



BUSTER TELLS IT ALL



Q and A

With Carolyn Berry



What inspired you to write a children's book?

The loss of my niece Becca inspired me. My niece loved animals, and when she was young she worked at Operation Kindness. She always loved her dogs and her bird, Mo. Becca would spend a week each summer at Pony Creek Ranch with us and really get to have the hands-on experience of loving, feeding, raising and caring for all the animals. I would always bring animals back and forth with me to Dallas from the ranch when they were on the bottle and the minute I would drive up to our home, Becca would be waiting at the door wanting to meet and feed the new baby!

Is “Buster Tells It All” a true story?

The stories I have written are all experiences I have had while raising animals at Pony Creek. So many of the stories I have scratched on paper occurred while Becca was living — particularly the two that I wrote in this book. She was able to know and raise both Baby and April with me.

Where is Pony Creek Ranch located?

It is located in North Texas 17 miles from Glen Rose or 17 miles from Granbury.

What motivated your family to turn the ranch into an animal preserve for endangered animals and wildlife?

Just the love for animals — you start to help and the next thing you know, you're trying to save everything. Initially my husband Jim and his father raised a small section of cattle at the ranch, then Jim dedicated a small area to African game — only zebra and ostrich. With time, especially in the last fifteen years, the exotics became our sole stock.



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Can you describe some of the animals who live at the ranch? For example, what is a Nubian ibex and where did they originate?

As the book states, Nubians are from Afghanistan, but we have several species. We have sable antelope, roan antelope, wildebeest, axis deer, kudu, Arabian oryx, Watusi, addax and several more.

With such a variety of endangered animals and wildlife living on the ranch, are there ever close call moments? Do they somehow manage to get along for the most part?

That's what's so fascinating! I would be crazy to say they get along perfectly; there will always be a "pecking order" with animals, as with people. For the most part what I find really interesting are the ones that don't quite "fit in" to their group. They all seem to jell together and get along so incredibly well. In a sense they don't look at each other as to who or what they are — they are just a group of friends. They really don't care if one is a zebra, a pigmy donkey or a gazelle; they just know for some reason they get along, no matter the size, shape, personality or food choice.

How did Buster become the spokesman for Pony Creek?

We had seven dogs: Riley the ranch dog — a caretaker, but he was nobody's friend, just strictly the police — Luke, Homer, Buck, Sweetie Pie, Honey and Buster. Buster came to live with Jim and me when one of our kids left for New Zealand after graduating from college. Buster just had this way with the babies. When they didn't take to the bottle at first, he would lick them and try to act like their mom would. He would play with them and let them lie next to him and feel safe. It was very interesting to watch the way he had such a genuine interest in each animal.

Have you always had a love of animals?

When I was little I used to hand out flyers on the block saying that I would take care of people's animals. One day my mom was watching me roll out chicken wire in the backyard — I was going to make dog runs so I could take care of everyone's dogs. She said that it was all of about 18 inches high with no start and no finish, but I was determined to make it work. As I got older I used to love going to the zoo and watching Suzette Shelmire run the children's part. I wanted to be just like her; back then everything was hands-on. I read every book about animals and watched every "National Geographic" show I could.





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What lessons do you hope young readers will learn by reading “Buster Tells It All”?

Compassion, taking care of one another, treating each other with kindness and loyalty — so many wonderful characteristics come with caring for animals. The overarching message is to love one another. What has been most impactful through the years is watching a child take care of an animal. Once that happens they become compassionate to all mankind overnight.

Trust plays a significant role in your book. Can you explain?

It's very simple: if I can't trust the animal and they can't trust me, then I would have no possible way to treat, care for or feed the animals.

How did your mother's influence impact you?

Mom was kind, and never spoke a bad word about anyone. She gave solely out of love, never expecting anything in return.

Do you have plans to open Pony Creek Ranch to the public so others can experience this magical paradise while learning important life lessons?

Yes, I want children to experience what I am writing about. I would love to have a contest for all children to write a short essay: “Why do you want to come to Pony Creek?” I would love to host twenty kids at a time for an overnight. It's not about the correct grammar used; it's about writing from the heart!

A portion of the proceeds will be donated to Teach For America and the SPCA. Can you tell us about Teach For America, how it works and whom it benefits?

Teach For America benefits children who aren't necessarily given the extras in life. The education leaders with Teach For America work to ensure that kids growing up in poverty get an excellent education so they can be given wings to fly. I hope the money donated will give more children the opportunity to be taught by these very educated, fine people who want to give so much of their time. So many children deserve a spot at Teach For America, but like everything else, it all takes money to grow.

“Buster Tells It All” captures the essence of many real-life adventures that have taken place at Pony Creek Ranch. I'm sure there are many more stories to tell. Do you have plans to write another book?

Oh, have I got the stories! Yes, another book would be a real treat!

