

MY VISIT TO AN ANIMAL SANCTUARY

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Shilpi quickly adjusted to life without any dairy products – but she wanted to learn all about what made her son sick. She read in detail about the dairy industry and dairy animals. To her horror, she discovered extreme cruelty the cows were subjected to. In order to maximize the milk production, they were artificially impregnated every year and fed antibiotics. Natural life span of cows is 20 years but at the age of six or seven years, milk production starts declining and at that point they are sold to the slaughterhouse. More she read, more she became sad. For centuries, humans have raised farm animals only to exploit them and in the end use them for food.

Shilpi's motherly instincts turned into compassion for all farm animals. She thought her son; Aarav had come into her life as a messenger from God to awaken her to the true meaning of Ahimsa. She discovered that just being vegetarian was not enough – use of all animal products – leather, wool, honey, dairy products like milk, butter and cheese were the product of cruelty and violence. She became completely vegan. A few months later, Shaleen joined her and he too turned vegan. Three years later the family grew again when Avi was born. Thankfully, he was born healthy. The family moved to a small town near Boulder and was enjoying the small town life surrounded by farms. All the while thinking about what they can do to reduce the suffering of Farm animals.

In the summer of 2015, Shahs learned of an animal auction nearby. Among thousands of animals destined for slaughterhouses were a pregnant mare (female horse) and two foals (baby horses). Shaleen rounded up some cash and headed to the auction to rescue this horse family from certain death. He did buy the mare and two foals but spent hours on the auction ground. He was emotionally drained seeing all kinds of animals – baby goats, sheep, horses, cows - many just days old being pushed on the weighing scale and on to the auction platform. After saving the horses, on the drive home, Shaleen was consumed by the haunting cries of animals he had just left on the auction grounds. He kept praying, “if only we had land, we could do something”.

That very night, his prayer was answered! Someone called to ask if he knew of anyone who may be interested in a 23-acre land parcel just a few minutes away. Shahs took that phone call as a sign from God. All night the two of them debated if they were ready to accept the massive responsibility of running an animals sanctuary along with raising two little kids. Next morning they signed a lease for the farm and in August of 2015 “Luvin Arms” was born.

The property they leased was neglected for many years and needed lots of work for converting it into an animal sanctuary. To create a sanctuary, one requires the knowledge of safe rescues, animal husbandry, farm and pasture management, trailering and hauling of animals, barn design, construction skills, animal first aid and local and state regulations. In addition to the knowledge, one also needs equipment. Depending on the variety of animals you plan to shelter you need several barns, automatic water systems, heating, miles of fences, etc. One must also develop relationships with dozens of vendors, suppliers, and professionals and help them to align with the organization's values and culture. As a functional non-profit, one has to master the basic skills of non-profit governance, tax and compliance regulations, fundraising, marketing, volunteer management, strategy development, and community development. And you need money - lots of it.

In addition to all that Shahs had ingrained commitment to non-violence and compassion for all beings as their guiding principle. They would only provide plant-based feed or medicine. No animal based products. Their faith and value system did not permit compassion for some at the cost of cruelty to others. This meant that they will only rescue and shelter birds or animals that thrive on grass or grains. The sanctuary will be for abused or neglected animals with a firm “No Kill” policy. Once adopted, they will keep them to the end of their natural lives. They will not breed animals nor return them to previous owners. As a commitment to not exploiting animals, they would compost eggs laid by any bird.

They also believed firmly that a sanctuary, as a practical matter can only do so much. From their 23- acre farm could save possibly a hundred lives directly. But extending compassion to a large number of animals, education and outreach was critical. Their sanctuary should serve as a host - a meeting place for humans to interact with farm animals. Visitors to the sanctuary could observe animals and birds in somewhat natural habitat and begin

to appreciate their majestic lives. Through outreach programs and education, visitors may choose to become vegetarian or vegan. **Imagine this: One vegetarian can spare lives of 100 animals annually and over the lifetime may spare lives of 6,000 or 8,000 animals – far more than any animal sanctuary can possibly achieve.** Their home for abandoned, abused and neglected farm animals can be a platform through which their stories can be heard and result in the more compassionate world for animals everywhere. Through tours, community events, vegetarian and vegan cooking classes and support programs it can inspire more people to adopt a plant-based lifestyle resulting in the rescuing of the multitude of animals from the life of suffering and cruelty.

The open sanctuary concept drew the attention of scores of volunteers from neighboring towns. Their first volunteer workday drew 35 kindhearted strangers. They had found a winning formula – **“Connecting Communities through Compassion”**. Most of these volunteers were vegan and members of a local animals rights organization. After the first three resident horses, two pigs, two goats, chickens and roosters rescued from abandoned backyard were adopted in the sanctuary. One by one the sanctuary soon grew to 30 animals. Every bird and animal was given a name like Franklin, Felix, Rudy, Rocky and so on. Volunteers helped erect barns, and collect donations of surplus vegetables from nearby grocery stores for the animals.

A wealthy animal rights activist noticed their progress – and made a generous offer of \$600,000 as the matching grant to assist in purchasing a 40-acre farm with a barn, more amenities, and a 3 bedroom house. The new property was within 30 miles of 1.5 million people and more adaptable to convert into an animal sanctuary. In September of 2016, the new property was purchased and is now the permanent home of the Luvin arms sanctuary. It has bigger parking area, community and education center, a food garden, medical and quarantine barns, The slow process of moving from the rental property will be complete by Spring of 2017. The existing barn on the new property was eminently suitable for the three horses and they were transferred first. In the first phase of construction activity, five barns, a cow barn, a goat/sheep barn/ Pig barn/ chicken/Rooster Barn(s) and a medical barn all of the various sizes will have to be built before all animals can be transferred at the cost of \$300,000. Local branch of American Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals has already requested that they accept a few cows they have rescued.

We got up early on Saturday morning to be at the new site as 20 volunteers were scheduled to arrive there to assist three construction workers in erecting of the first of the three barns that was going to be 50' wide barn for cows. Volunteers were already there when we reached the farm and the contractor's men were guiding them into correctly positioning the tall posts as the outer periphery of the barn into ground. When they broke for lunch, I got my chance to speak to the volunteers. I was amazed at their passion and determination they all had to finish making three barns in coming week.

That evening as we were preparing to go home, Shaleen got a call from a farm hand at nearby feedlot that had 5,000 sheep. Two 6 months old sheep had stopped eating for a couple of days and were very weak. The farm hand asked if the sanctuary would accept them. Shaleen just sprang into action. He and a volunteer hitched a trailer to his truck and headed to rescue the two sheep. The sheep were brought to the new sanctuary and put in one of the empty stalls in the horse barn. A volunteer stayed behind to make them comfortable with blankets, feed, and water.

Sunday morning, the nearby church was to bring 15 sixth graders for a tour of the old sanctuary. As soon as Shaleen and I got there, Shaleen got to work. He had to move some piles of feed and assist a couple of volunteers who were moving manure to a pile designated for it. When the kids arrived, they first presented a donation check for the sanctuary in the amount of \$350.00. Shaleen thanked them and proceeded to give a tour of the facility. He introduced each resident of the sanctuary by its name and told the story of how they arrived at the facility. He told them of the daily routine. A designated volunteer for every day of the week for morning or evening shift was responsible for feeding them and cleaning their stalls. Animals were weighed once a week and received wellness visit from volunteer veterinarian. Kids asked many questions and promised to return as volunteers once they reached the age of 18.

Later Shaleen and Shilpi were planning to take me to a vegan restaurant in Boulder before my flight back home but our plans changed abruptly with a phone call from the volunteer nurse practitioner at the sanctuary regarding deteriorating health of the two sheep that arrived the previous day. We were told that sheep needed to be examined and treated immediately by a veterinarian. Fortunately, CSU - Colorado State University in

Boulder (30 miles from the Sanctuary) has a Veterinarian Teaching Hospital with 24/7 staffing. Both sheep were loaded in a trailer hitched to Shaleen's truck and the whole Shah family and I was on our way to the hospital. The vet at the hospital was briefed by the nurse practitioner at the farm about the symptoms observed by her and they were prepared to handle the emergency at 5:00 pm even on a cold Sunday evening. After the initial diagnosis, we were told that the emergency tests and the first-night stay will cost around \$1,000 and the costs may escalate as treatment options become clear after 24 hours. Both Shilpi and Shaleen immediately consented to the cost estimates and instructed the hospital to do everything they could for both the sheep. We headed back from the hospital to the sanctuary, unhitched the trailer and headed to a restaurant near Denver Airport. My visit to the Sanctuary and with this remarkable couple was coming to a close. It just dawned on me that for the first time in my life, I was a vegan for the weekend and I liked it.

On my way home, I kept thinking about Shah family's journey of compassion for the farm animals with steely determination. I watched them, on a cold December morning, as they got ready in the morning and go to the sanctuary dressed like farmers rushing to go to work. They both had trained themselves to handle all kinds of tasks on the farm - driving the tractor, handling and feeding the animals, cleaning the stalls and some construction work etc. When I asked, Shaleen told me that he devotes 60% of his time on the sanctuary and 40% of his time on his business that he runs from his home. In addition raising the two boys, shilpi considers looking after wellness of all the residents of the sanctuary, book keeping and all the office work for the sanctuary as her mission in life. Their little boys, Aarav and Avi know names of every resident of the sanctuary and think of themselves as guardians of them all.

Transitioning to a new permanent location, Shahs have undertaken a huge financial project. They have borrowed money against their home to fulfill urgent need to start building proper barns to house the animals that will need \$300,000. There is monthly cost of \$5,000 per month to feed for Wellness/Vet care and eventually there will be need to hire 5 staff positions for animal care, Outreach/Education and fund raising etc. at the cost of \$18,000.

Many animal shelters in America like PETA keep the animals they receive for a fixed number of days and offer them free as pets to any takers. If no one comes forward in that period of time, shelters consider it humane to euthanize them - "put them to sleep" -euphemism for killing them by injection. Luvin Arms is a "No Kill" facility. Jains of North America need to adopt this sanctuary as their own, a token of their commitment to compassion and support the sanctuary. They need immediate help to install heaters and building barns with 9,000 sq. ft. overall space and propane storage tank. Your gift will continue to serve animals over many years. Luvin Arms is a 501 C (3) registered nonprofit organization and donations to it may be tax deductible. Donations may be sent to Jivdaya Committee of JAINA and forward it to Rita Sheth, 5308 E. 80th Place, Tulsa, OK 74136 or send to Luvin Arms 3470 Country Road 7, Erie, CO 80516-8613 You can visit their website: www.LuvinArms.org or on facebook.com/luvinarms