

Home At Last Makes Compassion For Other Species A Way of Life

By Erin Milburn / March 11, 1999 / Harrodsburg Herald

At Home At Last Animal Sanctuary near Salvisa, the concept of compassion and respect for a species has been practiced on a daily basis since the facility opened nearly two years ago. Today, the 'no-kill' shelter is home to 40 dogs, 10 cats, seven pigs, and an assortment of cows, goats, and rabbits who have been rescued from abusive or neglected situations. Some of the current residents of Home At Last will be adopted out, but many will live at the sanctuary for the remainder of their lives, protected and loved.

Home At Last is the brainchild of Stan Petrey, an eastern Kentucky native who has been active in animal rescue for most of his adult life. After visiting the largest 'no-kill' facility in the world at Kanab, Utah, Petrey said he became interested in the concept of providing an alternative to traditional humane societies, which euthanize unwanted animals.

In 1997, he co-founded Home At Last and established a companion and large animal sanctuary, along with a 150-acre wildlife refuge on a 200-acre tract of land provided by one of his three partners. Now, less than two years later, the facility is as full as its one full-time employee and handful of volunteers can manage.

"We're at capacity right now," Said Petrey, who in addition to handling much of the administrative and public relations work of the sanctuary, also has a career as a free-lance producer of television programming. "People ask me if we've really made a difference if we only have the 60-70 animals that we have here. I say that we've certainly made a difference in those animals' lives."

Petrey explained that his vision is also tied to changing the attitude of people as much as rescuing any individual animal.

"Home At Last is a work-in-progress," he said. "Our goal is to be an advocate for animals and an educational center that underscores the kinship of life and the concept of harmlessness."

In addition to its no-kill policy, Home At Last is very different from other animal shelters in the design of the facility and the philosophy, which underlies its function.

Visitors to Home At Last will not find its canine residents lined up in concrete cages awaiting adoption or euthanasia. Instead, the dogs live in small packs in large fenced-in areas with trees, ponds, fields, and custom-made doghouses. There is a special needs yard for animals that need some solitude to recover from

their abuse as we as special areas for the pigs and the goats and the cats and the rabbits.

Every dog or cat that comes to the sanctuary is spayed or neutered and receives whatever medical care it may require to be returned to health. One of the veterans at the sanctuary is Gilbert, a 950-pound pig who fell off a farm truck in Louisville and then was hit by another truck. As one of the very first rescued animals at Home At Last, Gilbert enjoys a certain patriarchal role and is one of the most popular attractions with visitors.

"Gilbert is quite a guy," said Petrey. "Whenever we get a group out here, he's the one they're looking for."

Home At Last does have an adoption program, which is highlighted every few weeks on WKYT television's AfterNoon program and Petrey and his staff also take some animals to the Petsmart Store in Lexington once a month. Home At Last has an Internet site as we that offers pictures and descriptions of the animals available for adoption. But the process for acquiring an animal from the sanctuary is somewhat more stringent than adopting a pet from the Humane Society.

In addition to a two-page application, prospective adoptive families must agree to in-home visits by staff before and after adoption to ensure that the match between owner and pet is a good one.

"We are very particular about where these animals go/' Petrey said. We want to make sure they are never neglected or abused again, so we have an agreement that if adopted, the animal is non-transferable to another home, but can come back to us anytime if the situation doesn't work out."

But adoption of the animals is not the primary goal at his facility Petrey said. The key to Home At Last is providing a secure and loving environment for every abused or neglected creature, which finds it way there.

"We're not a bunch of radical nuts," Petrey said. We just have a great reverence for the animal kingdom."

Part of the reverence translates into the feeding policy at the sanctuary where a the animals thrive on a vegetarian diet. A vegetarian or vegan himself for 20 years, Petrey said that while the vegetarian dog and cat food is much more expensive than the regular kind, he and his partners reel that the step is necessary to be true to the no-kill concept.

"Our goal is to nurture respect for a living things, including those animals normally consumed as food, Petrey said. "We're not trying to recruit anyone to our point of view, we're just trying to set an example of being true to our values and philosophy of life."

A tool that Petrey is hoping to use to increase awareness of the dilemma of abused and neglected animals everywhere is a documentary series he has produced in conjunction with Best Friends animal sanctuary in Utah and which he is hoping to syndicate national. Narrated by Kentucky native Nick Clooney, the proceeds would benefit both Best Friends and Home At Last.

In the meantime, Petrey is working on the sanctuary's spring newsletter, getting the two newest resident, bovines Oprah and Harpo, ready to move from their temporary lodgings to their new digs at Home At Last and keeping up with the day to day activities that such a facility demands. It's a thankless job, for the most part, but for Petrey and his partners, staff and volunteers, the reward comes in watching abandoned, abused and neglected animals come back to life in a place where they are loved, accepted and at last, are home.

"We have learned to celebrate sma victories here," Petrey said. "Every life saved here is a victory for us, and every person who visits here and see that other species are worth saving is a victory for us."

Home At Last is a non-profit organization, and contributions made to the facility are tax-deductible. For more information ca: 606-366-5103.