



Times Remembered
Betty A. Young

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Have you ever heard the term, "Stubborn as a Mule?" I'm sure many of us have heard or used that term before. I've never owned a mule, but as a kid we had a white mare that we called, "Old Maude." Dad plowed tobacco with her and she was really stubborn; she must have been half mule.

Stubborn, obstinate, head-strong . . . all these words have been used to describe mules. And calling someone mule-headed has never been intended as a compliment. Mules have a reputation for being difficult to work with. Stories about mules refusing to work for their owners are many. Mules have been labeled as unwilling and lazy, but the truth is more complicated.

What exactly is a mule? A mule is a cross between a donkey and horse . . . more specifically, a male donkey and a female horse. (A hinny is a cross between a male horse and a female donkey.) Horses have 64 chromosomes and donkeys have 62. The mule and the hinny both have 63, an odd number that renders them sterile in the majority of cases. There are never any absolutes in nature, and there's some documented cases of mules giving birth to healthy offspring.

Stubborn as a Mule

Mules and their donkeys and horse parents share a lot of similarities, but also several key differences. Mules tend to have smaller feet than comparatively sized horses. This gives them a distinct advantage when walking between rows of crops or down steep mountain trails. The donkey has a steeper pelvic angle than the horse, and this is passed down to the mule offspring. Mules also have shallower withers which make a well-fitted riding saddle or pack rig a must.

Donkeys evolved in hot, arid climates, where their long ears help with heat radiation. Mules have those same long ears, which are very sensitive and contain many blood vessels.

As a result of their desert evolution, donkeys use minimal forage very efficiently; the mule retains this feed efficiently too. Mules have a much smaller appetite than horses. Mules also are much less prone to colic than horses and are able to adapt to whatever forage might be available. Mule feet are much harder than those of the horse, which with their surefootedness makes them desirable for working a rocky terrain.

Mules have a smoother musculature than a horse, but pound for pound they are considered to be the stronger animal. Mules have more stamina and can maintain a steady walking pace for an entire workday. Trained and fit pack mules can carry 20 and 35 percent of its body weight.

Mules have been deliberately bred for centuries. Evidence of their use dates back to ancient times and in many cases considered more valuable than the horse and donkey counterparts.

George Washington is considered the "father of the American mule," and is credited with popularizing mules in the United States. Washington wrote to King Charles III of Spain, hoping to purchase some donkeys, but they were prohibited from selling any outside their country without the king's permission.

King Charles instead sent a jack (donkey) to Washington as a gift. With the addition of a Maltese jack gifted to Washington by the Marquis de Lafayette, the offspring of these two breeds became very valuable.

Mules quickly became the draft animal of the South, where their heat tolerance, small appetite, capacity for work, and small feet gave them an edge in planting and harvesting crops. Mules were also used during the Civil War to transport supplies and equipment to the soldiers.

Modern mules still play a significant role in other niches today. Even though tractors and mechanization are widely available, some people prefer using draft animals for lesser impact on the environment.

Mules are used to assist firefighters in remote and inaccessible areas. Rugged terrain makes vehicle transport unrealistic. Pack mules can carry loads of supplies to firefighters working in otherwise unreachable locations.

Mules have also been described as straightforward, patient, and sure-footed. One thing is for sure . . . much of our history would have been written very differently without the steadfast mule. So if anyone ever calls you mulish, give them a hearty thanks.

Church considers cots for people who sleep in on Sundays



America's Heartland
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I recently read a humorous piece about a church that decided to do everything it could to eliminate every possible excuse that was preventing people from showing up on Sundays.

For those who said Sunday was their only day to sleep in, the church placed cots in the foyer.

For those who said the roof would cave in if they were to show up at church, hard hats would be available.

Blankets were provided for those who think the church is too cold and fans were handed out to those who think the church is too

hot. Hearing aids were given to those who say the preacher speaks too softly, and cotton balls were provided to those who say he preaches too loudly.

The church brought in relatives for those who like to visit family on Sundays.

TV dinners were handed out to those who said they couldn't go to church because they have to cook dinner.

Oh, and one section of the church was decorated with trees, bushes, weeds, ticks, chiggers and mosquitos for all those who prefer to spend their Sundays in the great outdoors.

The truth is, there's nothing a church could ever do to satisfy folks who make excuses to stay home or do other things on Sunday mornings. I was one of those folks through the first half of my life. I had no interest in church. I preferred to spend Sundays on the lake with a fishing rod in hand. Now, I couldn't imagine being anywhere other than God's house on Sundays. I find myself being so appreciative to the Lord for forgiving me of a lifetime of sin that my strongest desire

is to be with Him and His people.

Down through the generations, people have experienced similar changes in attitude about being in God's house. In fact, King David of the Old Testament, once said: "A day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I'd rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than to dwell in the tents of wickedness" (Psalm 84:10).

In other words, David was saying he'd rather stand in the doorway and look into God's house than to be seated in the front row of any other place. That speaks to David's great love for his God and for God's people.

No doubt, we in the church should do all we can to make people feel welcome on Sunday mornings. But the truth is, until a person has a change of heart, they will never understand the joy that Christians experience just by coming into God's house with other believers.

People who love God don't need cots or fans or blankets or cotton balls. They'll be in His house with His people on the Lord's Day no matter what.

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