the chattering began on the opposite side of the road. The chattering turned out to be a entire pack of monkeys which were traveling through the tree tops. Ok now, we were in the jungle, this mule was not unfamiliar with such things nor was I and there was no reason for this attempt to throw me.

I sat there on its back and together we both watched this tribe of monkeys move on by. They passed and then we went on our way. Old Gertrude seemed to always be watching and waiting for its chance to kill, or at least injure me and I learned that this animal couldn't be trusted, for it would use every occasion to attempt to kill me and as you can tell, it didn't succeed.

Oh yes, there were many other times it tried to get away with its attitude of rebellion and self rule, such as side kicks to my legs, quick bites to my arms, nips to my hands and attempted run aways. On several occasions it broke out of its corral and my wife and I had to go hunt it down in the middle of the night. Now that was really an Amazonian nightmare, just ask my wife?

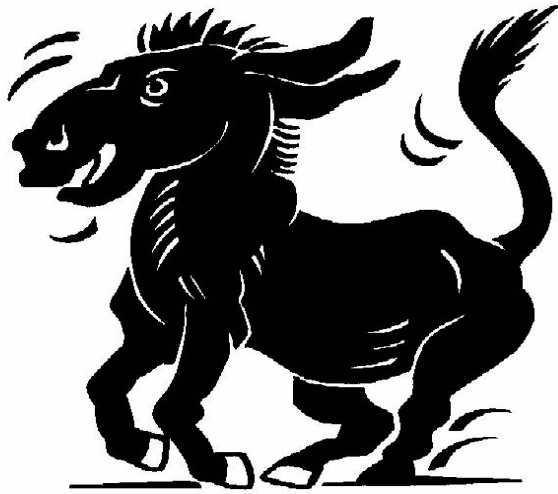
I learned to carry a good stick with me. In fact I had a whole pile of sticks just waiting; each time I saddled it up I would walk around it and smack the stick into my palm and hold the stick up to the mules eyes, just in case it was near sighted. Its eyes would grow large and I knew that it knew I meant business and believe me, this dumb American learned that when it comes to owning a mule that you must teach it who's boss!

After a year of owning this killer mule I sold it back to Edwardo for half price and I got the feeling he was surprised that I didn't come around six months sooner?

The experience of actually owning my own mule taught me one thing, forget it! Its much easier owning a tractor or a truck, this to me is the only way to go, forget that old time agriculture existence and return to simplicity, buy a tractor!

Tribute to Gertrude! Glad your gone, glad your not mine, hope Edwardo sold you to someone who really beat the heck out of you! The best thing about you is that you couldn't reproduce yourself! The only good thing to ever come from our relationship is this story and that ain't much! I hope you have nightmares about me and that you get frightened every time you see a

stick. Because every time I see a stick I want to pick it up and hit something...wish you were



here!

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