

## **SALVATION IN SALVISA...Alternatives to Animal Euthanasia**

**By Rob Hulsman, ACE Magazine, Feb. 4, 1998  
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When Gilbert the pig fell from the back of a truck in Louisville, he was a mess--and just this side of a frying pan--as opposed to the proverbial "hog heaven" at a no-kill animal shelter in Salvisa, Kentucky.

"Gilbert's the star, you'll need a picture of Gilbert," advises Stan Petrey, co-founder of Salvisa's Home At Last Animal Sanctuary. Petrey knows that a picture of Gilbert eating grapes is just the sort of image that could boost fundraising for his shelter, one of the few truly no-kill animal shelters in the state. He's a natural for this sort of thing, given an extensive background in advertising and television. Petrey worked in local television and for KET throughout the late 70's. He's started his own ad agency and worked for USA and Lifetime. It was just that role in producing a television show at Kanab, Utah's Best Friends no-kill shelter that changed Petrey's life.

"The spirit of healing, refuge, and just the spirit of the place itself is magical," says Petrey of the 1,500 animal shelter. The experience stuck with him. He returned to Kentucky and with the help of Margie Gill and Darlene Cook started Home At Last. "Late last winter we started talking about it; we had a few meetings to gauge interest last January; and fences started going up in spring. We were operational by summer."

The almost entirely volunteer operation includes five areas for dogs, two for rescued farm animals (Gilbert's new home) and a planned "cat palace" for the feline members of the sanctuary. All animals--cats, dogs, ferrets, pigs, you-name-it--are treated equally in this furry nirvana, allowed to roam the huge expanse of Home At Last. The shelter is truly no-kill, in that all the animals housed there are vegetarian.

"We know it would violate the spirit if we fed Gilbert's kind to the dogs or cats," writes Petrey in an impassioned editorial in the latest Home At Last newsletter. Petrey and his associates make the cats' food themselves, but Clear Creek dog food helps to subsidize the canines' diet. [Home At Last dogs have been fed Natural Life vegetarian since spring of 1998.]

Realistically, there is no getting around the fact that countless animals must be euthanized every day of every week of every year. Euthanasia methods have become far more humane by leaps and bounds, but not every part of the country abides by these methods. Lethal injection is the most common method, followed by gas, however bullets are still used much too frequently, especially in rural parts of the state. The Lexington Humane Society is celebrating, relatively

speaking, a 49 percent euthanasia rate for 1997. Even though the number is close to half of all animals brought to the shelter, it is much lower than the previous year. Just at the beginning of the decade in 1990 the number was 62 percent. The shelter uses injection to put down unadopted companions but has a relatively high adoption rate of 25 percent.

The National Humane Society's official stance on such matters reads: "A limited-admission organization's fund-raising solicitations should acknowledge that the shelter's ability to choose not to euthanize homeless animals depends in part upon the existence of animal shelter that do so. To fail to be forthright about the realities of pet overpopulation is to create in the public's mind the false and harmful perception that every animals shelter could choose to end companion animals euthanasia without disastrous animal suffering. Resulting from that decision."

"As far as we're concerned, no-kill shelters are wonderful when done well, and Home At Last is done well. The only downside is the huge public misconception--no-kill shelters don't mean animals don't get killed, just the animals in that shelter," agrees Cindy Rullman of the Lexington Humane Society. "The reason we have shelters in the first place is irresponsible pet owners."

Virginia Morris, director of the Bluegrass Animals Welfare League also agrees. Her organization works with public schools and science teachers on a weekly basis educating children on the importance of spaying or neutering pets. The Bluegrass Animal Welfare League also subsidizes spaying and neutering for pets of low-income families. "I'm so proud of our education program/" says Morris. She however sees problems with no-kill shelters. I think it's wonderful in its conception, but in reality when they reach their limit in space...they can't take anymore."

All agree that shelters are the way to go when seeking out a pet, and that responsible spaying and neutering is a must. "Breeding is obsolete/" according to Home At Last's newsletter. Overpopulation of companion animals, though down this decade, is still a huge problem. One female cat and her offspring can produce 48 new cats in just 16 months. One female dog and her offspring can produce a staggering 4,372 dogs in just seven years. Spaying and neutering is bible according to all interviewed, and those who don't practice it are in effect perpetrating cruelty upon the animal world. There has been progress, in 1987 17.8 million cats and dogs were euthanized, as compared to 4.5 million in 1996. But that's obviously 4.5 million too many.

Some would argue that no-kill shelters perpetuate the problem, giving a false sense of hope to the public. Roger Caras, president of the ASPCA, stated in the organization's newsletter, "No-kill is a goal, a hope, a dream. But alas, as things are today, it is more hoax than fact."

In sharp contrast to the harsh blanket statement Petrey's intentions and practices are solid. His spirit of kindness bolstered by good business sense perpetuates the cause of animal rights. "It's about living with your means," counters Petrey. Home At Last strictly limits the number of animals on its premises, but rotates them out through adoption efforts. "We have a very strict adoption policy; we've very careful in placing animals. [Home At Last] stipulates that animals can be recalled at any time." Representatives from the Sanctuary also visit the potential home of the pet before adoption. "Having a companion animal is a 10-15 year commitment. People need to understand that they need to give to the relationship, which gives back twice or threefold in their life. It's the cute puppy syndrome—people forget that they grow\*"

Some people let good intentions get out of hand, in this respect. Morris tells of a woman in Pendleton County who houses 100 dogs. There's also a well known "cat lady" in Versailles. This category of person, known within the industry as "collectors," tends to lose sight of the reality that quality of life is just as important as longevity. Diseases and other problems can run rampant in an unchecked pack of such tremendous size.

But such charitable impulses are hard to suppress. "You want to give couch time to everyone," empathizes Petrey, "but what allows me to deal with that is knowing what a good life each animal has [at Home At Last]. Most have come from really rough circumstances."

One dog at the shelter was left tied up in his backyard for a week after his owner died. A cage full of ferrets was found abandoned on a porch. Another pig, Pinky, also fell out of a truck. One particular dog, who has been dubbed Braveheart by Home At Last's staff, was beaten so severely that his face was completely broken and he was dying of infection. "He just did not give up on people," related an astonished and somewhat choked up Petrey. Braveheart has fully recovered and has the run of Home At Last.

Even in the face of such cruelty, not much funding is available for shelters. "The trouble in Kentucky is [that] elected officials resent money going to animals as opposed to the community," told one industry insider who declined to be identified.

Stan Petrey sees such funding woes as just one more hurdle in his path. "We're determined to make this succeed. I feel good about the choice to be a vegetarian, no-kill shelter," smiles Petrey. "We've got a long way to go but we'll get there." Home at Last has a mailing list which covers 16 states and has been in Best Friends magazine, but it is the sheer amount of compassion for the animals that seems to be the real force behind Home At Last Animal Sanctuary's momentum. "We're those folks that couldn't just drive by [an animal in need]. We stopped."

Donations to Home At Last are tax deductible, and adoptable pets are featured periodically in the ACE list Call 606-366-5103. Stan Petrey's latest work for television is a documentary on the life of Clay Lancaster, due to air on KET. [Rob Hulsman's dog Abone was adopted from the Lexington Humane Society; she just turned 5J.