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## Miniature horses are profitable pets for nuns



By Stacey Babin

ENTERTAINMENT WRITER

Sister Jude looked proudly over the fence at the newest addition to her family of horses. "Come here," she called to the horses so they would come closer to the fence.

(left) Sister Mary Bernadette Muller stands in front of the chapel at the Monastery of St. Clare near Brenham.

(below) Hot Shot watches over Valentine, her colt, at the Monastery of St. Clare. Valentine is the monastery's only black and white miniature horse.

(at bottom) Sister Jude Marie Howe of the Order of St. Clare kisses Angel, one of the 60 miniature horses at the monastery.

Photos by Jay Janner



first-born horse of 1989 — trotted clumsily most of the way across the pasture.

She hid shyly behind her mother as they approached the fence.

"She's our first black and white horse and she won't be sold," Sister Jude said.

Although these horses do 90 percent of their growing in the first

year, this horse will never grow to be even 3 feet tall.

Valentine, like the other 59 horses at the monastery, is a miniature horse.

At the Monastery of St. Clare, nine miles northeast of Brenham, nuns raise and sell miniature horses to support their home.

Sister Jude, a novice, has been with the monastery for almost two years. She is the horses' principal caretaker and feeder.

"At this time of year, we call this the maternity pasture," Sister Jude said as pregnant mares slowly crossed the pasture.

"We pasture-breed the mares with a stallion because it's more natural."

She pointed to the stallion responsible for the abundance of pregnant mares. Wansley-Basalt is a 29-inch stallion imported from England and is a leader for the mares, Sister Jude said.

The monastery's 98-acre ranch is a perfect setting for the little animals whose origins date to the 16th century.

Miniature horses were bred as pets for European royalty. Wars and famine contributed to the decline in their numbers, however.

By the 1900s, the miniature horses were almost extinct, but some could be found in circuses or with gypsies.

Some of the horses were brought to the United States to work in coal mines and were well cared for by their breeders. Records and pedigrees were kept, and by the 1970s they began to be registered.

"All of our horses are named and registered," Sister Jude said.

Miniature horses are measured at the last hair of their mane and are classified as those no taller than 34 inches.

"They are full-size horses bred down," Sister Jude said.

The two main kinds of "minis," as the miniature horses are nicknamed, are the stocky Quarter Horse kind and the taller, thoroughbred type. The monastery cares for these and many other breeds.

Some horses have the long, flowing manes similar to ponies' that drape across their backs and virtually cover their eyes. Others have shorter manes similar to those of standard-size horses.

The Monastery of St. Clare is nationally known for its miniature horses.

The horses have been featured in National Geographic and on the television show Texas Country Reporter.

Sister Mary Bernadette Muller, who handles the registering and sales of the horses, estimated that about 10,500 visitors come to the monastery each year to see the horses.

"It's the nuns plus the horses that interest so many people," Sister Bernadette said.

"The majority comes to see the horses, not the chapel. It's a way for people to get to know the nuns better, too."

Sister Bernadette said people of all religions come to see the horses and visit with the nuns, and some come to buy a horse.

"The younger horses start at about \$5,000, and the mares can go for \$10,000," she said. "We sell between 15 to 20 a year."

Stallions can be priced at up to \$30,000, Sister Bernadette said.

She said they sell the horses to only three kinds of people.

"We sell to people who want to get into it as a business, to elderly people and to people who want them as pets for their children," she said.

The monastery ships the small horses free in the continental United States for people who purchase 3 or more, Sister Bernadette said.

Sister Jude said the miniature horses are similar to dogs in their temperament, which makes them excellent pets.

Many of the horses are trained for shows and can be harnessed to drive a cart. The ideal size of a driving horse is at least 33 inches.

Geldings, or castrated horses, are good drivers because they are more attentive than stallions and more muscled than mares, she said.

Sister Bernadette said the monastery has two miniature horse shows a year. The Monastery Spring Fling, a competitive, all-day show, will be May 20. Because the monastery is sponsoring the show, however, its horses cannot compete.

The Monastery October Extravaganza is a 2-hour show exhibiting the monastery's miniature horses. Some horses are dressed in carousel outfits and some drive carts.

The sisters got some of the miniature horses in 1982 while living in Corpus Christi. In 1986, they moved to Brenham and doubled the number of their herd.

"We used to raise birds and cats, but horses are the best," Sister Bernadette said.

"They're time consuming, but they don't demand as much time as a caged animal, and our prayer time isn't interrupted."

## Nuns in Brenham lead secluded yet busy lives

By Stacey Babin

ENTERTAINMENT WRITER

The nuns of the Monastery of St. Clare near Brenham are not the kind of nuns the public usually envisions.

They are not social workers, nurses or teachers. They are contemplative nuns.

They lead a life of silent prayer and penance. Contemplative nuns take the three required vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, but add a fourth vow of enclosure.

This vow limits the exits and entrances of the monastery to those of necessity.

Only one road goes into the monastery. Enclosure is beneficial to the quiet setting and lifestyle of the contemplative nuns.

"Our purpose is prayer," Sister Mary Bernadette Muller said. "I don't go around telling people why I believe a certain way."

"Some people think it's crazy. I don't think I'm crazy!"

Sister Bernadette dresses in a blue robe tied with a rope, similar to a monk's clothing. Her formal habit is brown. The rope has three knots in it.

"The knots signify the three vows we take," she said. "The novice sister does not have these knots yet."

Poor Clares are an order of Franciscans founded by St. Francis in the 13th century. They evacuated Cuba in 1960 and came to the United States.

Sister Bernadette had to find a place for the monastery in 1986 when the nuns moved from Corpus Christi.

"This was the seventh spot we looked at, and we just knew this was it," she said. "We felt lucky about it."

The chapel was built with the dependent sisters in mind, and each sister has a certain place to pray and keep her prayer books.

Pews were built for visitors.

Of the 15 nuns who live at the monastery, nine are Cuban refugee sisters. One nun helps out the novice sister.

"The novice has not quite been with us two years, and she and Sister Angela do all of the work with the horses," Sister Bernadette said.

Because the monastery is autonomous, the nuns can choose how they raise funds.

The Brenham monastery is supported by the sales of miniature horses and ceramic art. The nuns' artwork is displayed in the monastery's Art Barn.

"One sister does the firing and six or seven do the painting," she said.

At 71, Sister Bernadette rides around the 98-acre ranch in a golf cart and claims a typical day is a "hectic" one.

She said the nuns are up at 6 in the morning to have breakfast and prayer. At 8 a.m., they have Mass with a priest from St. Mary's in Brenham. They pray together at noon, and from 2-4 p.m. the Monastery Miniature Horse Ranch and the Art Barn are open to the public.

In the office, visitors can view the Miniature Horse Carousel built by two inmates at the Texas Department of Correction's Pack II Unit.

The office also showcases many of the monastery's awards for their miniature horses.

At night the sisters have recreation time and can play cards, work puzzles or watch previewed videos, she said.

"So much that is on television today is bad," Sister Bernadette said. "We like to know what we're watching."

At 8 p.m. the nuns have chapel, she said, and most go to bed by 8:30 p.m.

"Some of the younger ones stay up a little later, though," she added.

## Aquarium owners enjoy oceanic beauty

Editor's note — The following is the first in a series of articles about pets — from the mundane to the bizarre, from fish and reptiles to dogs and cats. Suggestions of what and where to look for each animal and profiles of some pet enthusiasts will be covered.

Most Texas A&M students live in residence halls or apartments, most of which lack yards or large outdoor areas. These articles will describe animals that an apartment-dweller can maintain as well as those for the student lucky enough to have a yard (or forgiving roommates).

By Thomas Boylan

ENTERTAINMENT WRITER

Clowns, butterflies, triggers, cichlids, stones and angels — they don't seem to have much in common, unless you happen to be talking to an aquarium owner.

If so, you're likely to find that he or she probably owns a few of each. Just add the suffix "-fish" to any of those words, and you've named a breed, one of thousands of breeds that people like Tim Terrazas, Eric Ray and Carolyn Wheeler keep in aquariums, salt and freshwater.

Names like clownfish, butterflyfish and angelfish conjure up exotic images that are well supported by the animal's appearances. They're brightly colored and often rare.

Tim Terrazas, a senior economics major and an employee at Pet Paradise, is an owner of a few such fish.

Tim Terrazas and Saltwater

"I have a tomato clown, a seabay clown, a scissor-tail goby and a coral

banded shrimp (candy-cane striped with big pincers)," Terrazas said. He also has a dark maroon clownfish, and to enhance the atmosphere of his aquarium, he has several varieties of coral, including mushroom, fox and elegant. The elegant coral (that is its name) is on display in the tank at the front door of Pet Paradise.

Terrazas said he prefers corals to fish because "they're so much prettier." Describing it, he said, "Coral is like an anemone with a hard skeleton base. It's a coelenterate that in the past didn't live too long in aquariums — they just sort of deteriorated — but with today's lighting they can live and even thrive and multiply."

Technology has made better coral survival possible by artificially creating the spectrum of the sun. "The blue spectrum," Terrazas said, "because after you go 15 feet down, that's all the light that gets through."

He said he likes to keep corals not only because they are attractive. "They're also different," he said. "Not everyone can keep a coral. They aren't willing to spend the money and don't have the knowledge to maintain it."

Until recently, his miniature ocean was in a 75-gallon tank at his apartment. It was about 4 feet long, but that wasn't large enough, and he is in the process of moving his ocean denizens to a much larger home. His new tank will hold 135 gallons of saltwater and will be 6 feet long.

Terrazas began keeping fish about three years ago. "Some friends had a tank, a 10-gallon freshwater," he said. "After about three months I moved up to a 55-gallon and imme-

diately went to saltwater.

"It's so much more colorful, and there's a bigger choice of fish."

Until his new tank is set up, his fish and corals are living at Pet Paradise.

Terrazas noted that many hospitals and retirement homes keep fish because medical studies have shown that simply sitting and watching fish lowers people's heart rates.

The variety of tropical fish available is vast. Terrazas pulled out several books to show the particular species he is most interested in, and the books were all but medical dictionaries in full color.

The books showed thousands of species that come in color combinations unlike any found in land-dwelling animals: brilliant yellows and blues beside black and silver together on fish no larger than a silver dollar.

The photos were spectacular, but not half as spectacular as the fish themselves.

Terrazas' favorite among his collection is an eilbi angelfish. It is blue, gray, red and brown with brilliant orange eyes. His favorite fish of all is a *Caetodon semivatus* — it has no common name — which would cost a few hundred dollars.

"I've never seen one," he said. "They come from the Red Sea only, so I've only seen pictures."

Collecting fish is a way to travel the world. While Jacques Cousteau sails the world in his ship The Calypso, looking at beautiful reefs and animals, Terrazas sits in his living room, looking at a microcosm of the Philippines and the Indo-Pacific area, as well as the Caribbean and the Australian coast, all ablaze with

color.

Eric Ray and Freshwater

Eric Ray, a 1985 A&M industrial education graduate, owns six tanks holding a total of 325 gallons of water. He said he prefers freshwater to saltwater fish, and he has a particular affinity for African cichlids.

"They (cichlids) come from two lakes in Africa, and that's the only place they come from," Ray said.

"They're really aggressive and a lot of them are carnivorous, although some of them are vegetarians, too."

The fish are also unusual in the way they rear their young. Ray explained: "The female lays her eggs on the bottom, and after the male fertilizes them, she picks them up and carries them in her mouth for the three or four weeks it takes them to develop, and the baby fish hide in her mouth until they're too big to fit."

"During the three to four weeks they're in her mouth, she won't eat — she has no facility to allow it. That's how you can tell when they're getting ready to breed; the females get really big."

Ray said he prefers maintaining a freshwater aquarium to a saltwater tank.

"It's less expensive, and they're all colorful," he said. "They all have distinct personalities, too. If you watch them, you can almost always predict their behavior."

He added that freshwater fish are saying, "You've really got to screw something up to kill them."