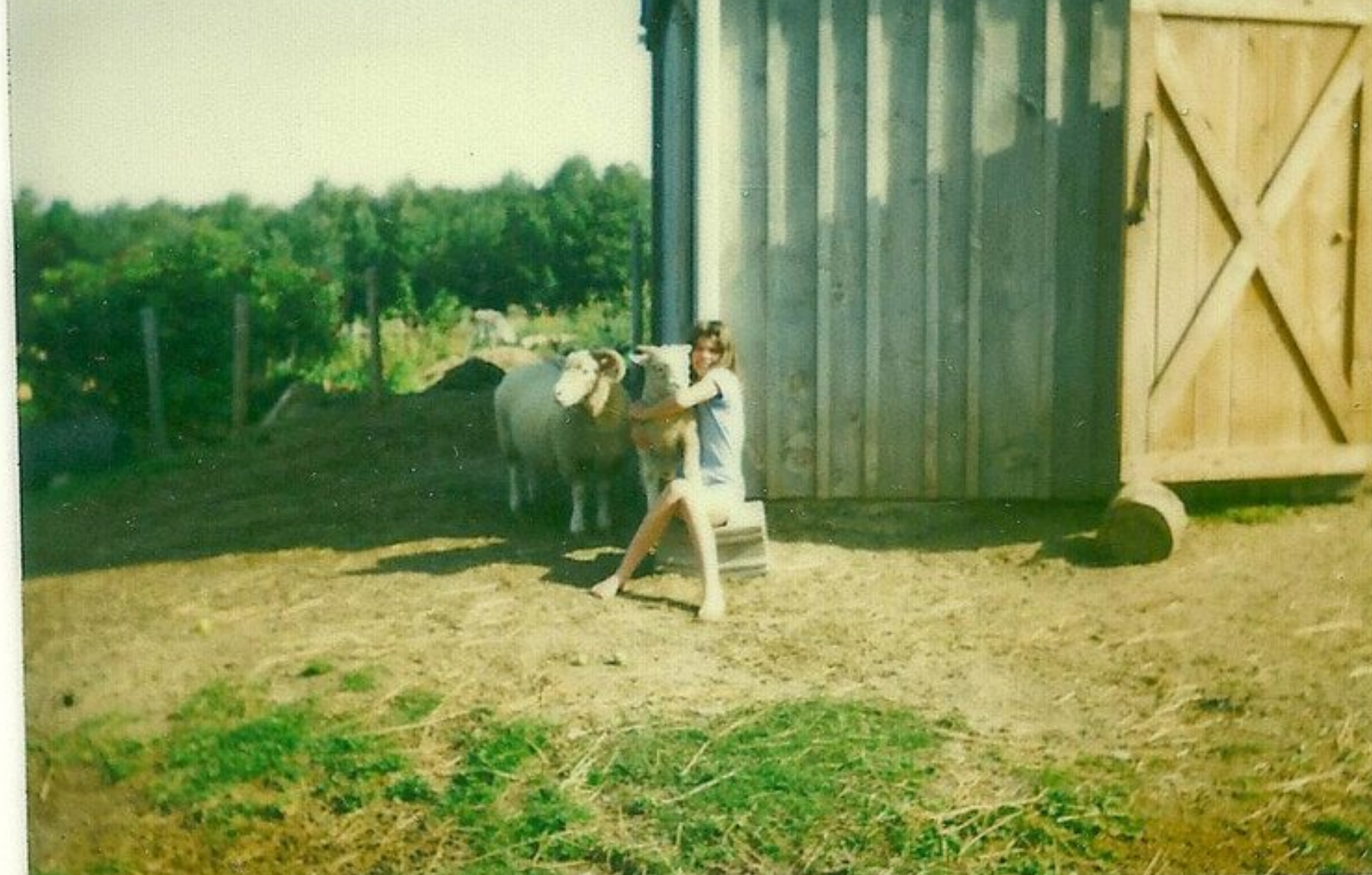


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Unusual Self-Care Products for Unusual Times

## Unusual Self-Care Products for Unusual Times

Dec 21 | Written By Heather L. Hughes



The author in rural Maine, circa 1982

I spotted the small green tin while in line at Rite Aid. I don't remember what I was waiting to buy—lipstick? paper towels? cereal?—but I do remember the **Bag Balm**. It was displayed among the other impulse purchase items near the registers. And it was an impulse purchase, but unlike most, this one was prompted by a series of memories triggered by that green tin.

When I was growing up in rural Maine, a large, dented tin of Bag Balm, with its illustration of a cow in profile surrounded by a half-wreath of red clover, was a permanent fixture on the kitchen bookcase. My parents raised sheep, and during lambing season we scooped the thick, sticky balm out of the tin and applied it to the ewes' chapped, sore teats. In winter, we smeared it on our chapped lips. My mother used it on her hands, but I disliked its tacky consistency and the greasy shine that it left on my skin, so I kept it to tougher areas, like my elbows and heels. Today, I use Bag Balm in the morning to moisturize my lips. I use it at bedtime, again on my lips and on the thick calluses on the balls of my feet.



Bag Balm. Credit: [@originalbagbalm](#)

Bag Balm also has the faintest scent of lanolin, which admittedly isn't a strong selling point. But for me, that smell evokes my childhood. Lanolin was the smell that clung to our hands after we'd buried our fingers into the thick coats of the ewes while they were devouring molasses-coated oats. Lanolin was the smell that accompanied shearing as long strips of the sheeps' burr- and twig-littered winter coats were shoved into burlap bags, to be hauled off and carded.

Today, the Bag Balm line includes Bag Balm Hand & Body, Bag Balm Pet, and Bag Balm Sport, though the formula is the same for all three; only the packaging is different. There's even a Bag Balm made with CBD and arnica, for sore muscles and joints. But it's the original formula, in its glorious, un-gussied-up form, that has achieved staying power. It will never be trendy—how could it with that name, which doesn't refer to purses but to udders? Like the cows it was created for, its prosaic, everyday function harks back to a simpler, less fraught era.

In light of the complicated, tension-filled times we're living in, it just may be time to try something out of the ordinary, like these self-care products with agricultural roots that can be found in both feedstores and drugstores. Unlike the situation we're all living with, when it comes to these products, you're *choosing* the unusual, and you'll feel better for it.

### 1. Udderly Smooth

The odds of two products initially created to soothe overworked cow udders attracting non-farming followers are high, but **Udderly Smooth** and Bag Balm have proven that high odds aren't always insurmountable.

Like Bag Balm, Udderly Smooth's name references its original intended use, as does its packaging—the immediately identifiable large, black-and-white spots of a Holstein cow—and it also contains lanolin oil. But that's where the similarities end. Udderly Smooth body lotion has a consistency similar to thick whipped cream, absorbs quickly, and its light fragrance doesn't carry a hint of lanolin.



### 2. Mane 'n Tail Hoofmaker

No one enjoys having hands and feet so dry and cracked that they feel—and sometimes even look—like hooves. Mane 'n Tail is best known as the shampoo and conditioner, which have long been staples in drugstore hair-care aisles, but its **Hoofmaker** lotion, originally created to rehydrate and strengthen painfully dry horses' hooves, is also a favorite among equine owners who use the non-greasy lotion on their own moisture-depleted extremities.

A horse-owning friend uses it in the stables when her hands feel grimy (“ick,” as she puts it) and dry (“double ick”). For those who prefer a container that's easier to stick in a handbag or backpack than the 2-pound pump-top dispenser, Hoofmaker also comes in a **6-ounce tube**.



### 3. Cowboy Magic Detangler & Shine

If you've ever seen a horse's mane post-grooming and wondered how you could achieve hair as soft, shiny, and manageable, ideally with minimum effort, it may be time to give **Cowboy Magic Detangler & Shine** a try.

After using it on her show horses and admiring the results, which didn't require time-consuming finger-combing to avoid breakage, one equestrienne decided “if it worked so well on coarse horsehair, it would work on mine, and at a fraction of the cost per ounce” of detanglers made specifically for human hair. It only takes a small amount to work through tangles, which is a plus whether you're grooming a horse's mane or your own.



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### 4. Absorbine Veterinary Liniment Gel

In 1892—sorry, Bag Balm, you're the second-born of this group—husband-and-wife team Wilbur and Mary Ida Young developed Absorbine Veterinary Liniment to treat their horses' aching muscles and joints. Its spearmint-scented spin-off, **Absorbine Veterinary Liniment Gel**, has the same ingredients (menthol, calendula, echinacea, wormwood) as the original but in an easier-to-apply formulation. The gel's warming sensation is more intense than the liniment's, which makes it effective at reducing pain in arthritic joints. Interestingly enough, the Youngs' son developed a formula, Absorbine Jr., just for humans, but many horse opt to stick with the original for its horsepower.



### 5. Unker's Therapeutic Rub

A product that advertises itself as “your medicine cabinet in a jar” is making a bold claim, but users of **Unker's Therapeutic Rub** back that claim up. The ointment has been a go-to for 15 years for one nurse.

“I like it because it's nontoxic, affordable, and has more than one benefit,” she says.

Relief from sore muscles and nasal congestion are two of those benefits, thanks to cooling menthol crystals and sinus-clearing essential oils (eucalyptus, wintergreen, pine needle, and camphor). Unker's also works as a moisturizer strong enough to hydrate cracked knuckles and heels. It's made in Upton, Wyoming, which bills itself as “the best town on earth”—another bold claim—and has long been home to cattle and sheep ranches.



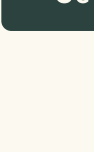
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Heather L. Hughes

Heather L. Hughes was born in suburban New Jersey and raised in rural Maine. Places she has called home include San Diego, New York City, New Orleans, and Tucson.



