



A MESSAGE FROM THE PTWDA PRESIDENT

By Andrew Tokarz

It's winter, and it is snowing. I pull up to the farm, and set my feet on the snowy ground. As I walk to the sheep barn, I admire the whiteness of the landscape and see how the ground rests under this cover. There is a *crunch crunch* sound as I pad along in woolen felt lined rubber boots. The extra pair of hand knitted woolen socks keeps my toes toasty, and my coarse woolen sweater from Zakopane is on my upper body so that I can work in the elements comfortably. As I walk to the barn, I can't help but notice how beautifully piled on the branches is the snow. It forms a stunning contrast of white versus the black and dark browns of tree bark. When Mother Nature works her wonders, one can't be amazed enough at the precision of how the landscape is changed. The scenery is a total contrast to the lush greens of summer pastures.

As I approach the barn, my presence is detected by my "gang" of dogs who approach me warily with their barks. They detect my calls of greetings and immediately their "halt who goes there" protective stances change into a welcoming run towards me. I am surrounded by a swarm of white winter heavy fur coats of my Tatras, all begging me for attention. To be patted first is goal of each dog. Turnia, one of my females, can no longer contain her exuberance, and makes a lunge upon me to put her paws on my shoulders and chest. I feel the full



brunt of her on me and gratefully scratch her ears, letting her know how happy I am to see her too. Meanwhile Durdusz, my male, is pressing against my legs demanding his share of affection. I am balancing Turnia leaning on my upper body with Durdusz practically walking between my legs. Licks and pats are being furiously exchanged along with my greetings and requests for enough in Polish.

Meanwhile Hyrna, my recent rescue, has gotten wind of my approach and is barking furiously from her dog house for attention. She is pulling so hard on her chain that she is standing on her hind legs, swimming in the air with her front paws in my direction, telling me to please come and greet her. I do so happily, and she comes down on her legs to feel the warmth of my hand on her head sliding down her back. I have to chain her during the night as she is a recent arrival, and I worry that her lack of familiarity

to sheep will cause her to wander, and thus end up hurting herself. I set her loose from her chain for exercise, and she immediately shakes herself and wags her tail in thanks for the opportunity to walk and run a bit around her new home so as to familiarize herself and to do some terrain marking. Hyrna is about 7 and has been until now in a totally domestic environment in suburbia, oblivious to the world of sheep. I don't expect her to be a working LGD, but her beautiful tall and slender build is a marked contrast to the stocky body of Turnia which is refined by her work on the farm.

By this time, all of my dogs are focused on what's in my shopping bag that I am carrying as I also have some kind of food scraps for them. The dogs await the spoils with eagerness even if it is just a few crumbs. I disperse the food in separate spots so that no fights will develop. Shaking the bag clean, I turn to make the last few steps into the barn. As I turn the doorknob to enter the barn through the service door, I am greeted by barks from Brandy who is lying faithfully among the sheep in the hay. I close the door behind me and call her immediately to reassure her that it is I, and not some stranger.

Standing in the barn, I am struck by the warmth generated by the sheep. My glasses fog up and I



have to remove them to wipe them down so as to see. Within a minute or so, I can finally see the flock, and sure enough between the flock sitting on her hindquarters is the “queen” of my Tatra pack, Brandy. She is wonderfully seated amongst her court consisting of about 35 sheep all in a variety of activity. Some are lying gracefully on the ground with their lambs snuggled up tight against their mothers. Others are nursing their lambs, and still others are oblivious to my presence as their mouths are tucked up tight against the hay racks pulling at the hay to eat. I walk to Brandy with my hand outstretched so as to give her my welcoming pat, and to convey my thanks to her for her wonderful work guarding the flock during the night. She is the last line of defense should a coyote get through the dogs outside, and into the barn.

By this time, I have assessed that Brandy is fine, and I immediately turn to scanning the flock to seek new arrivals i.e. lambs. Sure enough, there is a set of twins standing in the corner close to their mother. Their tiny size as well as the remains of their umbilical cord hanging from their stomachs tells me of their new arrival into this world during the night. As I approach, they turn slowly and stiffly on their legs towards mama for protection. I slow my approach so as to not scare them completely. As they turn to their mother, they seek their mother’s udder for nourishment. I see that they are suckling and all appears well with them. Still, I

decide that for everyone’s benefit, they should all go into a jug for uninterrupted nourishment, and I grab the lambs and carefully lift them up in a low position catching the mother’s attention. She starts to softly call them in a low tone and they in turn are looking at her for help. But nothing is going to happen and she faithfully follows her lambs being carried into a jug. As I close the gate to the jug, I see that Brandy has taken all this in without batting an eye, and is now back to lying down amongst the sheep, happy to be in the center of this herd. Meanwhile the other dogs are looking into the barn through the barn door to see the events unfolding inside.

After performing a number of chores inside the barn, I return outside. I marvel again at the white carpet and the crisp winter air. The dogs are nearby, tails wagging, and have a crispier appearance. It seems as they roll and play in the snow, their coats are brushed clean. Their white color is complimentary to the snow, and it seems that the Tatra is so at ease in the snow and winter. Even though at times they have to plow through higher snow up to their bellies, they take it all in stride as they know that during the summer they must deal with heat, humidity, and pesky insects.

Their activities range from wandering the fence line together, marking territory to suddenly returning by me to wander or lie by me as I work cutting trees with a chain saw. As I work and take a break, it is uncanny to see how one of the dogs detects that

this is a great time to approach me and rub against my leg seeking affection which I oblige. How can one not love our great white dogs!

This year the OP is the official mascot for marketing the *malopolska* region of Poland and the season of winter. At a press conference, the governor of this region, Marek Nawara, stood at a podium with the hero of the show, an OP.

He declared the OP as official mascot and announced a press campaign with 250 TV spots highlighting the OP and a website <http://www.visit.malopolska.pl/>. If you go to this website, sure enough you will see our heroes in line, wagging their tails. At the top exists an English version, as symbolized by the English Union Jack flag. If you click on the screen, it takes you to a whole internet section about the OP. If you maneuver through the site, you can download clips of the OP barking, and of course view the picture gallery. The whole purpose of the website is obviously to promote the OP and to get people to visit the Highland area of Poland and engage themselves in counting the dogs.

As I checked the site, there were 33451 persons who declared that they saw an OP. So not to be outdone, I quickly punched the internet counter 4 times, one for each of my dogs. Too bad there is no way to let them know that my clicks came from “Ameryka”. Maybe someday in the future though, we will have a worldwide campaign, and we will be able to click about our dogs too. In the meantime stay warm, and remember, spring will soon be here.