The Gift Of The Deer
By Vonnie Anderson

When we moved to town from our little farm, it was like God took pity on this country girl and brought a little ‘country’ into town for me. We gave up our farm animals but the Lord replaced them with His animals, which are a lot less work. The big fat fluffy squirrels which entertain us with their acrobatics, the raccoons that like to steal the neighbor cat’s food, and even a cute little rabbit that someone released to the wild when they tired of it. With infinite patience my husband, Jerry, tamed it until he could pick it up, and then we were able to find it a forever home with some nice people. But the best gift of all are the deer.

They are Mule Deer and I think they like the peace and quiet of our neighborhood which is the very last street within the city limits, so we border a country hillside in back. Each deer is so different in looks and personalities if one takes the time to study them.

About twelve years ago we noticed one exceptionally beautiful doe had a broken leg. Her right rear leg was broken at the ‘knee’ joint and just dangled, no longer reaching the ground. She ‘crow hopped’ when she walked. It was sad to watch her, but it didn't seem to slow her down. In fact, she could flat-out run when she wanted to and one would never know she was crippled. We were concerned about her making it through that first winter, so my husband, and our good neighbor Rick, started buying food for her and making sure she had water that she could get to without having to go to the creek unless she chose to do so.

She did well that winter with the extra sustenance, many prayers, and God's mercy, but imagine our surprise when the following June she gave birth to twin fawns, a boy and a girl! We so enjoyed the little family. The next spring, her children left and so did she, only to come back about a month later without her grown children, but with two new babies. Another boy and girl. She was always an excellent mother and often ran other deer off so she and the babies could eat first. That broken leg did not hinder her in any way.

This pattern repeated itself every year until four years ago. When she came back that spring with her new babies, her last years baby girl was still with her. She had run the boy off, as mother deer do, before giving birth, but allowed her daughter to stay with her. We planted a small garden in a nook below one of our utility room windows. It was fun to watch the babies nibble on the vegetables there. If the window hadn't had a screen, we could have reached out
and touched them. We could even see the little hard nubbin's under the skin on the tiny buck's head. They were offset and we knew that when his antler's came through, they would be crooked. I named him Knot Head. His sister was much smaller than he was to begin with, so we called her Baby Sister. And last years fawn became Big Sister. She was gorgeous and perfectly marked, but her face, while pretty, was not nearly as beautiful as her mother's.

I named Mama, Faline, because she is the most beautiful deer I have ever seen, but we call her Mama and good neighbor Rick calls her Grandma.

One day Little Sister was munching on the pear tomatoes under the open window, so I said, very quietly, ‘Don't eat the tomatoes!’ She jumped a couple of feet up in the air backwards and came down on the lawn and then looked straight up in the air, as if to say, ‘Was that you, God?’ We laughed and laughed, but not even her thinking it was God would keep her out of the tomatoes, so I always planted extras for her after that.

Knot Head was the most caring brother. When Mama and Big Sister would leave, he would start trotting behind them for a bit, then he would stop. He'd stand there, looking back and one could almost hear him say to his little sister, ‘Come on, you little pig! We're leaving. Stop eating and hurry up!’ He would faithfully wait for her to come and they would run to catch up. I think that cost him dearly.

On another occasion the family came to eat the grain we put out for them and Knot Head wasn't with them. He was way too little to have just left his mother, so we were afraid he had been hit by a car when crossing the highway to go to the river, which they did quite often. I could just see him standing in the road waiting for his sister, and a car coming into town...

We looked for him down by the highway but didn't find him. I was heart broken and asked the Lord to please take care of him if he was still alive.

Several times during that winter, we would see a little fawn, too young to be on his own, come flying into the yard, gulp down food and fly back the way he came as if demons were after him. As he got bigger he would stay and eat longer, but jumped at every real and imagined sound and would take off running. I prayed for that little guy all winter. I wanted to believe it was Knot Head, but could not understand, if it was him, why he hadn't come back to the family.

Late that winter, we had a very old doe come in that had been hit by a car. One side of her was all cut up and the other side was skinned from where she obviously went sliding down the road. She stayed in our yard four days eating the food we put out and drinking the water. Then she made it to the thicket, returning a couple times a day to eat.

She showed up one afternoon while the little one was here eating. He froze, and his whole body was quivering. He was totally terrified! She walked up to him, sniffed him, and just stood there. One could see him visibly relax. He dropped his head and started to eat again and she reached out with her front foot and kicked him out of the way. He backed off and let her eat. He stayed with her until she either died or left. He has been perfectly normal since then.

Then came the day when his antlers broke through the skin. They were tall thick spikes and they were definitely off set and we knew without a doubt that the crazy little guy was indeed our Knot Head. How good God is and how He must have chuckled over me praying for two little guys when in truth it was just one. I thank Him for honoring and answering my prayers and giving me so much joy.

Actually, we should have known it was Knot Head just by his face. It was like his mother's beautiful face with it's short gorgeous nose. He found his mother shortly after that. He was eating and she was coming to eat from across the neighbor's lawn. Knot Head looked up and
watched her crow-hopping, then bent his head to get another bite. He stopped abruptly and looked at her again. He watched her cross the yard and then took a couple of steps toward her and stopped. She walked right up to him and they just stood there staring at each other for the longest time. My active imagination supplied the conversation.

Knot Head: ‘You're my mother, aren't you?’

Faline: ‘It can't be! We saw you die! Your sisters and I saw you die! What happened? How have you survived all this time by yourself?’

Knot Head: ‘I don't know what happened. I woke up and I was all alone. I didn't know who I was or where I belonged. I was so scared. Everything was a painful jumble in my head, but, then the Creator Jesus put a thought in my mind where there was food and I would come here to eat and then I would hide the rest of the time.’

Faline: ‘Oh, my baby, it is you.’

And that's when she quit staring at him and started licking him all over his face and then all over his entire head. She probably would have bathed his entire body, but her tongue was most likely very tired by then.

They stayed together until spring and while he got along fine with Big Sister, he did not like his twin sister, who had grown bigger than him. In fact, one morning I was nearly mowed down by the two of them. I was crossing the yard, when Knot Head came flying around the corner of the house with Little Sister hot on his heels. I had to step back to keep from getting run over. I imagined, he was running away from her, yelling, ‘Get away from me! The last time I saw you, you nearly got me killed!’

We changed Little Sister's name to Piglet because she never stopped eating and was not pretty like her mama and brother. She had a long bony nose like her father, and wasn’t dainty at all. When she chewed her cud she looked like a chipmonk with both pouches packed full. She chowed, not chewed, very much like a camel.

Other things happened the following spring that we didn't understand. Big Sister came back with twin fawns, but later than usual. Other than the babies, she was alone. No Mama. No Piglet. Then eventually, Piglet came back, alone. Still no Mama. We were getting very concerned. We did see coyotes up on the ridge earlier in the spring. Big and dark colored. Made me wonder if they were crossed with a dog. There was also a cougar that sometimes prowled the neighborhood and had killed a deer in the neighbor's back yard.

A neighbor down the road claims he saw Mama Faline with triplets, but when she finally showed up, she was alone. Mama had marks on her that look like gouges and she was very afraid. Not of people, but of other things and animals. She even acted afraid of her own children.

I witnessed her reunion with Piglet and it made me cry. She was eating and noticed Piglet coming and she moved behind the cedar shed and laid down like she was hiding. Piglet started eating and all of the sudden caught her mother's scent. She started following it and walked right into a sprinkler, which she hates. She just stood there on tippy toes, getting hit by that sprinkler over and over again until she knew what direction to take. She went over to her mom and just stood there by her. Mama got up and started down the drive way. Piglet tried to get her to go under the shade of the tree, but Mama went the other direction, so Piglet started following her and they disappeared up into the thicket. A few days later, Big Sister found her too. Big Sister just walked off and left her twin babies under neighbor Rick's apricot tree and followed Mama, who was trying to get away from her. After an hour or so the twins left and laid down in the
thicket. Their mother was gone four solid hours! When she returned, those babies about broke
their necks getting to her so they could nurse. Big Sister always preferred being with her mother
instead of being a mother.

Mama eventually healed, but the following year she gave birth to a single fawn and kept
him hidden until his spots were nearly gone. She would come to eat all the time, but always
alone, so we were shocked when she finally brought him and showed him where the grain was. I
sure wish we knew what happened to hurt Mama and separate the family, but I am just glad that
they finally got back together.

Mama had many babies, but her last fawn was enough to make anyone feel old. Another
little buck, but this one didn't seem to know how to behave. He was always running off and
ignoring her when she called him. Once when they were through eating she walked off, but he
didn't follow her. He was too busy playing with a little girl fawn who wouldn't follow her mother
either. Mama called to him a few times, but he chose to ignore her. Ornery little boy!

Mama finally came back and ran the little girl back to her mother, none too gently, which
the other mother didn't seem to mind, and then she went back to him. She looked at him and
then walked behind him and slapped him on his bottom with the side of her head. Hard! It
knocked him about two feet forward. Then she did it again and started walking away, and that
little guy stayed so tight to her side, one would have thought he was glued there. We have never
seen him disobey her since then. ‘Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old,
he will not depart from it.’ Proverbs 22:6

We have had other deer also, some who lived around here and others who just passed
through. One buck had one thick antler that looked like a Brahma bull's horn that laid down
beside his face. The other antler looked like a big bush on the top of his head.

There was a little orphan girl fawn show up two years ago. I called her Orphan Annie. She
was smaller than the other fawns because she lost her mom before she was through nursing.
Mama's little boy liked her, so she stayed with him and Mama, and was able to make it through
the winter.

Another very large deer was a bully. When she first showed up, I thought she was a buck
with no antlers, because she was so big and muscular, until she had a baby. So she was just one
very large and mean doe. She ran the other deer away from the food. She didn't care how big or
how tiny they were, she kicked them all. It wouldn't have been so bad if she wanted to eat, but
she ran them all off and then she left, without bothering to eat. The time came though when
Mama had enough of her antics and ran her off, clear around the neighbors shop and out of sight!
Then Mama came back and they all ate in peace.

The old doe that was so badly injured came back. She had a tiny fawn with her that was
dark brown and curly fuzzy like a baby bear. She still walked very stiff legged and he walked the
same way. He was so cute. I named him Fuzzy Wuzzy. We were fairly sure he wouldn't make it,
because he had been injured before he was born, but we hoped he would. He didn't grow like the
other fawns and he eventually developed diarrhea. He made it through the summer and
disappeared in early fall. His poor old mother paced constantly for days and her grief was heart
breaking. Then she, too, disappeared.
After all these years Mama Faline is still with us. She completely amazes our Fish and Wildlife friend, Jeff. He says that a strong, healthy deer under the best circumstances has a life expectancy of about ten years. It has been twelve years since Mama appeared with her broken leg and we don't know how old she was when that happened. Mama is still producing children, but for the last two years, she has had single births, probably because of her age.

After four years, Big Sister and Piglet have finally left their Mama and moved on with their lives, although they are still a part of Mama's herd. Knot Head, too, has moved on, but he did have a nice big rack of antlers the last time he stopped by. We hope he has retained the wisdom God granted him when he was injured and all alone, and that like his daddy, he will be able to outsmart the hunters. Ornery is still with Mama, and will be until spring, if all goes well. His brother, who is a year older is now a nice two point.

Mama's 'husband' is a big four point, who is so old that his muzzle is solid white. I don't know how he has evaded the hunters all these years. We have no idea how old he is either. I call him 'The Great Prince' because is he is very wise to have lived so long.

We do pray for God to protect Mama Faline from the perils of the world and from the well meaning people who like sending a police officer down here now and then to 'put her out of her misery.' We assure them, and they can see with their own eyes, that she is not suffering. She is the Matriarch of the herd; where she goes, the others follow and she usually always eats first. Like our Fish and Wildlife friend, Jeff, says, 'Deer are tough creatures.' They are tough because God designed them to be that way. It amazes me at the minute details that our Lord wove into each animal to better help them survive in this world of ours.

We don't know how much longer we will have Mama, but we praise God for allowing us to share in her very long and interesting life. Since breaking her leg, she has birthed and raised to adulthood twenty two children. We, as well as our Fish and Wildlife friend, find that totally amazing.

Our God is a Mighty God and He does know how to give good gifts to His children. I thank Him, and praise Him, for this wonderful gift that He gives us daily. . . The gift of the deer! Thank you, Lord Jesus, for making them so beautiful and interesting, and for allowing us to watch this ongoing drama unfold on a daily basis.

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‘For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains; and the wild beasts of the field are mine.’

Psalms 50:10,11