

COMMENTARY

Limited Funds: Assessing Rescues and Sanctuaries

Lisa Kemmerer

Intent on familiarizing myself with local animal organizations, I took off across the state in my sister's old truck, hoping to hit up every sanctuary and rescue I could find – there were only a half dozen to consider. Mostly, I wanted to network with other vegans, but my adventures quickly turned into an examination of various forms of direct action, and an assessment of which types of organizations offered the greatest return on donations.

My first stop was a horse sanctuary sitting on one thousand two hundred beautiful acres, in a remote region, purchased by a very wealthy donor. Horses are popular with “animal lovers,” along with cats and dogs, and this Horse Sanctuary was clearly well supported. Though the directors did not work outside the sanctuary, they noted that they easily make their \$4000 monthly deposit on the \$700,000 that they still owe on their land. (And they already have \$50,000 squirreled already to put toward this debt). Though founded only six years ago, this sanctuary already has a host of worthy volunteers, and plans to build an indoor arena, quarantine barn, hay barn, and turnout shelters. They use homeopathic medicines, and trailer their rescued horses out of town for professional training. The Executive director noted: “We have to be sure the horses are well trained. Otherwise people will not want them after awhile, and they will come back to us.”

This horse sanctuary and rescue provides grants to buy hay for horses with families who have come on hard times. In 2009, their grants kept roughly 60 horses at home, and also helped with law enforcement to protect horses from neglect and abuse. The sanctuary has started a similar veterinary grant program in 2010. Unfortunately, there are not many visitors to the sanctuary, as it is 25 miles outside of a town of 57,000, and more than one hundred miles from the main artery that runs across the state. But the sanctuary offers educational workshops in various places around the region (such as “How to care for a Rescued Horse” for \$75), which they present for the benefit of both horses and their people. These events help to support the sanctuary while educating the larger public about horses and horse-human relations.

I asked how rescues were selected from among the thousands of unwanted and slaughter-bound horses; they are chosen to keep a “mix” of ages, types, etc. at the sanctuary. I also asked the story behind the rescues I met. Several were starved, one was taken by court order, another had to be given up when his caretaker lost her job. An old Mustang from wild herds in Montana had been given up simply because he was no longer wanted. Their youngest charge was a colt born of a Premarin mare. (Premarin is an estrogen product manufactured by Wyeth-Ayerst Laboratories – also sold under the name Prempro – which requires the urine of pregnant mares, who are impregnated and tethered in stalls for four or five months out of each year for the purposes of this drug company; their foals are shipped off to be fattened and slaughtered when they are just four months old, though foals are not normally weaned this young.) Each horse is provided with food and medical care, rehabilitation as needed, and professional training. Most importantly, every horse is guaranteed a permanent home, though that home might be with someone else. If they are not too old or injured, rescues are up for adoption. Adopted horses cannot be sold or given away, but must be returned to the sanctuary if the caretaker no longer wishes to keep a horse. Additionally, every adopted horse is tested annually to be sure that their caretaker is not breeding the rescue.

As someone who grew up around horses, I can testify that the horses at this sanctuary were contented and well cared for; the people running the sanctuary were knowledgeable and dedicated, no doubt this was a wonderful place for any endangered horse, but was this a good investment for my animal liberation dollars? It takes time to establish a rescue and sanctuary, and this sanctuary is currently paying off land, but I was nonetheless startled to learn that they have only six rescues. Frankly, my best buddy from high school supports five rescued horses (as well as rescued dogs and cats), on just 40 acres. My sister also has several rescued horses, and over the course of time has additionally rescued and tended cats, dogs, chickens, geese, ducks, and turkeys. She has, at times, supported as many as forty rescues on less than ten acres. Both she and my buddy go to work five days a week to provide safe and comfortable homes for their previously unwanted and abused rescues, and do not ask for any donations.

What seemed most striking was the economics of the sanctuary. It was obvious that they were channeling thousands of dollars into the purchase of land to keep horses, and also into food, medicines, and training for rescues. While it is reasonable to have a small plot

of land and keep a few horses as part of an outreach program, the ultimate goal of any sanctuary ought to be to prevent the ongoing problem – unwanted horses. Grants to buy hay and pay for veterinary care are excellent ways to keep horses in homes, and do not require acreage, or the ongoing expense of horse care. Workshops also seem an excellent form of outreach. But buying and maintaining acreage – no matter how many thousands of acres – will not stop the flow of unwanted horses, and cannot provide homes for all of those who are in need. Money is optimally spent on prevention, not by housing a token group of horses who would otherwise be slaughtered, meanwhile ignoring the millions of other neglected, abused, and doomed horses.

I recalled the director's comment about training horses to maximize adoptability. Professional horse trainers are expensive, and it would be more beneficial to horses – and all animals – if the director overtly and publicly reject the mentality of the “useful horse,” and help to reeducate people to recognize horses as independent individuals and companions, rather than tools for our purposes. The conventional, exploitative attitude toward horses will only perpetuate the need for sanctuaries, which will never be able to keep up with need: There are currently thousands of abused and neglected horses in need of rescue – for starters, there are 50,000 “Premarin mares” and their 40,000 foals, born every year. Neither my sister nor my buddy keep horses to ride; they keep horses because horses need homes, and also because horses are wonderful beings with whom to share daily life.

This led me to the realization that the horse sanctuary did not seem to take into consideration the bigger picture. While the directors rescue horses, they consume cattle, pigs, chickens, and turkeys, and help to create a market for veal, eggs, and dairy products. While the director expressed her frustration that so many people seem indifferent to such atrocities as horse slaughter and the Premarin industry, she appears to be indifferent to the slaughter of cattle, and the dairy industry. For example, when I asked her about Montana's recent vote to build horse slaughterhouses, she lamented this cruel demise, commenting that “horses are more aware than other animals in the slaughterhouse.” She recognizes horses as individuals who suffer terribly when abused, who grow attached to people and others whom they come to know, and that they struggle desperately to remain alive when endangered, yet she verbally resisted the simple truth that cows and pigs are similar on all counts. Those running the horse sanctuary rally to protect horses from

neglect, abuse, and slaughter – and ask others to do the same – while supporting these very same immoral acts with regard to other exploited animals.

I was eager to compare this horse sanctuary with another that was established specifically for draft horses. The draft horse sanctuary did not have a rich donor, and was operating on just ten acres located on the edge of a tourist town of about 7000. She had nine gigantic horses on this little plot of land – most of whom she had rescued from deplorable conditions and all of whom had been saved from imminent slaughter.

Unlike the director of the first sanctuary, the director of the draft horse sanctuary had not intended to start a sanctuary – she was simply determined to rescue *one* horse from slaughter. She had worked with horses some as a child, but had never kept horses. The director admitted, with a smile, that she had no idea what she was getting into when she adopted that first rescue. But she would be the first to say that her decisions are not necessarily her own. Her work is spiritually based; she felt “called” to offer these rejected behemoths a reasonable retirement. She understands her role to be one of healing: healing horses, humans, and relations between the two.

At 2000 pounds, these are expensive rescues – I helped her feed four fifty pound bags of grain at a morning feeding. But feed is not her most formidable cost – most of the horses are arthritic, with serious leg, back, and hoof problems, and her greatest difficulty is finding a farrier who will trim the feet of these elephant-sized equines, most of whom are too old and stiff to support themselves on just three legs.

The horses she rescues are home to stay. They cannot be adopted out because of their age, injuries, and/or lack of training. Most of them worked all of their lives, but when they became arthritic, or foundered, their people were unwilling to continue caring for them. Only one young draft horse stood among the older rescues, born from a “Premarin mare” who had been bound for slaughter, fetus and all. The director sees her sanctuary as a place where unwanted horses live out their remaining years with pasture, grain, hay, and veterinary care, free to mingle with their own kind, free from human contrivances. All told, she has kept twelve horses from slaughter, and placed hundreds of other horses in safe homes.

How did this compare with the previous sanctuary? The director works a full time job to support her small herd of large horses. Additionally, she welcomes visitors, offers workshops, holds fund-raisers, and has a little gift shop with cards, calendars, and pictures – all created from her own photography. In a pinch, her rescue could be self-supporting, like that of my friend and my sister. This seems essential, as it is unwise to adopt animals whose welfare is ultimately dependant on an expectation of donations. This is possible because the director is an employed professional who has purchased a home and land within her means. From the perspective of maximizing the effectiveness of donations, this means that moneys donated can go toward outreach and education, though the director did not seem to be pitching for larger change for all nonhuman animals. Still, by participating in local events, such as parades, and by holding healing workshops for people and horses, this sanctuary seemed to be working toward a closer human-animal connection – at least for draft horses.

What about the bigger picture? This sanctuary director seemed more cognizant of the horrible plight of farmed animals in the food industry – and more sympathetic. Still, she consumes animal products, and she does not stock any literature on this subject in her gift room. Furthermore, with a board already in place, she noted that advocating for a vegan lifestyle could be problematic. Consequently, the draft horse sanctuary, like the previous horse sanctuary, does not work for deep and lasting change for nonhuman animals. And of course this is what is needed if horses – or any other nonhuman under the power of humanity – is to live a fully and freely among humans.

My next stop was a large animal sanctuary about which I had heard a great deal: They were notorious for strange telephone interactions. I had heard only one positive comment; every other report indicated that this sanctuary was suspicious and problematic. Most notably, they clearly did not want visitors. They had hung up on me once, and only returned my repeated calls when I mentioned a donation. Consequently, I was not so much visiting as investigating this sanctuary.

With no address or sir names on their website, it was tricky locating this “rescue.” The sign outside their facility read “Black Bear Ranch,” and was complete with state-of-the-art video cameras aimed at the driveway

I could tell that the man who came out was prepared to send us packing, so I immediately offered fifty dollars for a tour, indicating that I might be a major donor if I liked what I saw. He agreed, and we walked about 50 feet to a fence. That was as far as I was allowed to go because they “were not insured for visitors.” From the fence I could see several emus (out of a dozen), a couple camels, a herd of burros (20), and a batch of lamas – of which he told me they had 700! He admitted that the baby lamas were mistakes – and I saw a lot of mistakes, not only in the herd of lamas, but also among the cattle that we had seen from the road.

I worded my questions and responses to avoid bringing up his guard. He said that he was a vegetarian, and that the sanctuary owned 400 acres, including parcels of land located elsewhere. I could not see sheep or goats, but he said that they had about a dozen such ungulates. I saw one pony, and though their website shows horses, he said that this was their only equine. I had heard from others that their very fancy website sported animals who were no longer residents, and I wondered where these previous residents had gone. I asked about the camels, and he admitted that the sanctuary had purchased a camel from a dealer two states to the West to keep their rescued camel company.

While the horses had disappeared, the “sanctuary” was buying camels, and lamas were overtly propagating. This was not a sanctuary as I understand the term. This raised a key question: What qualifies as an animal sanctuary? First and foremost, sanctuaries do not *buy* or permit breeding among their charges. Buying supports exploitative industries; breeding creates yet more needy animals in a world where there are millions of nonhuman animals in need of rescue and sanctuary. Because all sanctuaries have limited space and funds, a new baby fills a sanctuary spot, for many years to come, which cannot be filled by any other needy animal.

There were yet more fundamental problems at this suspicious sanctuary. In front of me, as I stood at the fence, was a burro with hooves so long and curled that he or she could not walk – could not even stand comfortably. I was looking at neglect and abuse, and it was exactly what I expected to find at a sanctuary closed to visitors. (For the record, I pursued this as a cruelty case as soon as I arrived home, with the help of PETA.)

Though the burro's feet were not trimmed, I noticed that I was standing next to a state-of-the-art swimming pool. The grounds were exquisitely manicured. The director explained that they had a rich donor in Texas, who visits once or twice a year. I wondered if she had any idea what was going on at this sanctuary, or if she was part of the problem – billing her exquisite home as a sanctuary to help support a hoarder's lifestyle. It also occurred to me that unscrupulous sanctuary owners and/or tenders were primarily interested in a good life for themselves – living on expansive lands in remote areas – and created sanctuaries as a way to support their lifestyle preference.

I asked my “tour guide” (while we stood at the railings of the nearest fence) about outreach. “We have school kids,” he reported. On further inquiry, I found that just one class visits every autumn, from a local school. There is no other outreach: No workshops, no leaflets, no community education – nothing. As an advocate for nonhumans, this place made very little sense. As if to cap of the experience, their dogs appeared to be purebreds, and when the caretaker tried to pet one of the dogs, he was bitten.

My next visit was to a farmed animal sanctuary that was just a few years old. Like two of the three sanctuaries I had already visited, they had purchased an ideal piece of property – on the side of a hill overlooking both mountains and valleys. They did not have a wealthy donor, so they had placed a modular on the land, along with a small barn, a chicken coop, and a giant garage filled with every imaginable shop tool – only the wife was interested in rescue, and the husband had his own hobbies. Both were retired, and she chose to create a sanctuary as a retirement lifestyle.

Every morning she wanders into the fresh air to feed half dozen pot-bellied pigs, nearly as many full-sized pigs, three cattle, a couple pigmy goats, a few sheep, a couple of lamas, a dozen hens and roosters, and two naughty, boisterous dogs. This was the place that I was most excited to visit – the director told me up front that she was vegan, and she not only seemed aware of the larger picture, but also seemed interested in bringing long-term, deep-rooted change. Furthermore, they were located on just 20 acres, just 3 miles from one of the largest cities, and there were no other farmed animal sanctuaries for hundreds of miles around. It seemed that this sanctuary had every possibility of encouraging locals to rethink their diet.

The director referred to her charges as “ambassadors” for change, busy changing the minds and hearts of whomever they meet – turning omnivores into vegans. As it turns out, they were pretty good at their job, and several student interns had become vegans after working at the sanctuary. Others had not, but at least the director requires that they read books, such as Tom Regan’s *Empty Cages*, as part of their internship. The director also visits primary and secondary schools with a hen and rooster tucked under her arms, allowing the children to meet healthy, well adjusted chickens. She explains a little bit about where meat comes from, and briefly describes the lives of animals. She also speaks out against 4-H, encouraging Roots and Shoots as a non-exploitative alternative, and always invites children, church groups, and other interested parties to visit the sanctuary. She even sponsors a plant-based potluck for the larger community.

It all seemed too good to be true – initially. Having grown up on a small farm, it was soon obvious to me that the caretaker did not know some of the basics of farmed animal care. Grain was thrown out for the animals onto the ground, amid rocks and mud – a danger to their teeth and increasing the likelihood of internal parasites. Neither did this method allow for portion control, and larger or greedier residents routinely crowded out smaller or less assertive ones. I was also concerned about the hens, who were kept in a small, barren pen with four roosters. One little hen was afraid to come down to eat. I had long ago learned that the minimum ratio of roosters to hens is one to fourteen. Roosters beyond this ratio brutalize hens with their incessant breeding. Furthermore, hens prefer to be released from their coop at dawn, and I never saw the director open their door before 9, four hours beyond the preferred time. It may seem a small matter, but with too many roosters in a small henhouse, this bordered on neglect. There was also a goat that trailed a webbing lead-rope, which was tied in a large loop, so that the goat could be caught, if need be. I watched the goat become entangled in the loop several times in my short stay, and while the goat always managed to free herself, a looped rope should never be left on a nonhuman animal who is roaming free – I would question the need to leave any kind of a rope on the little goat.

One morning watched the director worm her yearling calves, and I could see that she had no idea how to worm farmed animals. In the end, she overdosed the cattle, and the wormer is poisonous. She is fond of her residents, and quickly became hysterical. The calves were fine, but for me, this brought a critical insight: Those who lack long-term

experience in tending farmed animals, even if they would like a rural lifestyle graced with farmed animals, should not open sanctuaries. On reflection, only one sanctuary director seemed highly qualified to work with the animals at the rescue; two others, with years of experience, had become fairly proficient. Who knows what mistakes they made along the way, or with what consequences. On one of the horse sanctuaries I pointed out that one of the horses needed to be treated for a particular problem that the director was unable to recognize.

Being present on sanctuary grounds was key in assessing the situation, but talking to the director was equally important, and unveiled yet more disappointments. The director had purchased one of the hens from a local store, and two of the cattle from a dairy – \$75 each: “I waited for a couple of years, and no cattle showed up, and I needed a couple if I was going to have ‘Old McDonald’s Farm’.” The director’s vision of her lifestyle choice – “Old McDonald’s Farm” motivated her actions, not the desire to rescue nonhuman animals. To add insult to injury, I also learned that the husband eats meat and supports hunting, and before I had been on the premises for half an hour, the director pulled a cheese burrito from her freezer.

In search of the perfect sanctuary – or at least one that understood that protecting a few select animals is probably not a good expenditure of donor moneys – I headed across the border. I had heard about another comparatively new sanctuary, which had only been up and running for a few years, in the hills of a neighboring state. With a little handful of sheep, half a dozen pigs, nearly twenty horses, and about that many cats and as many dogs, they had already accumulated a fair number of residents. This sanctuary was unique in taking in research animals. It was also unique in charging for tours, and providing plush accommodations – at about \$100 for the first night (since you also had to buy a membership to stay), and roughly \$80 for other nights. The animals were very well cared for, the grounds well kept.

The dogs and cats were housed in round, yurt-style structures, and more accommodations were needed if they were to take on more dogs – or cats. They had a recent request to take twenty more beagles. These dogs were special needs citizens. Without the companionship and kindness that most dogs experience, they need considerable socializing, and the sanctuary had just hired a full-time trainer to live and work with the

rescues. She seemed competent, and confident, and was also a vet tech – perfect for a sanctuary.

I also met three interns who were coming to the end of a six-week internship. They were all gathering to talk about a book they had been reading, and the director did a fabulous job of engaging these students. I asked the interns what they had learned during their time at the sanctuary. One reply demonstrated that the student had backed off from her dream-career – breeding horses. She was considering a sanctuary, instead. Excellent! Another intern commented that she had learned to be wary of what was behind the products she was buying. Bingo! This young woman had learned exactly what I would hope such a facility would teach visitors, and two of the three were adopting cats to take home with them.

Still, this mammoth facility could surely change more minds than one or two in a summer – were this a priority. Again, I found myself at a sanctuary where the primary focus was rescue, and where every dog counted – so long as that dog had already arrived on the property. This sanctuary, like the others, was doing very little for any deep-rooted change. In fact, by charging for tours and only allowing members to stay overnight, this possibility was extremely limited. Furthermore, the accommodations did not have any of the books on their shelves that I would have hoped for, such as a work by Singer or Regan, or perhaps Kaufman and company's book on animal research. This sanctuary, like the others, was designed primarily to save the few, not to bring lasting change. And the director was not a vegan – nor were the interns or the vet tech; worse yet, the topic was sensitive, and discussion on the matter was generally unwanted.

My sanctuary tour, though undertaken in hopes of networking, helped me to clarify the purpose of sanctuaries in the animal liberation movement, and how best to assess which sanctuaries to support. Those interested in supporting rescues/sanctuaries are wise to first understand, as donors, what makes a sanctuary legitimate and worthwhile. From my perspective, a rescue/sanctuary must have people in charge who have an in-depth knowledge of the animals they tend, and must be operated with an eye to ending *all* animal suffering and exploitation. They must not buy animals. They must not allow animals to breed. They must prioritize outreach. They must stock and keep literature

available on key problems facing nonhumans, which explain how each of us can help alleviate suffering.

Additionally, sanctuaries ought to invest a minimum of fifty percent of their budget and labor in education, outreach, and prevention. This means that they must not focus on maximizing adoption, but must instead limit rescues in order to reserve funds and energy for changing the larger picture. If those running sanctuaries wish to keep animals, but not work hard for larger changes, it is reasonable to expect that these facilities will support their own rescue – as my sister and buddy do – and not ask the rest of us to support this lifestyle choice. My assessment is that the goal of a rescue/sanctuary is to bring deep and permanent change for all nonhuman animals. It is good to pull people (or cattle) out of a river if we see them floating by, but it is much better to go upstream, find out why they are falling in, and prevent future mishaps. Rescuing a handful of farmed animals without offering year-round, far-reaching education and outreach does not help foster a deep or more lasting change for all animals, and when these rescues/sanctuaries take funds away from organizations that are working toward such change, they betray the billions of nonhuman animals who are cruelly exploited and prematurely killed every day. That said, what percentage of outreach/education justifies tending a handful of animals while billions are killed, will be a matter of personal reflection and priorities.

I noticed, in my travels, a difference between those who began sanctuary life by rescuing an animal who was in dire straits, and those who set out to create a sanctuary because they were in search of a particular lifestyle. The former is the method by which Farm Sanctuary and United Poultry Concerns, for example, were founded. Both of these organizations have about thirty years of experience with farmed animals, both started with one rescue, and both now engages in extensive, national (and international) outreach and education. Among newer organizations, Lorri Houston's Animal Acres (near Los Angeles) is designed for outreach and education aimed at deep and lasting change. Another option is to spend *all* of your dollars upstream. For example, Vegan Outreach works tirelessly (with no overhead costs or land payments) to educate people about suffering, slaughter, health, and diet.

I recommend that anyone supporting local rescues/sanctuaries *visit before you send a check*, and before you visit, sort out what matters to you in a rescue/sanctuary. If possible,

take someone along who understands animal care. For my part, I will only support organizations that spend most of their time and resources *upstream*, working to *prevent* cruelty and exploitation through outreach aimed at deep and lasting change, and that advocate for *all* species – they must practice and advocate a vegan lifestyle.
