



## Booth

---

Volume 7 | Issue 6

Article 1

---

6-5-2015

# Of Goats and Men

Richard Bertram Peterson

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.butler.edu/booth>

---

### Recommended Citation

Peterson, Richard Bertram (2015) "Of Goats and Men," *Booth*: Vol. 7: Iss. 6, Article 1.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.butler.edu/booth/vol7/iss6/1>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Butler University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Booth by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Butler University. For more information, please contact [fgaede@butler.edu](mailto:fgaede@butler.edu).

---

# Of Goats and Men

## **Abstract**

In the small, coastal town of Monterey, California, a tidy residential community called Deer Flats perches on one of the nearby hills. From up there, on a clear day, of which there are many, one may, if one chooses, watch the bay and the boats that sail upon its waters, and catch the failing rays of sunlight at dusk. The houses are well kept, the people industrious, and for the most part civil, if not particularly cordial. They enjoy walking their dogs and tending their front yards. Lately, however, because of the drought, the lawns have browned and withered.

The “flats” is a misnomer. Not unlike the fictional Tortilla Flat, the neighborhood is actually quite hilly. The community is surrounded by a greenbelt containing a stand of Monterey pines, a tree peculiar to the region and vigilantly safeguarded by the city arborist. But over the years a dense carpet of desiccated vegetation beneath the stately trees became a concern because of the threat of fire. The members of the homeowners’ association, in their august wisdom, devised a plan to mitigate this danger and, at the same time, demonstrate their ecological awareness.

They hired goats.

## **Cover Page Footnote**

Of Goats and Men was originally published at [Booth](#).



# BOOTH



A JOURNAL

June 5, 2015

## Of Goats and Men

Fiction by Richard Bertram Peterson

In the small, coastal town of Monterey, California, a tidy residential community called Deer Flats perches on one of the nearby hills. From up there, on a clear day, of which there are many, one may, if one chooses, watch the bay and the boats that sail upon its waters, and catch the failing rays of sunlight at dusk. The houses are well kept, the people industrious, and for the most part civil, if not particularly cordial. They enjoy walking their dogs and tending their front yards. Lately, however, because of the drought, the lawns have browned and withered.

The “flats” is a misnomer. Not unlike the fictional Tortilla Flat, the neighborhood is actually quite hilly. The community is surrounded by a greenbelt containing a stand of Monterey pines, a tree peculiar to the region and vigilantly safeguarded by the city arborist. But over the years a dense carpet of desiccated vegetation beneath the stately trees became a concern because of the threat of fire. The members of the homeowners’ association, in their august wisdom, devised a plan to mitigate this danger and, at the same time, demonstrate their ecological awareness.

They hired goats.

Several hundred of the goateed animals arrived one day in cattle trucks, accompanied by a shepherd and his herding dog. The first night the goats bedded down in a shallow ravine in the greenbelt, to the delight of the welcoming homeowners. The next day

they were hungrily devouring roots, branches, small trees, trash, and anything underfoot or overhead within reach—at a cost of just \$800 per acre. A small portable fence was erected to enclose them and their watchful dog to the task at hand. The clearing was scheduled to take a few weeks; however, toward the end of the first week, an unfortunate incident occurred.

A mountain lion ate several of the goats.

A neighbor lady had recently lost her pet to such an animal—a shriek in the night and a tuft of fur on the ground the last memories of the beloved Fluffy. The shepherd, as of course he should, took steps to immediately protect his flock. He brought in two large, muscled dogs and, adjacent to the goat enclosure, posted a warning on large signs that cautioned children and all domesticated animals to stay clear of his working animals and their vicious protectors.

Now, in a community with nearly as many dogs as people, this was going to be difficult.

More trouble ensued during a casual, sunny afternoon at the small neighborhood park, hard by the greenbelt where the goats were working. Despite the signage prohibiting dogs in the park (although generally law-abiding, the community showed a blatant disregard for restricting in any way the rights of its canine members), a free-spirited, unleashed corgi named Mr. Jones (his owners were fans of Counting Crows) decided to investigate the strange creatures across the way. His excitement at seeing the goats and his frantic attempts to join their company elicited an even more spirited response from the herd's pair of trained-to-kill guardians. In their eagerness to disembowel the perceived threat, the beasts crashed the fence, tearing it asunder. They hurtled across the greensward toward the unsuspecting park visitors.

As was to be expected, the clamor of slaving, snarling, howling, four-footed avengers bounding pell-mell effected a startling end to the tranquility of the afternoon. As the adults scattered, the ruckus alerted the children in the bounce house and allowed them to exit just as the hounds crashed into the giant inflatable toy and toppled it to a flabby, plastic mass. Taking advantage of this slight delay to his would-be assassins, Mr. Jones disappeared up the adjacent alley. Unfortunately, as it later turned out, a terrified spectator of the mayhem called the cops.

The complications escalated when law enforcement arrived.

It was difficult for the officers to ascertain the exact nature of the situation. With everyone hysterical, their only comprehension was that vicious dogs were attacking

people in the neighborhood. As they surveyed the scene, they came upon a herd of goats down the hill from the park. At first stupefied by this discovery, they soon spied a dog mingling with the herd. Not wishing to be attacked and mauled by this probably rabid animal, they approached it warily, weapons at the ready. Now, this dog was one of the smartest breeds in dogdom, so, not wishing to be executed for a crime it had not committed, it fled the scene. The officers, not privy to the distinction between herding dogs and guard dogs, took aim and fired. Fortunately, their shots went awry and the animal was unharmed. Unfortunately, their bullets struck the volatile grass and brush.

It took only a brief moment after the tinder ignited for the conflagration to begin.

Meanwhile, the goats, now unherded and spooked by the tumult, wandered through the broken fence, and it didn't take very long for most of the animals to array themselves throughout the park and into the street. The shepherd was beside himself, yelling at the police and gesticulating wildly. The few people remaining in the park tried to calm him; others tried to wrangle the goats back behind the fence. At about this time the faint smell of smoke, of burning wood, turned the people back toward the greenbelt.

An alarmed homeowner called the fire department.

A short time later the sirens could be heard. The neighbors cheered the fire engines' imminent arrival. Now, Deer Flats had plenty of hydrants, so it should have taken only a few seconds to connect the hoses and direct water at the flames. The engines started up the hill toward the park—and then abruptly braked.

The wayward goats obstructed the road.

Oblivious to the wailing sirens and desperate honking, the goats remained steadfast. With the fire blazing in front of him, the driver of the lead engine made a courageous, albeit unpopular, decision that later, following the investigation, resulted in his early retirement.

He gunned the motor and drove into the herd.

As the trucks plowed through the goats, the cheering stopped, supplanted by gasps of disbelief and shouts of outrage. Some neighbors fainted, adding to the shambles; others, sickened and having soiled themselves, shrank from the Grand Guignol. The children, so recently screaming with delight at the park, now had their wails muted by the din of the carnage.

The hoses were connected to the hydrants, and the water finally flowed, but by now the precious trees were aflame, their tops, too high for the water to reach, sending embers skyward.

A helicopter dropping water and retardant eventually quelled the blaze.

The street sweeper and the garbage trucks later arrived. It took several hours for the ghastly remains of the herd to be removed and the street cleansed of the offal. A few days later, a solemn, memorial tribute was held for the fallen ruminants.

The community was renamed Goat Flats.

As the rancorous neighborhood debate over the responsibility for the unpleasantness gradually waned, a general consensus developed that, due in large measure to the goats, the dry brush and tinder of the greenbelt had in fact been successfully removed—as well as the great stand of Monterey pines and several houses.

Richard Bertram Peterson lives in Monterey, California. He is the author of *The Wonderful Apparition*, a book not about ghosts. He has been a finalist in *The New Yorker* cartoon caption contest.