



## GUIDE MAGAZINE

### Farm Animal Rescue

#### True Love Stories

By Karin Edmondson

There is a scene in the movie *The English Patient*, where Count Almasy and Katherine and her husband Clifton debate the significance of adjectives, modifiers—semantics, if you will.

Almasy

A thing is a thing no matter what you place in front of it. Big car, slow car, chauffeur-driven car, still a car.

Clifton

A broken car?

Almasy

Still a car.

Clifton

Not much use though.

Katherine

Love? Romantic love. Platonic love. Filial love. Quite different things, surely?

I tend to follow Count Almasy's thinking. Adjectives allow humans wiggle room to define, to analyze, to deflect blame or to elevate import. Love is love is love and love is good, nourishing, sustaining, life-affirming. So then, how about a definition of alive? Most folks know that factory farming involves the suffering and inhumane treatment of millions of animals on a daily basis. There is currently some debate in industrial farming circles (whiff of Dante's *Inferno*, anyone?) to allow downed animals into the human food supply. What is a downed animal? One that is too sick to stand but one that is alive. OK. So the animal is alive and is "dragged (by chains), forklifted, bulldozed or otherwise abused" to be moved into the truck to transport them from feedlot to slaughterhouse. This treatment "cause injuries ranging from bruises and abrasions to torn ligaments, broken bones and dislocated joints." After all that, the animal is then killed; sometimes, however, not right away: "The cattle were supposed to be dead before they got to Moreno. But too often they weren't. They blink. They make noises, he said softly. The head moves, the eyes are wide and looking around. Still Moreno would cut. On bad days, he says, dozens of animals reached his station clearly alive and conscious. Some would survive as far as the tail cutter, the belly ripper, the hide puller. They die,



Happy Babe the pig, sunning himself on a warm January day at the Catskill Animal Sanctuary in Saugerties. Photo by Karin Edmondson



said Moreno, piece by piece....” (The Washington Post, April 2001).

How alive is alive? Never mind the semantics involving arguments if animals feel pain. Humans with a profit margin goal are cunningly adept at spin, at verbal posturing but none of it, no matter what clever bon mot is inserted - it don't change the fact that a living, breathing animal (that feels pain) is still alive and being grossly abused “institutionalized animal cruelty” at the hands of humans. “Under normal agricultural operation, any act, no matter how cruel is considered business as usual.” We are all connected in this world therefore, we are all responsible. Complicit.

Farm animals have safe haven at two shelters in the Catskill region: the Catskill Animal Sanctuary in Saugerties and the Woodstock Farm Animal Sanctuary in Willow. Fragrant, sun-splashed meadows and warm, cozy barns replace gestation crates (severe confinement for pregnant animals; babies must suckle from outside the crate, in between bars) and feces-covered concrete floors. Most importantly, these animals are rehabilitated with love, pure and simple.

#### Woodstock Farm Animal Sanctuary

The morning I visit the Woodstock Farm Animal Sanctuary, Jenny Brown, the Director, and I are both suffering heartache. Hers: she lost a sheep that morning and the day before, a rooster. Mine: my friend Mark had decided to leave these mountains indefinitely. Loss of loved ones. The human heart has tremendous capacity for love. Love is really the only thing that matters. The work of love is work of kindness, compassion, selflessness. Human or animal. “Loving people is a serious matter but falling in love is just a temporary form of madness.” So says British author, Iris Murdoch.

The work that Jenny and her husband, Doug Abel, do is serious and important. The couple provides the basic rights of any living, sentient creature: safety, warmth, veterinary care and food. They also offer beauty and peace to animals that are victims of the United States’ broken and outdated—Medieval comes to mind—food system. Twenty three acres alternate between rollicking fields and white pine forest, all of it hugged by low Catskill Mountains. The couple have owned the land since 2004, and the doors to the Sanctuary officially opened in 2006. The WFAS mission is

one part rescue and one part education and outreach. Both Jenny and Doug are vegans, really the only lifestyle that makes any sense if one has both humane and environmentalist values. Those ‘cage-free’ eggs in supermarkets aren’t really. “Most times, egg producers who profess to provide their hens spacious quarters merely provide them with a little more room than battery-cage hens which only receive personal space the size of an 8" x11" piece of paper.” Semantics, my friend.

The first group of animals I meet are the white chickens. “We prefer to refer to them as the white birds rather than the commercial broilers.” Many of these birds are leftovers from Kapparot Chicken Swinging Rituals in New York City, abandoned to die in alleys and on the streets of the city. “In this ritual, which isn’t mentioned in the Torah or the Talmud, the rooster (for a man) or a chicken (for a woman) is held above the person’s head and swung in a circle three times, while the following is spoken: This is my exchange, my substitute, my atonement; this rooster (or hen) shall go to its death and I shall to a good long life and to peace.” (from a brochure produced by Jews for Animal Rights—www.micahbooks.com—and Concern for Helping Animals in Israel—www.chai-online.org) Jenny mentions that in 2005, nearly 700 birds were abandoned at a poultry place in Brooklyn; this year WFAS only took in seven, “so some progress is being made.” These birds are bred for breast meat and to mature rapidly to reach slaughter weight in 45 days. “These are Frankenbirds. Bred by humans. Most of our birds are on homeopathic medicines to help their legs carry weight. Their organs can’t keep up. With a closely monitored diet, these birds have a life expectancy of three to four years.”

Jenny picks up one of the roosters—docile, quiet—and says: “This is Aven, he is a gentleman rooster with eye problems. These fellas are very inquisitive. I’ll sit on haybales and they’ll come right over to me.”



Olivia the goat, who now resides at the Woodstock Farm Animal Sanctuary. Photo by Karin Edmondson



Jenny Brown of the Woodstock Farm Animal Sanctuary with turkeys. Photo by Karin Edmondson



Rescued commercial broiler chickens, now referred to as the White Chickens. Photo by Karin Edmondson



En route from the white bird enclosures to one of the two barns, a group of three lively and very inquisitive young sheep burst forth from one barn and nearly fly over to Jenny. Their names: Ruby Bird, Summer and Storey. The turkeys inside the barn, however, are a revelation. There are several birds: a couple Narragansett heritage breed turkeys—gorgeous avian creatures with pale powder blue heads and hot pink gullets. Jenny stands caressing the head of one of the Narragansett's: Boone. Eventually, I reach out for his head as well and am shocked to my core to feel his warmth. His head—nubby, blue folds of skin—is warm. Alive. Just like, say, the skin of a beloved human, warmer actually. "These fellows are unexpected converters. There is a stigma attached to turkeys that they are stupid. They aren't. In the summer they roam around, usually greeting visitors at the parking area and when people laugh, the turkeys all start gobbling too. People have said to me: I can hear their breath." Yes. I understand. I have felt their warmth.

WFAS has rescued a little over 100 animals. "Each of these lives matter to us." Jenny tells me the names of a goat—Olivia, simply abandoned by her people when their barn burned and they moved), and of an enormous cow—Dylan, rescued from fate as a veal calf, chained and confined in a crate his entire short life, and Joey, the goat with a broken leg who was found living in the same room where other goats were being slaughtered. WFAS

encourages a sort of Farm Therapy. Urbanites with a conscience or just those in need or some healing time away from the city and a little country air can hop onto a Trailways bus in Manhattan and be dropped off literally at the doorstep of WFAS on Route 212. Wanted: Volunteers: The Few. The Proud. The Poopy. A Different Kind of Bootcamp. Seeking good men and women to clean barns and help care for over 100 rescued farm animals. A weekend of mucking stalls and feeding and befriending cows, sheep, goats, pigs, rabbits, chickens and roosters awaits.

Having prior lives in the media world, Jenny and Doug have attracted luminaries to the sanctuary. Nellie MacKay hosted a benefit concert for WFAS and animal rights activist Alicia Silverstone has visited the sanctuary. Last Thanksgiving, Jenny and Doug hosted a Thanksliving Dinner—outside in big tents—that featured a 100% Vegan, Wheat Free and 99.9% Organic menu. Dishes for the event were prepared by several notable area restaurants: Joshua's Restaurant & Catering, Marion's Country Kitchen, The Alternative Baker, Bread Alone, The Garden Café, Healthy Gourmet to Go, Little Vegan Monsters Gabriel's Café and New World Home Cooking. The dessert menu featured one cake—Double Chocolate Mocha with Raspberry Filling; two cupcakes—Chocolate and Vanilla; two pies—Apple and Pumpkin; one Cran Apple Raspberry Cobbler, Molasses Cookies; three candies—Peanut Brittle, Chocolate Almond Candies, Chocolate Almond Divinity, and two breads—Banana and Zucchini. The Thanksliving Dinner was sold out with a wait list. I suggest reserving early—like now—this year.

Plans for this year include raising the funds—a total of \$125,000—in order to construct an animal hospice on site for the veterinary care of sick and wounded animals. "Right now we have three little lambs in our kitchen and a sick, blind chicken upstairs," says Jenny. "We have raised \$65,000 thus far and have another \$60,000 to go." Jenny and Doug also plan to clear a portion of the nine acres of woods they own in order to create an entrance to the sanctuary directly from Route 212. Visitors can drive right into WFAS from Route 212, park and then walk through the woods to a building that would be a hub of information on the evils of factory farming, with displays of gestation crates etc. Visitors then continue through the woods to the fields and barns to meet the animals.

The Woodstock Farm Animal Sanctuary is located on Van Wagner Road off of Route 212 in the hamlet of Willow between Phoenicia and Woodstock. For more information please visit [www.woodstockfas.org](http://www.woodstockfas.org). The sanctuary is open to visitors Saturday and Sunday from April 1 through October 31 and by appointment during the week.

#### Catskill Animal Sanctuary

Catskill Animal Sanctuary in Saugerties rescues, rehabilitates and seeks to find warm, loving homes for abused (some severely) and neglected (ditto severely) farm animals. Twelve species of animals, including horses, cows, pigs, sheep, rabbits, turkeys, ducks, chickens, goats—animals usually dismissed merely as commodities—call CAS home. They have been locked in barns and left to die, or raised in narrow, confining crates, and are animals that most people do not find cuddly or cute. In American culture, they are too easily cast aside, overlooked or viewed as commodities without emotions or the capacity to feel real pain. These animals receive the patience, grace, care and healing from Kathy Stevens, the founder with an innate gift for deeply resonant animal healing; from the staff and army of volunteers who shovel stalls, haul bales of hay and offer treats of apples, carrots and apricots; and from that magical, wondrous, ethereal element in the air—L.O.V.E. It's found in abundance at CAS.

Catskill Animal Sanctuary has rescued and rehabilitated over 1,200 farm animals and has found homes for over 950 since its inception in 2001. In 2007 alone, CAS welcomed over 150 new animals, built several shelters and expanded its pastures. Both Kathy and animal care director Walt Batycki live on site, assuring that animals have round-the-clock care. While CAS has an active adoption process, it's a rigorous one. Volunteer "home inspectors" drive miles to interview potential adopters and to examine the barns and pastures that will become the animals' new homes, and conduct thorough interviews to ensure good matches between animal and human psyches. "So many of these are animals whose spirits have been broken "



Kathy Stevens of the Catskill Animal Sanctuary says hello to Helen, a blind calf and her "seeing eye calf," Rudy. Photo by Karin Edmondson



A happy family of ducks at the Catskill Animal Sanctuary. Photo by Karin Edmondson

ensure good matches between animal and human psyches. So many of these are animals whose spirits have been broken," Stevens explains. "People need to understand that."

Stevens explains that it's the healing process "that's the joy of what we do." Indeed, one unique aspect of CAS is its number of free-range animals. As one pulls into the parking lot, she is greeted by a pair of sheep, who wait as she exits the car. Potbelly pigs roam freely and are often underfoot, as is an assortment of ducks and chickens, and an arthritic goat named Mufasa. Stevens explains why in her book *Where the Blind Horse Sings: Love and Healing at an Animal Sanctuary*:

In recognizing that the healing process is different for each animal, CAS allows each one to heal in his own time, on his own terms. We watch them closely to determine what they need in order to be truly happy. That's the richness here: as much as we can, we provide each animal what he or she needs not only for his or her physical health but also for his or her emotional well-being.

Some—generally those that have been confined their entire lives or are so afraid of humans that they need the constant contact that being free-range affords, are allowed to be free. Everyone at CAS knows that this choice can make for a longer day for the humans. As Stevens writes:

Now if they actually roamed the entire farm, we'd have way bigger problems than an occasional raid on the feed room. But they don't. They stay close to the barn. Usually, in fact, they are underfoot, which is both heartwarming and maddening. Try moving the tractor forward with a sheep lying in the aisle in front of you, a duck napping underneath, and Paulie the rooster grooming Charlie the pig as Charlie leans against a stall wall...CAS may not be the most efficient farm in the world, but it just might be the happiest.

The challenges of healing wounded animals notwithstanding, Stevens says the bigger challenge is in getting "good, caring people to understand the connections between their lifestyles and animal suffering." She elaborates: "Humans recoil at the thought of deliberate animal cruelty. When we do large rescues of animals that have been locked in a barn to starve to death, the outpouring of sympathy is overwhelming. Yet if we ask these same people to consider the lives of factory-farmed animals, who know nothing but terror and suffering from birth to death, we're not likely to get the same response." She continues: "How to reveal the lives of farmed animals in a way that doesn't judge people's lifestyles (i.e. decisions about whether to eat animal products) but encourages them to consider different choices—that's our greatest challenge."

Winter of 2008 has presented a challenge of a different sort. CAS knows to expect calls every winter from law enforcement about animal seizures after animal hoarders have been charged with cruelty. It knows many of them will be in desperate shape; it knows how to bring them back to health. "What never occurred to us was the impact of the economic downturn. Farms are being foreclosed, people are losing leases on rural properties, or they can't afford the cost of hay. People can't afford their big animals anymore, and they're reaching out to us." In response to this issue, CAS is building three new barns, all of which will be completed by publication time. "We're doing all we can to be as responsive as possible. We hope those in a position to make a contribution will do so," is Stevens' simple request.

Kathy's book, *Where the Blind Horse Sings*, was published—to great acclaim—in 2007. A second printing followed six months after initial the print run. A third printing is under way. Meanwhile, the publisher has asked her to write another—a triumph because, as board member Chris Seeholzer explains, "Kathy's book speaks to people who love their pets but haven't yet extended that love and compassion to other animals. It's a joyful illustration of the ways that we're all the same. When you read it, you're a little different, a little humbled...and farm animals are lucky for that."

On the farm in '07, "we broke through with some deeply wounded animals," explains Batycki. Last spring, CAS received a blind horse named Buddy (the book jacket model) who had violent and unpredictable panic attacks and was both a danger to himself and to humans. Long, patient hours after work, when the farm had settled down and things were quiet, by Walt finally paid off. A year later, Buddy, relaxed and affectionate, lives in the barn at night and joins two other horses in a pasture during the day. "When we work with an animal for one solid year and finally have a breakthrough, that is a triumph," Stevens says, smiling.

Helen, a blind cow, was a four-month old calf when she arrived. The only time she'd ever been handled was when her owners lassoed her to get her onto the trailer. Initially, she ran in frantic circles. No one could get close to her. But Stevens' decision to take the calf was based on three questions: 1. Could she have a full life? 2. Did they have a suitable "seeing eye cow" for her? 3. Could they train her to follow their voices? Stevens' answer to each question was a resounding "yes," and within days, the frantic calf followed human voices, licked faces, chewed fingers...and snuggled with her buddy Rudy, a calf rescued from the now defunct Catskill Game Farm. Now in 2008, Helen is "cute as hell. Delightful. She mooing outside my door right now, wanting some carrots." Meanwhile, Rambo the sheep is still wonderful and continues to be welcome and watch over new arrivals trying to comprehend CAS. Stevens says, "No incoming animal has come from this sort of world. Rambo is here to help them know that this is a safe and sacred space." Stevens cites Norma Jean the turkey, who runs to Rambo whenever she sees him.

Plans for 2008 are to ensure that the public knows they can have a full experience at CAS: intimate, hands-on tours, vegetarian cooking classes and lots of support for people wanting to change their diets. Many new events are planned, as is a capital campaign for a "real" Visitors Center. Stevens laughs and says, "Yeah...we've definitely outgrown The Welcome Hut." Yet the heart of the CAS growth plan is the same as it was when Kathy first wrote its mission statement in 2001: to keep healing animals, to allow guests to experience who they are...because who they are is really quite extraordinary...even

life-altering.”

Monetary donations for hay top the CAS wish list. It has doubled in price in the last few years, and CAS uses a tractor-trailer load—over 700 bales—every two weeks. Skilled construction volunteers who can take on small building projects are also needed. For a full wish list of smaller items, please visit [www.casanctuary.org](http://www.casanctuary.org).

Catskill Animal Sanctuary is located at 316 Old Stage Road in Saugerties. For more information, visit [www.casanctuary.org](http://www.casanctuary.org) or call 845 336 8447. The CAS blog is at [www.blindhorsesings.com](http://www.blindhorsesings.com), and they’re on YouTube, MySpace, and Facebook. CAS opens in April, with hours of 11:00 am to 4:00 pm on Saturdays and Sundays. To program an educational outing that’s right for your organization or to schedule Kathy for a talk or reading, contact CAS.

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