

# Going Whole Hog

Gilbert the pig became a shelter's first guest--quite by accident

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"We didn't plan to start out with Gilbert. We planned to start with cats and dogs--like most other sanctuaries."

TV producer Stan Petrey was preparing to open Home At Last, a dream-come-true sanctuary for homeless cats and dogs on a beautiful ridge above the Kentucky River. But a 900-pound hog, on his way to the slaughterhouse, changed Stan's schedule.

Gilbert, as he became known, had fallen off a truck onto a busy highway in Louisville, Kentucky, and was promptly hit by another truck. Instead of continuing to the slaughterhouse, he was taken to an animal control shelter.

"Five days later, the shelter called Margie, one of our partners," said Stan. Margie called Stan, and they agreed to take Gilbert. Like any new sanctuary, they had just entered the initiation ordeal!

Stan is a TV producer, mostly with public television. But his heart has always been with the animals, and after he first visited Best Friends four years ago he started planning a sanctuary near his home outside Lexington, Kentucky.

Home At Last is now open, and about 100 dogs, cats, goats, and ferrets are finally enjoying a new life.

So is Gilbert. His wounds have healed, and he's on a special slimming diet of delicious cantaloupe, melon, tomatoes, apples, and corn. Plus treats. Plus his own special pond and mudhole.

Soon after Gilbert arrived, a little cat called Chessie befriended him. Chessie had not been treated well in a school playground, but Gilbert treats her like a princess. They still spend much of their time together, although Gilbert also has two goat friends, Nancy and Nick, and now a second pig.

Rocky is a typical potbellied pig who grew up. Nobody at his home believed he would become as big and unmanageable as he did. So Rocky had to go. Luckily, he's joined Gilbert at Home At Last.

Pigs are herd animals. They enjoy each other's company, and they're very talkative. (That's another of the many good reasons why, for most people, pigs really don't belong as house pets.) Indeed, the latest agricultural research at Pennsylvania State University is that pigs are super-intelligent and highly communicative with each other.

Gilbert and Rocky struck up an instant conversation when they first met. "They started clucking and foaming," says Stan. "Then Gilbert turned his rear end toward Rocky, pooped generously, and then walked away. This probably means something very profound in pig language."

Dogs and cats are still the staple at Home At Last. Latest arrival is Braveheart, a dog who hadn't performed well enough for his hunter-owner. Bones were broken but not his brave heart. He's sweet and gentle, though a little shy.

Home At Last has room for about 100 animals at any given time. Now that the sanctuary is built and operating, Stan's attention is turning to the Home At Last outreach work: a low-cost spay/neuter program; a regional rescue and adoption network; and educational programs in area classrooms and to youth groups.

"Since we have background in television, the educational outreach will be especially strong," says

Stan. "Expect to see the work of Home At Last on TV, radio in the newspapers, and on the Internet, teaching our regional community the importance of kindness to animals."

In other words, Stan plans to make Gilbert a star!

