

How the Burro Got His Ears and His Voice

IT WAS SUNDAY, and the clear blue sky above the Arizona desert had begun to take on its usual evening rainbow hues, as the sun sank nearer the horizon beyond the Tucson Mountain to the west.

Five-year-old Billy Pierce, recovering from an illness, had been wrapped in a blanket and carried to the front porch of his bungalow home. Here he rested happily in his father's arms, and gazed about him at scenes that he had not been able to view for some time—the cheery flowers in his mother's garden, the freshly cut green lawn, the lovely hues of the changing sky, and the far-off mountains to the north.

Soon he said, "Daddy, do you know a new story?"

"I'm afraid not, Billy," answered his father. "Seems to me I've told you every story I have ever heard."

Just then Billy's burro, Sally, in the corral back of the bungalow, began to call. The peculiar sound, so loud on the quiet evening air, startled Mr. Pierce. Then he laughed softly and said, "There's your Arizona nightingale singing for her supper, Billy."

"Aw, Daddy, that's no nightingale. A nightingale's a bird! That was just my burro calling. Why did you call her an Arizona nightingale?"

"Cowboys out on the range call burros that to make fun of their unmelodious voices. Nightingales sing night and day. Burros call night and day, too. But we have no nightingales in Arizona so far as I've heard, and we do have many burros. So the cowboys think it's funny to call them our nightingales, because the burro's voice is so dreadful sounding when compared with the sweet song of a



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The Nightingale

The nightingale is one of the best-loved songbirds of Europe.

nightingale. Anyhow, Sally called just in time to remind me of a story that I haven't thought of in years. My granddad used to tell it to me when I was a little chap like you."

"Is it a true story, Daddy?"

"No, son. It's a story told to show us that even animal mothers protect and train their little ones, so that they may know how best to care for themselves when they are grown and have to live in the world on their own. And it also tells how we develop better physical organs to be more useful, including voices so that we can express our feelings and thoughts, My granddad told me the name of the story is, 'How the Burro Got His Ears and His Voice.'"

Billy laughed softly and snuggled down in his father's arms before he said, "Sounds funny, Daddy! Please tell it to me."

"This story is about a mother burro and her son Jacky. The mother's name was Mrs. Jenny. She belonged to a prospector who early one spring

morning put a pack saddle on her back, loaded it with picks, shovels, dried beans, flour, and like supplies, and drove her up to his mine in the Catalina Mountains over there to the north. There the prospector expected to keep Mrs. Jenny busy working for him all through the summer.

But Mrs. Jenny had a different plan for herself. She didn't like to work, and so she had set her heart on a nice long vacation in the cool shade of the trees on the mountain, where the grass grew rich and tender, and the mountain streams rushed cold and refreshing down to the desert below.

One night when her master thought Mrs. Jenny had begun to like her new home so much that she would be glad to stay there without restraint, he neglected to bell and hobble her as he usually did. Mrs. Jenny had been watching for this freedom to be given her, and before morning she was miles away in the deep forest, where she felt sure that she would never be discovered. Here she made a home for herself in an old, abandoned, miner's shack, and here her son Jacky was born.

All went well with the little fellow and his mamma until Jacky was four months old. Then Mrs. Jenny began to worry that Jacky was much too young to stand the severe cold of the approaching winter. So she began to teach him how to protect himself on the way down the mountain to her relatives in the desert, where she decided he should go for the winter. She guided him to places where the grass would be tenderest for his growing teeth, and to streams where the water would be cleanest and freshest for him to drink.

Along with the rest of his education, Mrs. Jenny emphasized the value of listening, so that Jacky would be able to detect sounds that would warn him of danger. And while the constant pointing and turning of his ears this way and that as he listened for warning sounds caused Jacky's ears to grow much longer than normal burros' ears, this Mrs. Jenny did not mind that. She thought it was better to have long but less beautiful ears than pretty short ears that could not catch distant sounds as well as Jacky's now could.

One cold morning when Mrs. Jenny saw Jacky shiver as he snuggled close to her side she decided that it was fully time that he should be on his way

to where it would be much warmer for him. So she said to him in her silent way of talking, "Jacky, it will be nice and warm down in the desert where your grandma lives, and I have decided that you must go and pay her a nice long visit."

"That'll be super!" said Jacky in words that he had not yet learned how to make audible. "We'll have a grand time down there in the warm sunshine won't we?"

"But I can't go with you," said his mamma. "My master'll be home by this time. He'll be watching for me. And after the long spell of freedom I've had, the thought of returning to a life of hard work doesn't appeal to me at all."

"But I don't want to go all by myself," grumbled Jacky.

"It'll be a long trip for you, I know, dear," Mother Jenny sympathized with him. "But you're a big boy now, and I feel sure that with all the knowledge you have gained from me, you'll be able to make."

Jacky sighed. "Do I have to go right away?" he pleaded.

"I believe you should, dear. But we'll enjoy ourselves and not worry about it today. Then tomorrow morning we'll get ourselves a nice breakfast, and it warms up you can start your trip. The nights will grow warmer the farther down the mountain you go. And once you get through the pass where Mr. John, the hermit, lives you'll be quite safe."

Jacky shuddered. "If Mr. John catches me, will he eat me?"

"Not unless he's awfully, awfully hungry," answered his mamma. "But you must watch out that no wild animals catch you as you go down the trail. You'd be a nice, tender morsel for them now, but by the time you are a year old you'll be so tough that no animal will try to eat you."

"Maybe I better stay here till I'm a year old," asserted Jacky fearfully.

"Oh, no indeed! You might freeze to death before spring, for the winters here are dreadfully cold. Just remember to listen every step of the way and if you hear any disturbing sounds, you just crouch down on the ground, tuck your head, tail, and black hoofs under your belly, keep very still,

and with your gray coat maybe you'll be mistaken for a rock."

Shortly after sunrise the following morning, Mrs. Jenny aroused Jacky from his slumber, hovered around him till he'd eaten a good breakfast, led him to a plainly marked trail on the mountain side, rubbed noses with him and hurried him off.

Jacky traveled all day long, and as night came on he crouched down close to a tree. Here he shivered with fear that some big wild animal would discover he was not a rock, in spite of the fact that he did as his mamma had told him and tried to appear like one.

Toward evening of the next day Jacky came within sight of Mr. John's house. It was built close to the trail in a narrow pass in the mountain, just as Jacky's mamma had told him. Jacky could plainly see a man near the house who looked like the hermit, for he wore an old straw hat and had a long gray beard. Just now he was bending over some wood he was sawing.

When he saw the old man Jacky felt his heart almost stop beating with fear, for Mrs. Jenny had said that Mr. John would surely be his master and make him work hard if Jacky was not able to get past his house without being captured.

"Maybe if I lie down and rest a while," decided Jacky in his effort to quiet his fears, "Mr. John will finish sawing his wood and go into the house. Then I can easily slip by without his seeing me." But Jacky was tired, the day was warm, and he had no sooner comfortably settled himself than he fell fast asleep.

He had slept but a short while when Mr. John, walking noiselessly by in his moccasined feet, discovered him.

"Ha, ha!" gloated Mr. John. "Here is where I get a fine burden bearer for my next year's work! I'll corral him through the winter, feed him well, and he'll be in fine condition for my service by spring. Get up, burro, and come home with me!"

Startled from his slumber, Jacky could not bring himself to open his eyes and verify his fear that the voice he heard belonged to Mr. John.

"Get up, I say!" shouted the voice.



Arnault/Foregram

In the Southwestern United States a donkey is called a burro. Donkeys, or burros, can carry heavy loads, like this one carrying grain in Greece.

Immediately Jacky felt a heavy whack on his back—something he had never felt before—and he was too frightened to move.

"I'll make you get up!" said Mr. John. He caught hold of Jacky's ears and tugged until he saw the ears stretch toward him more than a half foot in length. In his astonishment at such an unusual sight, Mr. John let go of Jacky's ears.

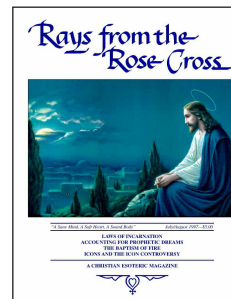
Instantly Jacky scrambled to his feet and raced off down the mountain trail as fast as his legs would carry him. When he had reached what he

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considered a safe distance, Jacky glanced back over his shoulder and saw Mr. John standing where he had left him. His old straw hat was over one ear, and he was evidently still so astonished at the sight of such long ears on such a little animal that he could not move.

Jacky was so overjoyed to find himself safely far from Mr. John that his heart could not hold all his emotion. It forced his mouth open to let some of the joy out, and to Jacky's surprise, "He-he-hee-e!" came out of his throat.

Alarmed at the sound—for he had never heard its like before—Jacky gasped, and "Haw-aw-aw!" came from where the "Hee-hee!" had come.

For a moment Jacky was too frightened to move. Then, as he trotted off down the trail to put yet greater distance between himself and Mr. John, he decided, "Aw, that's nothing to be alarmed about. Those sounds were right within myself! Power to make those sounds must be inside all my folks, but none of us has ever found it out before. Now it's up to me to perfect those sounds, so that when I get down to Grandma's place, I can teach her and all her family how to make them, too. Then we'll be able to call to each other no matter how far one of us may be from the other. That'll be so friendly and happyfying."

So the rest of the way down the mountain, Jacky practiced and practiced his new-found accomplishment until by the time he had reached the corral where his grandma and some of his other relatives were, it seemed the easiest thing in the world for him to express his joy at finding them by, "Hee-Haw!" the only language he had yet learned.

Grandma Burro trotted swiftly up to rub noses with him. "Jacky! Darling! How glad I am to see you!" she told him in her quiet way. "But your ears! Your voice! Most, most wonderful in one of us! You must have done marvelous work to have deserved to be given such astonishing things."

"I haven't done a thing marvelous at all, Grandma," answered Jacky. "I've just brought out what is in my own self. And there's nothing astonishing about those things either, Grandma. For what's in me is in every one of us. All it needs is bringing out. Have you heard what Mamma used to tell me, 'what we don't use, we lose'?"



Greg Haverson

This wild burro (or wild ass) and her foal lives in Africa.

"Often, dearie."

"Well, I've decided there's another saying just as true as that one: 'What we don't develop in our own selves we never can use!' Now tomorrow after I'm rested I'm going to tell every one of you who wants to know just how I got my long ears and my voice."

Jacky kept his word. The next day he gathered all his relatives about him and began to tell them just how he had developed his ears and his voice. His relatives told their children and their friends. Soon all burros everywhere were following Jacky's advice and practicing self-development. And it is plainly evident that they have kept up that practice ever since, for today all burros have long ears and voices. □

—S.B. McIntyre