

IN THE CITY

By Emily Chetkowski

“Things That Go Hee-Haw in the Night”

I was reading the paper the other night. The police were reporting an increase in crime in the city, crime of all sorts. Of course a report like that concerns a person, especially in these hard economic times. I've heard more stories lately of people resorting to crime and desperate measures all over New England, in peaceful places you'd never expect to be unsafe, not just in a city, like Fitchburg. Tired, I went to bed, but with one eye open. I was awakened around 2 am by the dogs barking. It sounded like the bark they use when deer are around. I ignored them.

Suddenly, their barking changed. Both dogs got up and charged towards the front doors, VERY upset. Uh oh, they were barking like someone was here! At 2am??? I jumped out of bed and snuck down the hallway to see the dogs snapping and snarling wildly at the door. I peeked out a window but couldn't see any one, not even a car, but the view of the front door from that window isn't great.

Then my heart lept out of my chest, I heard what the dogs were barking at. Someone was pushing on my front doors, trying to get in! Oh no! I turned to go get the phone to call 911, my pulse beating faster, my mind racing to figure out what to do if they get in!

As I turned I glanced out the window again. This time I saw the culprit, the early morning marauder, standing there with a foolish look on his face. It was WINSTON, my miniature donkey! He was loose, and he wanted to come in. Gee thanks, Winston, for giving me a HEART ATTACK!

People often ask me “*Why do you have a donkey?*” At that very moment, at 2 am, with my heart still in my throat, I asked myself why, too.

It's been ten years since I got the notion to get a donkey, 10 years of getting asked that very question. I ponder it a moment, but I always answer the same way. “*Why do I have a donkey? For the jokes of course.*”

You see, no matter where I go or who I am with, I am the brunt of donkey jokes, affectionately so. What's a donkey joke? Just think about it, use the alternative name for a donkey and the comments and guffaws are endless.

There are times when he is a silly...”donkey,” times when he can be a stupid...”donkey”. And times like the other night, when he can be a real pain in the...”donkey”.

Winston is his own entity. He has a personality larger than life. Ask anyone who has ever met him, and they will tell you what a nice donkey I have, no pun intended there. And Winston is a donkey without

walls. At any given moment, he can get out of the fencing and go wherever he pleases, like my front door at 2am.

Off or on, my horses just need to see my electric fence and they stay away from it. But Winston has a sense the horses don't, I guess. He's like a fence tester, he can tell when it's not working well, and takes full advantage of the situation. I spend a lot of time super-charging the fence around here, thanks to Winston.

I got him when I had sheep, as a flock guardian, a protector of wooly ruminants against coyotes and neighboring dogs. I remember the day he arrived, only 6 months old at the time, delivered in the back of a Taurus station wagon. Winston is a registered mini-donkey, named by the breeder after Winston Churchill. He was adorable, a playful gregarious fluff ball. But the sheep guardian idea didn't work out. Winston couldn't care less about the sheep. I think he thought they were rather ridiculous, always doing whatever the other sheep did. They weren't independent thinkers like Winston. But they coexisted until the day he pulled what I call a Mike Tyson. Yes, Winston bit my favorite sheep's ear off.

So, I gave Winston away, for awhile, to an old man who loved him, with the understanding that he came back to me if he couldn't keep him anymore. I advised him to not feed Winston too much, mini-donkeys never get rid of fat and it can cripple them. He had him 5 years, then Winston came back, fat. Yes, I know what you are saying about my ..."donkey" now. Spare me. I've heard that one many times before. Still it makes me laugh, it makes me smile. And though I hate to admit it, so does Winston, and that's really why I have him.