



DON JULIO BARREDA

1919 – 2006

Walking in Two Worlds

Mike Safley bids an affectionate farewell to Don Julio.

Julio Barreda — an artist who extracted pigment from the invisible DNA curling in the plasma of an ancient species — painted his vision of perfection with balance and harmony across the genotype of a herd sixty years in the making. His extraordinary accomplishment, a gift from God, touched each of us.

Don Julio stood all of five foot six, hair combed straight back—black until the day he died, nut brown skin, burnished and creased by an Incan sun and the cruel, cold wind that comes to rest in the marrow of a man born of Macusani's high plains. Don Julio was a giant in the alpaca world—the Godfather. He was born of a Quechua woman and an accountant father from Arequipa, who died, leaving little Julio to be raised by his mother and grandfather on a vast hacienda in the province of Carabaya. His relationship with alpacas began almost before he could talk.

Don Julio walked in two worlds. The first was the Quechua's tradition-bound land, where the ocarina's plaintive melody betrays the loneliness of the vast sierra, and where the very lives of the shepherds are dependent on the sustenance of their alpacas. Julio Barreda's second world was filled with the books of Gregor Mendel and studies in world politics and classical music. Portraits of Mao Dze Dong, Fidel Castro, Winston Churchill, and Abraham Lincoln lined the walls of Accoyo's dining room.

Julio Barreda understood political tyranny first hand, spending years negotiating to save Estancia Accoyo from the Peruvian government's confiscatory land reform schemes. His bullet-pocked Studebaker reminds Accoyo's visitors of the Sendero Luminoso's reign of fear. But Don Julio, always the optimist, told me in 2004 at the age eighty-four that he wouldn't be selling alpacas for a while because he needed to build his herd for the future. His passion for alpacas came from an ageless heart.

I have never known a more gracious human being — always willing to share his knowledge and wish a man well. When he visited my ranch in 1991, he spent his first day touring and inspecting the animals. Don Julio was always polite. I tried, as hard as I knew how, to encourage his assessment of my herd. He declined, and in retrospect, I suspect that he was following a principal taught by my mother early in life—if you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all.

That night, as dinner arrived at the table, I naively informed Don Julio, "One day I will breed better alpacas than you do at Accoyo." (I was only half kidding). He paused, fork in mid-air, and said, "Thank

you for telling me that.” After carefully chewing his steak, Don Julio finished his reply, “A man always walks a little faster when he knows someone is behind him.”

As the evening wore on and dessert arrived, I pressed Don Julio to tell me how long he thought it would take my herd to catch up to his—even after he walked a little faster. After many attempts to avoid my question, he said, “Forty years.” That set me back. I was forty-five, and I couldn’t imagine forty more years playing catch-up. I finished my pie in silence. Finally I asked Don Julio, “How long would it take if I had Accoyo males as herd sires?” He immediately responded, “Four generations!”

I didn’t fully understand the implications of his answer way back then, and not long after Don Julio’s visit, I began to research the science of animal breeding, Mendel’s laws of inheritance, and the concept of heritability. I was intent on catching my mentor. I am, of course, not even close to catching the man I so much admired—more like a charging turtle than a hasty hare. But Don Julio’s gift was a vision that will continue to guide my days as an alpaca breeder.

I remember admiring a particular macho in the Canchones above Don Julio’s home, and after I pointed him out, Don Julio replied without hesitation, “He’s a Shere Kahn son.” “How can you tell?” “By the two wrinkles behind his nostril”, he replied. I looked, and sure enough, there they were, the shape of a clipping from my thumbnail. My eye sharpened, I began seeing a number of similar males in the herd, all with two wrinkles behind each nostril. I went back to the Tejada house, my residence while in Macusani, thinking about what I had learned. The next morning Don Julio arrived early at 6:00 A.M., anxious to talk with me, saying, “You know what I told you about Shere Kahn’s wrinkles yesterday?” “Yes.” Then, almost in a whisper, he asked, “Please, don’t tell anyone.” Every animal breeder has his secrets, and now I wonder how many Don Julio took to his grave. Will his magnificent bloodlines live on?

Someone once said to me, “You made Barreda famous, writing all those books and articles about him.” I felt a flush of embarrassment at the thought that someone might give me credit for Don Julio’s fame. Don Julio had a passion for alpacas before most of us were born. He was famous long before I bought my first alpaca in 1984. Rigoberto Calle Escobar in his 1984 book, *Animal Breeding and Production of American Camelids*, said that Mr. Julio E. Barreda is one of the most prestigious alpaca breeders in Peru. Machos from Accoyo are servicing hembras on Estancias throughout the Peruvian Altiplano with positive affect on the breed. Don Julio’s fame and his magnificent legacy will continue to grow with every cria conceived from Accoyo’s loins.

I remember the first males he sent to Australia: Ledgers Dream, Highlander, Inti, and El Dorado, as well as the ones he sent to the United States in 1994: Caligula, Felix, Camillo, Drazno, Torbio, and Ramilo. All were personally selected by Don Julio from Accoyo’s Majada de Plantel. Each was magnificently, powerfully potent, and they transformed the international alpaca breeder’s perception of excellence. I have always believed that, in many ways, these were the finest machos ever to come from Accoyo. I asked Don Julio why he sent his best males. “They were my business cards,” he said. “I wanted Australia and the United States to remember Accoyo.” We will, Don Julio, we will.

Accoyo quickly became the alpaca world’s Mecca. Every breeder dreamed of making the pilgrimage and having a picture taken between the suri and huacaya logos, drawn with precision on the white stucco facing the doorstep to the casa. Don Julio is the alpaca community’s rock star, and everyone wanted his autograph, a handshake, and an opportunity to pay respects. He was always polite, patient, and willing to pose with a new friend for a photo.

Julio Barreda was the mayor of Macusani three times, and he could hold a crowd in his palm, bringing tears to a room with his eloquence. He was a compassionate champion of the Quechua people, making heartfelt appeals for the little children with no shoes, noses crusted with infection and eyes dulled by hunger. Julio Barreda quoted the bible, reminding us that Jesus calls us all to comfort the orphans and the aged. He touched our hearts.

I last saw Julio in November of 2005 at Accoyo, his beloved daughter Elena by his side. He was vigorous, his mind clear, barking orders to the cowboys, showing us his finest stock. I know that God has welcomed Julio. He is there with Shangri-la, Aribal, Lord, and Shere Kahn, in the vast valleys of ichu grass, made green by water distilled from Lake Titicaca. Here on earth, Don Julio walked God's path with unsurpassed grace, and I know today that Julio is at peace — a shepherd surrounded by his cria. We will miss you, Don Julio.