

The Difference a Lamb Made

Most of us are familiar with the nursery rhyme *Mary Had a Little Lamb*. As children, we most likely recited it often, and as a parent, taught it to our offspring.

The poem by Sarah Joseph Hale was first published on May 24, 1830, and was possibly inspired by an actual incident. It's a cute little ditty that almost always brings joy to those who hear it repeated aloud. Here it is (as if you needed it written!):

Mary had a little lamb ... Its fleece was white as snow ... And everywhere that Mary went ... The lamb was sure to go.

It followed her to school one day ... Which was against the rule ... It made the children laugh and play ... To see a lamb at school.

And so the teacher turned it out ... But still it lingered near ... And waited patiently about ... Till Mary did appear.

Why does the lamb love Mary so? ... The eager children cry ... Why, Mary loves the lamb, you know ... The teacher did reply.

So, Beecher, what's the point of this nursery rhyme for us today?

Well, Life Care Center of Nashoba Valley in Littleton, Massachusetts, has had an experience something akin to this. Pamela Cole, director of rehab services there, shared it with me on a visit to the facility. It's one of her favorite Life Care people stories that happened a few years ago.



“We had this spunky, kind, fun-loving, retired World War II nurse named Clem as a rehab patient and then as a long-term care resident,” Cole said. “My high school-age daughter also knew and loved Clem because she worked here part-time in the Activities Department. She also had a small 4-H farm at our house. When her favorite sheep had a cute little ewe lamb that year, she asked what she should name her. I said she should think of a really sweet person she liked, and so the lamb was named Clem.”

That decision was a big hit with Nurse Clem. “You would have thought we had given the resident a bag of gold when we told her a lamb was named after her,” Cole said. “She was a proud Momma, showing off pictures of her little lamb and later loving it up when we brought it to Life Care to show her.”

(more)

That year, the Activities Department took some residents to a local agricultural fair, so Clem was able to see her lamb in competition and spend more time at the fair telling everyone about how wonderful her little lamb was.

As time went on that fall and winter, Nurse Clem declined and was placed on hospice care. Cole's daughter asked what they could do for her. "I thought of all the fun Nurse Clem had with that little lamb and decided to make her something with the newly shorn wool from Clem," Cole said. "We quickly cleaned and spun a skein, enough to make a muff for Clem to keep her hands warm, and we added a white heart on the front of it from the llama at the facility (it's an animal lover's home!).



"Clem loved the muff and used it every day," Cole added. "When resident Clem passed away, I thought her daughters might want to lay it to rest with Clem, but they wanted to keep it as a loving memory of their mother."

Cole has a beautiful picture on her desk with a smiling Clem with her hands warm in that muff. "I think of her often and smile and feel happy that we were able to bring a fun spark of joy to her and her family, even in her final days. I hope her namesake lamb will live on our farm for many years as she is just as fun and spunky as her namesake, and it always makes me smile just to say her name."

Pamela Cole and her daughter have proven a tried-and-true principle followed by associates all across our company. They find creative ways to make life interesting and fun for residents – even in the final months and days of their lives – and in the process provide memorable events and gifts for the families they leave behind.

What a wonderful story Pamela Cole has shared about the impact of a lamb on the lives of people. And the Bible speaks of the tenderness of God toward lambs:

He will tend His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs in His arms; He will carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those that are with young (Isaiah 40:11 ESV).

– Beecher Hunter