Of Human Bonding
by Wendy VanHorn

A Wobbly Rabbit
a New Neurological Disease in Rabbits?
by HRS Executive Director, Anne Martin, PhD

My Grumpy Bunny Story
by Bob Graham
Stargirl came to House Rabbit Society in 2016 with neurological disease. Her preliminary diagnosis is Sarcocystis, a possible new disease in rabbits. Find out more about Sarcocystis, and a new study being spearheaded by HRS, on page 5.
EVERY YEAR we hear about a number of emergency rabbit rescue situations around the country that involve anywhere from 15 to 1500 rabbits. In order to help, in 2007 we started the Emergency Rescue Fund. All donations coming to HRS that specify “Emergency Rescue Fund” will go toward these grants. We use these funds to make targeted grants (usually ranging from $250 to $1000) to animal rescue organizations that are involved in a large rescue of many rabbits. House Rabbit Society’s Chapter Grant program seeks to assist HRS chapters in their mission of rabbit rescue or education and outreach. Below are our grant recipients for the first half of 2018. Congratulations to these great rescues and HRS chapters! To see past winners and apply, visit rabbit.org/the-hrs-emergency-grant-program

### 2018 Grant Recipients

**Bunnies Matter in Vegas, Too**

$1000

Funds from this grant helped the Las Vegas dump site rabbits for intake exams, medications, and spay/neuter fees for 100 rabbits.

[facebook.com/Helpthevegasbunnies](https://facebook.com/Helpthevegasbunnies)

**Cedar Valley Humane Society**

$1000

Funds from this grant helped offset spay/neuter and veterinary costs of 60 neglected rabbits from a hoarding situation in Vinton, Iowa.

[cvhumane.org](http://cvhumane.org)

**All Creatures Sanctuary**

$1000

Funds from this grant helped with transport costs for Las Vegas dump site rabbits to 10 rescues.

[allcreaturessanctuary.org](http://allcreaturessanctuary.org)

**Rabbit Wranglers**

$1000

Funds from this grant helped pay for spay/neuter surgeries and medical care for 22 rabbits who had been neglected and living in a garage in Pennsylvania.

[rabbitwranglers.org](http://rabbitwranglers.org)

**House Rabbit Network**

$1000

Funds from this grant helped pay for spay/neuter surgeries for 17 rabbits rescued from an outdoor hutch in Massachusetts.

[rabbitnetwork.org](http://rabbitnetwork.org)

**Harvest Home Animal Sanctuary**

$1000

Funds from this grant paid for spay/neuter and rescue costs for 21 rabbits from a Modesto, California hoarding situation.

[harvesthomesanctuary.org](http://harvesthomesanctuary.org)

**Furever Cherished Animal Rescue**

$1000

Funds from this grant helped pay for spay/neuter surgeries for 27 rabbits rescued from horrible conditions in Pennsylvania.

[furevercherished.org](http://furevercherished.org)

**Almost Home Humane Society**

$1000

Funds from this grant helped 81 rabbits from an animal cruelty situation in Indiana with spay/neuter and medical care for upper respiratory infections.

[almosthomehumane.org](http://almosthomehumane.org)

**Minnesota Companion Society**

$800

Funds from this grant helped 20 rabbits from the Las Vegas dump site with vet care and spay/neuter.

[mncompanionrabbit.org](http://mncompanionrabbit.org)

**Rabbit Rescue Inc.**

$1000

Funds from this grant helped 33 Las Vegas Dump Site bunnies with spay/neuter surgeries and medical care.

[rabbitrescue.ca](http://rabbitrescue.ca)
Maxine loved her rainbow tunnel, but while she grew the tunnel gradually flattened into a rainbow raft. She no longer could go through it or climb it. What could I do? It was so sad to see her just standing on the flattened pieces of wood. The tunnel needed support to keep it arched and stable. I got an idea: I curved it back into an arch high enough for Maxine to go through and climb it. I measured a solid piece of wood for the bottom of the arch, cut it, drilled it and then screwed everything together securely. It worked! Maxine once again is enjoying her tunnel. This is an easy fix for those of you who may have come across this same problem.

-Michele Beckhardt-Lada / Beckhardt-Lada Design
A WOBBLY RABBIT and the Search For a New Diagnosis For Rabbits With Neurological Symptoms

by HRS Executive Director, Anne Martin, PhD

In June 2016, I got an email from a San Francisco Bay Area animal shelter that a rabbit had come in stray “and needs to go to rescue immediately or she will be euthanized. The veterinarians believe that she has E. cuniculi, and unfortunately would not place her up for adoption due to this.” They added, “She is very sweet, and able to be handled. She does have a slight head tilt and wobbles from time to time.” I coordinated with a volunteer to pick up the bunny the next day, and the shelter agreed to take in a healthy rabbit from another shelter overflowing with rabbits into their successful rabbit adoption program.

The cute wobbly black bunny, who we named Enoki (like the mushroom), arrived at House Rabbit Society headquarters in Richmond, CA, where she had a vet exam with Dr. Carolynn Harvey, our Medical Director. Dr. Harvey did not see evidence of head tilt, but Enoki was wobbly and her right hind leg was semi-paralyzed. Like the vet at the shelter, she suspected it might be Encephalitozoon cuniculi, a common cause of neurological problems in rabbits. But Enoki’s symptoms seemed a little different. Approximately 49% of rabbits in the US have been exposed to E. cuniculi, usually in utero from their mom or from urine exposure as a baby rabbit in poor breeding conditions, and will test positive for antibodies to the organism for the rest of their life even if they’re not sick. We were surprised when a few days later Enoki’s test result came back negative.

We had several other wobbly rabbits in the last couple years, or rabbits with progressive neurological disease that did not respond to E. cuniculi treatment, and a couple rabbits with seizures, all of them with symptoms a little different than we would expect with E. cuniculi. House Rabbit Society headquar-


2 The most commonly described neurological symptoms of E. cuniculi are head tilt, rolling and nystagmus, ataxia, hind-end weakness or paralysis. While there is some overlap in the description of symptoms of rabbits who have tested Sarcocystis positive, and a small percentage of rabbits with neurological symptoms have tested positive for both E. cuniculi and Sarcocystis making it difficult to know which organism is causing symptoms, however, the presentation of clinical symptoms in Sarcocystis-positive rabbits appears qualitatively different from E. cuniculi-positive rabbits in the majority of cases.
I always have been an animal lover. When I was growing up we had dogs, and eventually in high school we were allowed to keep a cat that just showed up on our porch. This was a big deal considering my mother is highly allergic. In 2009, I was in a long-distance relationship and we often sent emails back and forth. On one occasion, I sent a picture of a rabbit. It was then that my boyfriend mentioned he always had wanted a rabbit when he was growing up, but his mom wouldn’t let him have one. I had never thought about it. As time passed, we continued to talk about getting rabbits when we were able to be together in one location.

I decided I needed to learn about rabbits to determine whether I really wanted one. I searched my area and found the North Texas Rabbit Sanctuary, the only all-rabbit rescue in the entire Dallas/Fort Worth area at the time. I signed up to volunteer one Saturday to see what rabbits were all about. My first impression was that the rabbits were adorable but smelled and were messy. I was even a little scared of them. I was invited to volunteer once a month, and I reluctantly agreed to be added to the monthly schedule. I was worried that it would become a burden, but I thought I could always quit if I wanted to. What happened was quite the contrary. Volunteering became part of my routine. Plans were made around my volunteering, or I would switch my Saturday with another volunteer if a conflict arose. I went years without ever missing a month. Month by month, year by year, I learned about rabbits and their needs. They had stolen my heart. A few years ago, after the unexpected death of an active volunteer, I stepped up and became even more involved. I monitored the email inbox and Facebook account. By this time I also had built up the skills and confidence to groom and clip nails. Later, I started taking photos of new rabbits to upload to our website and Petfinder account. It was during this time I really saw how neglected rabbits could be. I saw how uneducated owners were in regard to their own pets’ care. I saw how disposable people thought they were. I heard the same stories over and over: “My kids don’t take care of the rabbit, and we don’t want it anymore,” “We got a dog, and he doesn’t get along with the rabbit,” “My child is going off to college and can’t take the rabbit,” or “We found a rabbit in our neighborhood, and no one is claiming it.”

When I heard all these stories and saw the poor condition of the rabbits we received, my heart broke. My time with NTRS has made me so much more compassionate for animals in general, and specifically rabbits. My friends often call me militant when it comes to bunnies and their care. This new compassion led me to reflect on my childhood pets and their care, or lack thereof. My parents came from a different era, when pets were meant to be outside, and money wasn’t wasted on vet care unless absolutely necessary. Perhaps my passion for educating people about rabbits and their care comes from this guilt. I try to remember this and not judge people who truly don’t know any better. This often is difficult when it is clear owners just don’t care and aren’t interested in learning. The hard reality is that we, as rescuers, can do only so much. We cannot save them all. That doesn’t make it any easier when your organization is at capacity, and you have to turn people away, or an owner was unreceptive to education.

It has been almost nine years since my first visit to NTRS, and I am now an active volunteer/contributor. I also have gained some dear friends. Although the relationship that led me down the bunny path has ended, I have no regrets. I am forever changed by these amazing animals and will forever be a bunny person. I have two rabbits, Fizzgig and Lola, who have brought me so much joy. I have learned so much as a rabbit guardian. You must be content to be in their presence, because most rabbits are not cuddly. There is a constant sense of invention to figure out how to better care for your rabbits or address behavioral issues. They keep me company and keep me entertained. When a friend visited, the rabbits entertained us the whole time we chatted. He asked me, “Is this what you do at night, sit and watch the bunnies?”

“Yes, it is,” I answered. And I wouldn’t have it any other way.
I would like to say that I was always an informed rabbit owner that did things right from the get-go, but that was not the case. I made plenty of mistakes along the way, but I’d like to think I got most of it right by the end of my journey with my rabbit, Cocoa. I was a teenager when Cocoa came into my life. He was a tiny rabbit being sold, along with his litter mates, at the farmers market during Easter season. My sister and I had planned on getting a rabbit and found it impossible to resist this little ball of chocolate and white fluff. An hour later he was home and set up in a hutch under our deck in the back yard. At the time, the community we lived in was still more agricultural than not. Putting a rabbit outside in a hutch was just what you did, and Cocoa seemed more than happy with the arrangement.

My sister and I doted on the baby bunny. We brought him inside every day for a couple hours of playtime before we returned him to his hutch. Everything was going along fine until Cocoa hit bunny puberty. That was when our sweet boy went from pleasant to pesky. Cocoa would charge to the front and bite us when we reached inside his hutch. He would then promptly turn around and jump in the air and spray urine everywhere. When we picked him up to clean the hutch he would flail around and scratch us. He quickly earned the nickname “Cocoa Loco.” Our indoor play sessions became non-existent, which didn’t help the situation. Just taking care of his daily needs was a challenge. It wasn’t long before my sister grew tired of his antics and I took over all care of Cocoa. It was at this point that family and friends suggested I try to find another home for him.

While it was true that Cocoa wasn’t a particularly enjoyable pet anymore, finding him another home wasn’t an option for me. As difficult as he had become, I still remembered the day we brought him home and I held that sweet baby against my chest and promised to take care of him forever. It was a promise I intended to keep. I mostly managed to avoid his biting and scratching, but almost always ended up being sprayed with urine. I became so frustrated with this that I began wearing a poncho over my clothes when I took care of him. My neighbors probably thought I was crazy.

Cocoa and I continued this way for another year or two when a heat wave transformed our whole relationship. I was always cautious to make sure Cocoa stayed cool enough during the hot summer months, but when I noticed the forecast was calling for several days of temperatures in the upper 90s, I was concerned it would be too much for him. I bought a rabbit cage and put it in my bedroom and moved Cocoa into it in the evening to avoid a drastic temperature change. That was when things started to improve. As the days stretched into weeks, Cocoa began to react positively to my voice and got excited when I came in the room. The scratching, biting, and spraying slowly came to an end. It was like I had a completely different rabbit!

Needless to say, Cocoa never went back outside. I eventually set him up in a large dog crate with access to an exercise pen. He continued to thrive as an indoor rabbit. Cocoa was always a spunky rabbit, but no longer displayed any of his previous, less desirable bunny behaviors. Cocoa lived out the rest of his 10 years as a house rabbit. Over the years I had other rabbits, all indoors, all neutered, and all dearly loved. But the relationship I had with Cocoa, from our tumultuous beginning to the close bond we shared throughout the rest of his life, will always hold a special place in my heart. After all, Cocoa showed me the joys of having a house rabbit.

From Hutch to House with Love
by Erika DeAngelo

WRITE FOR US!

We’re seeking submissions for House Rabbit Journal and we would love to have your contribution! We publish twice each year and HRS members receive an automatic subscription! You can find out more information, including submission deadlines, on our website.

rabbit.org/hrjsubmissions

You can also check out past issues of House Rabbit Journal, dating back to House Rabbit Society’s founding in 1988!

rabbit.org/house-rabbit-journal-archive

Join HRS! rabbit.org/donate
My mother gave me my first bunny when I was six. For Krümel (German for "crumb") I prepared little salads out of lettuce, celery, and carrot. That experience helped to make me a passionate cook today. And it was through Krümel and the rabbits I had in my teenage years that I learned about observation and silence and developed the sensitivity and presence that have served me as a professional writer.

A few years ago Moose came to us as a foster via Rabbit Rescue & Rehab, the New York City chapter of House Rabbit Society. He had not had a happy life up to that point. The one-year-old was emaciated and had an upper respiratory infection. His mate had died of pneumonia. We boarded the new houseguest in my downstairs office. He would be my muse, I joked. Faintheartedness and aggression are not desirable traits in rabbits (or in writers, for that matter). While my husband and I managed to fatten up Moose and cure his infection, we failed to find him a permanent home. “Let’s just keep him,” I said. Since we were getting along with my eccentricities, we could certainly manage Moose’s. Besides, I had just returned from a writers’ residency and was encouraged that my husband had survived four weeks alone with the new guest. How bad could it be, really? Pretty bad, it turns out.

Moose’s loving, calm demeanor disappeared at the buzz of the doorbell. Any unfamiliar sound or movement sent him scurrying into the bathroom. I could relate. The intensity with which he and I experience the world is beneficial in some ways, but overwhelming in others. I’ve been known to flinch when the phone rings. (Bad news or an unpredictable change of plans?) Once, after several days of writing in solitude with Moose by my feet, I found myself ducking under my desk when I heard a neighbor call my name from the sidewalk.

Breakfast time was the biggest challenge for Moose. He would lunge at me grunting like an angry dog when I entered his territory to fill his bowls. His bites were more than light nips. Before his morning meal Moose was Monty Python’s Killer Rabbit and I was the unarmed knight in his cave. But once his belly was full, Moose would nudge me with his velvety, black nose and lick my hands in affection. He’d stretch out on the couch to have his head stroked and softly chattered his teeth in pleasure. We just had a few things to work out.

Fortunately, a couple of years ago I attended a bunny-training workshop led by veterinarian and animal behaviorist Susan Brown. Dr. Brown mentioned that aggression and anxiety in rabbits can be successfully treated by teaching them simple tricks, which instills confidence along with a sense of order and purpose. So I confidently bought a training target (a small pole with a little orange ball on top) and a clicker (a sound stimulus that communicates to the animal when he does something desirable).

With Moose now living in my office I was eager to put target and clicker to use. Off I ventured to buy supplies that I could turn into training hurdles. If you want to make a Home Depot associate happy, ask for help with your bunny obstacle course. Never have I been treated with such enthusiasm. I came home with a little saw, a bunch of PVC pipes and fittings, cardboard,

Like Rabbit, Like Writer

By Sabine Heinlein

Photograph by Jan Vasek
“It occurred to me that the rabbit obstacle course was an apt metaphor for my unpredictable life as a writer. For years I’ve jumped through hoops and over hurdles, not knowing what’s next. That insight took flight when I watched Moose take to his new gym. It was a hoot to watch him squeeze through Bambi’s legs, which reminded me of how many times I’ve felt oafish wrestling with a small writing assignment. I tend to collect material until it no longer fits into the little story I’ve been assigned to write. Moose’s first sessions on the course were trying for both of us. He attacked the training target as if it were threatening him. He bit the hand that held the treats. He flinched whenever he heard the clicker and became distracted looking for possible danger. Fortunately, my experience as a journalist helped Moose and me get the hang of the obstacle course together. With writing, the key to success is patience. Just keep working and eventually things will fall into place.

Between training sessions I noticed that Moose had taken to jumping on top of the wooden box. I’d rush over with target, clicker, and treats and soon he began to associate his training tools with rewards. One day I found that after I left the obstacle course set up for the next session, Moose had entered it and started performing his tricks on his own.

Even though I was seeing progress, the training was exhausting. We usually worked at night while my husband sat at the computer. When I was discouraged and wanted to give up, my husband pointed out, “The 20 minutes aren’t up yet!” (Don’t ask how he came up with that schedule.)

In the process of training Moose I made another discovery about rabbits and writing. Sometimes it helps to take a break to keep in the present moment. In the past, when I would hit a wall while writing and needed to rest, I’d spend my break and a 12-inch metal exhaust pipe. On my way home the aforementioned neighbor asked about the purchases. I feigned innocence (another task rabbits and reporters are good at). “I’m making some minor plumbing repairs,” I said. I was afraid to look like a fool (add timidty to my list of rabbit-like qualities).

I added a cardboard hoop to the pipes and fittings as well as the tunnel, assembling feeling guilty about not working. I’d force myself back too soon and try to finish the story. Through working with Moose, though, I noticed that breaks serve a productive purpose. The mind ferments and reorganizes things. The trick, of course, is to face the obstacle course eventually.

There was just one major thing that we had to work out. I had set up the course in a way that made sense to me. But Moose had other ideas. He’d begin in the middle, jump through the hoop first (that seemed to be his favorite part), and then move on to the box. Sometimes he began at the end, hopping onto the box and jiggling the keys. Taking his cue, I rearranged the course, starting with the hoop and the box. I moved the tunnel closer to the deer, to which he had suddenly taken a particular liking. The changes made me wonder why I always started stories at the beginning instead of letting intuition reign. Things can always be rearranged and edited later. Why not approach what we fear or resist on our own terms and allow ourselves to do what we love first? The dreaded part might very well be a “Krümel,” (a crumb, not a rabbit).

It worked! As I’d hoped, Moose’s successes in the obstacle course bred confidence. Soon he began sticking around when my friends came over. His eyes still widened, but now he waited out his terror and allowed it to pass. (Patience!) Delightfully, the first stranger who was allowed to pet him was a fellow writer.

Moose’s anxiety around food is almost gone now. He still rushes to the bowl grunting when I fill it, but when he nips me I can usually blame it on having approached him hurriedly or waiting too long to serve him. (I sympathize completely. I’m still trying to figure out when I should follow up with editors and agents without seeming zealous or rash.)

It always amazes me how work, patience, and rewards can re-channel behavior. I think that through my writing and my rabbits I’ve become a steadier and less impulsive person. The more I write, putting order into a narrative that appears scattered and erratic, the calmer my brain becomes. I know, of course, that the order by means of sentences and paragraphs is an illusion. After one thing is brought under control, the next challenge has to be faced. But sometimes it’s easier to begin by jumping through the hoop and saving the tunnel for later.

Maybe I’ll elevate Moose’s hoop ever so slightly tonight.”
One evening in December of 2008 my life changed forever. There I was, sitting with my laptop, browsing the Craigslist pet section. I scrolled through the countless unwanted animals listed for sale, then clicked on an ad featuring a rabbit free to a good home. Apparently, the current guardian felt too busy to have a rabbit anymore, and his roommate felt compelled to advertise the bun. The man was local to me so I decided to send an email expressing my interest. Shortly after, I received a reply that the rabbit was still available. I made plans for the following evening to swing by with a friend and pick up the bunny. As we walked down a set of dreary basement stairs, there was the rabbit, locked in a wire cage with no hay or toys. I did not have much experience with rabbits, other than petting and feeding them at the animal shelter where I volunteered. As I watched the man try to grab the rabbit by the ears, I quickly intervened. I placed the bun gently inside my pet carrier and off we went with this new fellow. Because of his strong personality, accompanied by the white lightning bolt shape across his chest, I decided the name “Zeus” was perfect. As soon as I got Zeus comfortable in his new home with me, I returned to the computer to research everything I possibly could on proper rabbit care. After all, this remarkable four-pound Dutch mix was my responsibility now. Zeus was notoriously bossy (with the occasional grunting lunge), but he was also a mama's boy who enjoyed every minute of me cooing over him and kissing his cheeks. He had me wrapped around his little brown-and-white fluff of a tail and he knew it. Boy, did he know it! His presence always demanded attention from anyone in the room. He was unforgettable.

Being smitten with Zeus and everything rabbits, I wanted to help other rabbits who needed a safe haven. I noticed many people networking about dogs and cats in danger but never saw a plea for anyone to help a bunny. After checking various shelter intake lists online, it was clear that rabbits needed help, desperately in some states. So, I began my own crusade. Rabbit Rescue Network, a social media networking page for rabbits in need all over the world, was born—with 12,000 followers and counting! This outlet became a source for many to interact and learn something new, from basic care to behavioral issues. The best part is I’ve also been successful in the mission of helping needy rabbits find safe placement in rescue groups and forever homes. Receiving happy-tail updates on the page has made it all worth it.

Because of Zeus, I unknowingly garnered a reputation as The Rabbit Lady and a nature center I volunteered with asked me to become a licensed rehabilitator for wild rabbits. I’ve been told that many wildlife professionals look the other way when a rabbit is in need because they are considered difficult. In my opinion, it is because rabbits are still just very misunderstood animals. With all the unanswered phone calls for injured and orphaned rabbits, I knew I had to help in my area. Since then, I am proud and even humbled to say I have helped hundreds of our wild bunny friends by rescuing them and nurturing them back to health.

And, as you can imagine, having Zeus opened my heart to more adoptions. As of today, I have fostered dozens of homeless rabbits through a local rabbit rescue group I actively volunteer with. I admit, some of these buns ended up being “foster failures” and became permanent members of my family. Despite all the extra veterinary bills and litter boxes to clean up, it’s been worth it; each of my rabbits has given me so much love in return. I really believe none of this would have been possible had I not answered that Craigslist ad that evening back in 2008.

Many people think the things that are life-changing have to be big and impressive, like career growth, or a new house or car. Many wouldn’t even fathom that a little grunting rabbit would qualify. But that was indeed the case.

In the summer of 2017, my beloved, elderly Zeus passed away peacefully on his own terms, just as he would have wanted it. When his soul left his body, he took my heart right along with him over that rainbow bridge. There isn’t a moment I think of him when a smile doesn’t cross my face. I am who I am today because of Zeus.
When I first got Oreo, I never envisioned my life would consist of so much travel by car and that she would sometimes travel with me. As a computer consultant, I would occasionally change jobs and need to move around the United States. Additionally, I started transporting healthy rabbits and supplies for rescue organizations.

Among the biggest dangers transporting a rabbit by car are temperature and driver fatigue. Also one must be careful to monitor that she is eating enough to prevent stasis as some rabbits do not like to eat while the car is moving. I always make sure to have working air conditioning in the car when it’s hot, with a backup plan to buy a five-pound bag of ice if it breaks.

In Virginia, I made the mistake of transporting her in a cardboard box with the flaps folded over. Fortunately she was fine, but I learned to always transport her in a carrier and never in a box. I also realized that the temperature in a sunny back seat can be very different from the temperature in front in the car. Five years later, the setup evolved to having a top-opening carrier secured by a seatbelt with the front gate pointed toward the rear bumper for safety and padding to keep the carrier level. I learned to put fleece in the carrier folded at the wire door to prevent legs or paws from escaping. I put paper towels on top of the fleece in case of a bathroom accident because they are easy to replace at rest stops. I stuffed a paper towel roll with hay and placed inside a water bowl with a small amount of water. I found that the backup water bottle tended to leak due to road vibration, so it was water bowl only. For longer trips, I put the carrier on the front seat where I could occasionally pet Oreo and give her a healthy treat or watered greens.

Six months after I lived in Virginia, my contract ended and we had a slow drive back to my cottage in Palo Alto, California. After starting down the Blue Ridge Mountains, I learned that Oreo, like most rabbits does not like winding mountain roads. I found that the yellow speed advisories on curves are good to follow when traveling with a rabbit so as not to frighten her.

Soon after getting back to Palo Alto, I had a work trip to Sacramento, California. This was my first experience with a pet checking in and out of hotels. I found that Red Roof, La Quinta, and Motel 6 chains do not charge extra for a pet. However, in one city in New York, we found that local regulations may prevent a pet from staying at a hotel, even if the hotel chain is advertised as pet-friendly.

After California, the next work location was Bowling Green, Kentucky. Oreo had the opportunity to use the bathroom before we left and she used it again as soon as we reached our destination. Six or seven hours seemed to be the maximum length Oreo and I could travel without a stop of at least half an hour. We listened to hours of books on CD on this route. I looked for signs that my rabbit accepted my audio preferences: driving is already stressful enough for her.

Right after Kentucky, my mother became sick so we stayed in Illinois for several months until she got better. This was the first time Oreo got GI stasis. I searched Google and the HRS website for nearby exotic and small animal vets. After calling around I found one that could take her that day. We don’t carry a huge amount of rabbit emergency supplies, but we do have a thermometer and petroleum jelly so I can take a bunny’s temperature, Simethicone, Critical Care, and a feeding syringe. Rather than carrying a lot of medical supplies, I always plan to find a vet in advance of a road trip if we need help quickly.

Travels with Oreo
By James Wilson

Photograph by Christin Lovell

www.rabbit.org

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I firmly believe that the universe brings you exactly who you need, often in unusual ways. It’s certainly true of how my husband and I found Joy. I would never have guessed that a visit to a salon for a brow waxing would lead to a friendship with a fellow bunny mom who would become such an important part of our lives. And on a recent night filled with fire and fear, the bonds we formed became even closer.

Every rabbit parent at some point faces the daunting question: Who do I trust to take care of my rabbit when I’m away? We all know too well that rabbits have needs that are not easy to explain to non-rabbit people. There is a cartoon on social media of a giant whiteboard filled with hundreds of instructions that someone left for the bunnysitter. It’s not that far from the truth. I have four pages of typed instructions in case there’s an emergency and someone has to take care of my rabbit. Finding a friend, relative, neighbor, or even trained pet sitter you trust to keep your rabbit healthy and safe while you are gone for more than a few days can be nearly impossible.

A well-meaning friend can make a salad and change a litter box, but non-rabbit people can’t read the subtle clues a bunny leaves when things are going off course. How do you explain the importance of proper poop size and quantity to someone? How do you teach the body language that indicates that your rabbit is in pain? How can you trust someone to know how long to wait before a problem means a trip to the veterinarian? And what if the vet is closed and your rabbit needs help?

These are things that keep you up at night and make it easier to just stay home. And that’s where we were a few years ago with our two rabbits. SweetPea was an elderbun of nine and suffering from chronic
stasis and arthritis. Nutmeg was feisty and food- and space-protective. We didn’t really travel because there was no one we could rely on to take care of our two buns, each with their own special needs. Then, on a visit to the salon, I mentioned that I had rabbits and learned that there was an aesthetician there who worked part-time as a petsitter. And she had rabbits, too. Joy!

I met with Joy and discovered she was an experienced petsitter. But more importantly, she was a rabbit person through and through. She has two bunnies of her own and one was an elder-bun. I introduced her to our two girls and she quickly impressed me with her rabbit knowledge. We realized we shared the same love of living with rabbits. I knew my husband and I could start planning a trip!

At the start, we hired Joy as a professional petsitter. It was still hard to leave, but knowing that Joy would visit twice a day and give the girls the care and love they needed made it all possible. She recognized early signs of stasis with SweetPea and was able to get her treated. And she took no offense at Nutmeg’s growling and lunging at salad time. Joy became an extended member of the family. When SweetPea crossed the bridge, Joy shared our grief.

Eventually, Joy decided to stop petsitting. But she let us know that she would still be happy to watch Nutmeg. We were so relieved! In time, we had to say goodbye to Nutmeg, and Joy to her pair, as well. But, as rabbit people know, the story can’t end there. One day I got a text from Joy saying that she had found a beautiful rabbit girl at a shelter. Soon after, a photo of a grey fluffy boy appeared in my messages. These two became Holly and Nicholas.

This was when our rabbit bond deepened, because now Joy wanted us to watch over her bunnies, too. What began as a professional relationship became a true friendship. I call Holly and Nick my “godbunnies.” Just like being a godmother to a human child, Joy wanted me to love her rabbits as I would my own, not just watch over them when she couldn’t. And when we were ready to add to our family by adopting Collette from B.U.N.S. (Bunnies Urgently Needing Shelter) in Santa Barbara, Auntie Joy was her first visitor.

Whenever either of us is planning a trip, the first thing we do is check to see if the other is available. The stress of leaving has been replaced by daily videos and photos of happy rabbit antics. Joy and I both leave emergency kits in case of stasis and we use the same veterinarian. We are so grateful to have each other and to love rabbits besides our own.

On the night of December 4, 2017, the largest wildfire in California history roared into our city of Ventura. Joy and I live in the same neighborhood, Joy just below the hillside that the fire hit hardest, and my home just five blocks farther. That night, as the fire crested the hill, we prepared to evacuate. It was scary and frantic and hard to think straight.

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Pulling into the animal shelter it occurred to me I didn’t know how to pick a bunny. I had the supplies and an enclosure ready; this wouldn’t be my first bunny. Yet I wondered how I’d pick one. My previous bunnies were always gifts or found stray. I didn’t know if I could say yes to one bunny and no to another; the bunnies had always picked me.

Putting on a confident smile, I walked into the shelter and announced, “I’d like a bunny please.” The woman behind the desk opened a binder. “You can look at the rabbits and I’ll have an adoption application ready if there’s one you like.” “No need,” I replied. “Just give me the bunny who’s most in need of a home.”

The woman hustled out back. Moments later, she handed me a squirming grey and white ball of fur and floppy ears. Fifteen minutes later I had signed, paid, and headed out the door with Byron, a six-month-old lop-eared rabbit.

If it seemed a little fast, I learned later Byron was going to be euthanized as unadoptable. Despite looking like a fluffy teddy bear, Byron routinely broke out of his cage, bit staff, and would snort when displeased, which was apparently often. Once home, Byron made a mockery of my bunny-proofing, destroying several appliances and a rare book before attacking the carpet and baseboards. He refused to be held, and I had the holes in my clothing to prove it. He also scared more than a few people with his snorting “I didn’t know rabbits could make that noise,” one shocked veterinary tech said.

I thought a companion might tame the beast, and for several years Byron had a rescued rabbit named Clio as a bonded mate. While Byron always had to be within a few feet of Clio, and Clio diligently cleaned his ears, Byron nipped her as much as he snuggled.

After Clio passed and I got married, my family found Byron the grump who came home with me. He still wouldn’t be held, and if you offered treats, Byron was more likely to yank them away and hide than stay and be petted.

Now over 11, Byron has arthritis, cataracts, and permanent abscesses that need treatment. He sleeps most of the day and still bites when you try to hold him. My wife says he has a permanently angry look to him. Yet every morning Byron has breakfast with me, and evenings when I sit near him to read, Byron will sometimes edge over for an ear rub or to chin me.

After all these years, I think it’s fair to say Byron is indeed a grumpy bunny. He’s also the bunny I asked for, and that makes it okay.

TIPS FOR DEALING WITH GRUMPY BUNNIES

A grumpy bunny may still want company. Create a space where bunny can come to you for petting or hang out near you while you read or go online. Most bunnies don’t like to be held. Be mindful of this, especially with children who may want to grab and hold bunny. Make sure bunny has an enclosed space all their own to which they can retreat any time they feel the need to get away. Bunnies, like people, have their own personalities. While you can teach bunnies some things, accept that you can’t make them act the way you want all the time. You’ll both be happier in the end!

DO YOU KNOW A GRUMPY BUNNY?

Susan Brown DVM and House Rabbit Society Vice President Mary Cotter gave a wonderful presentation on strategies for dealing with common behavior problems in companion rabbits at the first HRS conference in St. Louis, Missouri in 2014: rabbit.org/strategies-for-managing-behavior-problems-in-companion-rabbits

Photograph by Jessica Graham
(continued from page 5)

plants contaminated by predator or wildlife feces containing the organism. Once the species of *Sarcocystis* is known, we may learn which predator is the primary host of the organism.

Enoki’s symptoms started getting worse, and she came home with me for special care as she was spending most of her time lying on her side. In horses, *Sarcocystis neuron* causes ataxia and progressively worsening ability to walk and stand. We started Enoki on Ponazuril, which was developed to treat *Sarcocystis* in horses, along with Trimethoprim/Sulfamethoxazole (also known as TMS or TMP/SMZ), an antibiotic that slows the growth of coccidian parasites closely related to *Sarcocystis*, and meloxicam to help with inflammation. As she continued to decline, we also tried a short course of Prednisone, a steroid, which is a high-risk drug for rabbits as it can depress the immune system and make them susceptible to infection. While she improved for a few days on the Prednisone, she was back on her side when we discontinued it.

“With each subsequent rabbit that came to HRS with strange neurological symptoms, we would try to put together another piece of the puzzle.”

During this time, Clementine, another bunny with neurological symptoms from a local rescue group, came to House Rabbit Society for vet exams with Dr. Harvey. She also tested positive for *Sarcocystis* and negative for *E. cuniculi*. Dr. Harvey started Clementine on Ponazuril, but she didn’t improve. She then tried a course of TMS alone and Clementine declined faster. Dr. Harvey decided to restart Ponazuril at double the standard dose, and Clementine got noticeably better. When they dropped the dose back down to the standard dose, she started to decline again. After several more months of treatment with Ponazuril at the high dose, Clementine’s symptoms stabilized and her recovery plateaued. While she was still a little wobbly, she was no longer getting worse, was able to stop medications, and got adopted.

With the knowledge that the higher dose Ponazuril made a difference for Clementine, we started Enoki on a high dose of Ponazuril. While Enoki’s symptoms stabilized, we weren’t able to get her back on her feet and she required a lot of special care at home. It was likely that the organism had already done brain damage that couldn’t be reversed. One day, months later, she stopped eating and something in her intestines didn’t feel normal. I rushed her to the emergency vet, and she passed away in my arms in the waiting room. Necropsy showed that she had died due to intestinal problems. Because the pathologist found the cause of death elsewhere, he didn’t look closely at her brain and we weren’t able to learn more about what caused her severe neurological symptoms.

With each subsequent rabbit that came to HRS with strange neurological symptoms, we would try to put together another piece of the puzzle. We started testing every rabbit who came in with neurological symptoms for *E. cuniculi* and *Sarcocystis*, and started treating *Sarcocystis* positive rabbits with high dose Ponazuril and/or ReBalance, another drug developed to treat *Sarcocystis neuron* in horses.

We’ve now had multiple *Sarcocystis* positive rabbits like Stargirl, Lily, and Sherman, who came in to animal shelters in the San Francisco Bay Area unable to stand or hop. After being rescued by House Rabbit Society, and after just a few days on treatment with high dose Ponazuril and/or ReBalance, they were on their feet and their mobility significantly improved. While they were permanently a little wobbly, even after treatment for a few months, they are happy and healthy rabbits. Both Stargirl and Lily have been adopted into loving homes, and we hope Sherman will be ready to be adopted soon!

Sadly, there have been some rabbits who tested positive and were given treatment, but their neurological symptoms continued to get worse and they died. We don’t know yet what is different in these cases. Maybe they had a higher load of parasites in their body when we treated them, or maybe they got infected with a higher load. Maybe there is more than one parasite at work. Maybe their immune system is compromised in some way. Maybe too much brain damage and inflammation had already happened by the time we started treatment. With the rabbits who passed away, we did necropsies and additional lab testing. Our research to better understand neurological disease in rabbits follows House Rabbit Society’s policy on ethical health research (see box above).

A House Rabbit Society member who admires Dr. Harvey’s work heard about our project and made a generous donation to fund our study of rabbits with neurological issues. This made it possible for us to reach outside of our organization to offer rabbits with other rescues/shelters and private rabbits with similar symptoms the opportunity to participate in the testing at no charge. This gift has also allowed us to continue pursuing additional laboratory testing to better identify and understand this organism.

We started working with Zoo/Exotic Pathology Service lab, looking at the brain tissue of a couple rabbits who died who had previously tested positive for *Sarcocystis*. They have seen an organism in the brain, but we have been unable to definitively identify the organism using special stains. We have been working with another lab at UC Davis to DNA sequence the organism(s). They have been able to find some DNA, but haven’t yet been able to identify the organism. It’s possible that the organism that is causing our *Sarcocystis* positive PCR results is something related to *Sarcocystis*, or it could be a species of *Sarcocystis*, or there could be multiple parasites.

At this time, we have identified 30 rabbits with neurological symptoms who are *Sarcocystis* positive. Most of these rabbits are *E. cuniculi*-negative. As we have mostly tested rabbits in Northern California, 26 of the cases are here, as well as one in Southern California, one in Chicago, IL, and three in Pittsburgh, PA.

Dr. Harvey and I will present about *Sarcocystis* at the ExoticsCon veterinary conference in Atlanta in September 2018, to share what we’ve learned so far with other exotic vets in the hope that we can all better help rabbits with neurological problems. While we didn’t learn enough to help Enoki in time to reverse her progressive neurological symptoms, this research has already helped other rabbits like Enoki and has given them the opportunity for a long life in a loving home.

You can watch videos of the neurological symptoms of rabbits who have tested positive for *Sarcocystis* at rabbit.org/sarcocystis. If you have a rabbit with similar symptoms and are interested in participating in the HRS study, contact us with the info requested. rabbit.org/sarcocystis

Although House Rabbit Society is involved in rabbit nursing care and health research, all House Rabbit Society health research is done by compilation of existing data and necropsy results. House Rabbit Society “experiments” only prescriptively to save sick animals and bring about recovery. No animal is ever “sacrificed” for any reason.

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t is very important to watch your bunny’s eating habits, especially hay intake. Lack of hay, among other things, leads to GI stasis, but that isn’t the only problem your bunny could have. Belk’s story is a good example. In January, 2017, Brother Wolf Animal Rescue in Asheville, North Carolina, rescued nearly fifty rabbits from a barn located in Buncombe County. Belk was one of those bunnies.

I was at the adoption center when I first met him. Belk was a five-pound white-and-brown lop-eared bunny whose ears drooped to his side. He hid in his box when I spoke to him. I didn’t know it then, but this little bunny had been through a lot. He came in wounded with part of his ear missing from a fight. His wound soon got infected and in March he had surgery. It was now August and he was back in the adoption center where I now stood talking to him.

I took Belk home that day. Within a week, he seemed to be adjusting to the peaceful surroundings. Our house is pretty quiet for the most part. He would let me pet his head and feed him, but he wouldn’t let me pick him up. He would roam and binky a little, and he loved veggies and fruit treats. But it didn’t take long after I’d taken him into my care for me to notice that he’d stopped eating his hay. A rabbit’s diet should be 80% hay, so Belk’s behavior was cause for concern.

I contacted Brother Wolf, and they gave me contact information for a rabbit-savvy mom named Anna. After I met and talked with her, it was clear that he needed to be checked out by a veterinarian. Anna provided advice on different types of hay to try until his appointment. I was hopeful that Belk was simply a picky hay-eater, but he snubbed every type of hay I gave him. The strange thing was that he was still eating all his other foods, both hard and soft.

We scheduled an appointment with a local animal hospital in Asheville. It took the vet thirty seconds to find the problem. Belk had an abscess on his lower jaw, up under his chin. We couldn’t see it because it looked like fluff. The vet was certain he needed surgery. There is no veterinary hospital in Asheville that could handle this surgery, so Brother Wolf made an appointment with a veterinary hospital in Knoxville, Tennessee.

Upon visual examination, they couldn’t judge exactly what was wrong with him, but they too were certain it was some type of abscess. They gave us two oral antibiotics to take home and told us how to do a “bunny burrito” (wrapping the bunny in a towel to give him his medication). I felt bad that I’d have to force him to take it. When I got home, I decided to just try to give it to him with a syringe like a treat. To my utter amazement, he popped up on the side of his cage and drank both medications down without a second thought.

We did this day and night for two weeks until our next appointment in Tennessee. We scheduled a CT scan so we could see what was really going on inside. He was sixteenth in line that day for the CT scan. We were there and on the road a total of thirteen hours.

We got the news later that day, and it was worse than we thought. Belk’s entire lower jaw was abscessed, all six teeth. It was painful for him to eat, and he also had spurs growing into his tongue. Rabbit teeth, as they explained to me, are supposed to grow straight and close together (like pulling your fingers close together). His were spaced out and growing crooked. Because of this, he had a sharp piece of his tooth growing into his nasal cavity and his eye. If something wasn’t done soon, it would penetrate. I began to worry they’d put him down. He had been through so much, and he was such a fighter. I hated the thought of this being the end of the road for him. But it wasn’t! While we were there, they filed his teeth down, eliminating the problem of penetration into his nasal cavity and eye. It also helped prevent pain during eating because the sharp edges were now filed down, away from his tongue. They explained that pulling all of his bottom teeth wasn’t really an option, as it would harm him later and be very painful. Belk was prescribed three different medications that day, two oral medications and an injection.

We learned that Belk would be on medication for the rest of his life. Our luck with his medications continued. He still voluntarily takes both oral medications and happily eats veggies or fruit treats while he’s getting his injection, administered by my pharmacist friend Teresa (I’m terrified of needles!). A rabbit’s teeth grow continually throughout their life. Because of this, Belk has to go every six months to have his teeth filed down to protect his nasal cavity, tongue, and eye.

But after the first initial filing treatment, he seemed like a different bunny. I watch him annihilate piles of hay, run circles in the back room, and play with his toys. He even curls up beside us for a good massage. He is beginning to explore and test his boundaries. He is a happy and healthy bunny, considering everything he has been through. The medications help to keep the infection in his teeth at bay, which in turn prevents abscess pain and complications.

The lesson in this? I pay very close attention to my bun. He cannot talk with his mouth but he can talk with his habits and body language. Belk’s refusal to eat hay was a silent cry for help. When something is off, it could be a sign of something deadly. We’re not sure what the future holds for him. The veterinarian is hopeful that, with the help of the medications, Belk will have a long, happy, healthy life. ■
Up For Adoption
by Bethany Ascott

A rabbit’s life is briefer than ours
and ours is all she’ll ever know,
so give her the meadow with all the flowers,
let her lick dew from ones whiter than snow.

In ninety years she is only a fraction,
but one fat with joyous memory,
of summers with her as my distraction
from the humdrum of reality.

Give her sweet grasses and Timothy hay,
let her chew through your electric cables.
Neither of us knows how long she will stay
before she’s taken by the bunny angels.

Pick your rabbit after many considered hours
because she’s not there just for show.
For a rabbit’s life is briefer than ours
and ours is all she’ll ever know.

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I texted Joy: “Are you OK?” The reply was: “Flames right behind my house. Can I come and bring the bunnies?”

In a howling wind, we carried Holly and Nick and their cages into our front room. Joy left immediately to evacuate her elderly parents. We couldn’t imagine that the fire would keep growing but it did. We, too, were forced to evacuate about an hour later. My husband and I loaded Holly, Nick, Collette, and rabbit supplies into one car, and as many personal belongings as we could cram into our second car. The power was out everywhere. As we drove through the darkness into choking smoke and ash, I told the bunnies to be brave.

Without a second thought, Joy knew she could leave part of her family with us and that we would do our best to keep them safe. She would have done the same for us. Miraculously, both of our homes survived the fire. Joy needed time to clean her house from all the smoke and ash, so Holly and Nick began an extended stay with us. During that time, Joy would come visit. Spending time together with the bunnies helped us both process the trauma of that night. My Collette was very curious about the two rabbits who had taken over her front room, but amazingly there was no thumping on either side of the barrier.

Joy and I both know how lucky we are to have each other as friends and fellow rabbit moms. Holly, Nick, and Collette may not be a traditional bonded trio, but they are all part of the same extended warren.
The top of my head itched and I really wanted her to lick it. That is my favorite thing ever. I bet hers itched too with all that long, flowing hair; she was beautiful.

We’d recently returned from spending a long weekend together being bonded with Suzie, who specialized in such things. Suzie had tried very hard to help us with the physical relationship but said that these things would likely come in time. I really hoped so. At Suzie’s, we did end up sleeping snuggled up close to one another and occasionally shared a kiss. After returning from Suzie’s, our time was spent together roaming our new large split-level home and its vast local environs.

Wandering around away from the house was equally exciting: plush velvet horizons, cooling brick alcoves, myriad private meditation spots, and crunchy willows appeared around every corner. We were sharing warmth at night, too, her little heart beating its tune somewhere near my belly, bringing up the tempo of mine.

One night after dinner while we were just lazing around, I figured the best way forward was to just go for it. I went over to her and gently split a small section of hair on the top of her head. Then, working outward, I softly groomed her luxurious locks with my tongue. Mmmmm. I only did it for a moment, but enough so she’d get the idea (and enough for me to thoroughly enjoy). Then I nervously put my own head down in front of hers and waited.

And she still didn’t get it.

Moreover, she actually went back to the food bowl and ate more pellets instead. I hopped out of the cage to the outside litter box wondering how I could get her to groom it off of me. Sheridan loves strawberries, however she didn’t seem to enjoy being submissive. She just kept walking away. Strawberry juice dripping into my eyes, I stood there patiently and expectantly for as long as I could stand it. Finally my guardian had to wipe it off but it had stained my fur, so I had to let them shampoo me. But, that didn’t work either. It took half a week of vigorous self-bathing to get the stain off permanently.

During the next few days I felt a little bit less infatuated. I basically gave her the master bedroom and slept downstairs by the kitchen, snacking throughout the night. We still took the occasional nap together, cuddling so sweetly that I’d forget that I was supposed to be forgetting about her. But every time I watched her bathe herself I remembered, and I was shamed and then cross.

Once, when one of our guardians went away, the other one took it upon herself to try the strawberry trick. I was so excited! The owner smeared a bit of it on my head to entice Sheridan into grooming it off of me. Sheridan loves strawberries, however she didn’t seem to enjoy being submissive. She just kept walking away. Strawberry juice dripping into my eyes, I stood there patiently and expectantly for as long as I could stand it. Finally my guardian had to wipe it off but it had stained my fur, so I had to let them shampoo me. But, that didn’t work either. It took half a week of vigorous self-bathing to get the stain off permanently.
Then one day they were trying to catch her. She was really unwell; she wasn’t able to eat at all that morning because it hurt too much. I kept myself between her and them as much as possible but in the end they won; they were two, they were bigger, and she was slower and feeling very sick. I was scared. It was Tuesday when they took her away.

I sat in all her favorite places. I remember when I first met Sheridan—that’s her name by the way. I came to this neighborhood in June and met her through a wiry purple link fence. I was immediately smitten. A coy flirtation existed from the start, consisting of a disinterested sniff from one of us, followed by a grand show of turning our backs at each other. Next there was usually a “Well gee, I’m so bored I think I’ll take an afternoon siesta, and the only place I can think of doing it just happens to be right here in front of the neighbor’s fence, fancy that.” This was usually sufficiently annoying enough to generate a little sideways chase, occasionally upsetting the stability of the fence. It was all so very delicious.

I could smell her still, by the cushion where she spent so many days comfortably lounging around, bits of her sultry coat clinging to the upholstery.

I went back to the house and saw that they had taken her favorite litter box. When Sheridan and I lived as neighbors with the purple fence between us, we constantly marked territory with our droppings along the perimeter of the fence. Sheridan took this extremely seriously. Our guardians seemed to return every few days with an additional litter box for Sheridan, as she managed to create new places for her droppings; I only required two litter boxes, one for droppings and one to knock over and pee under. She loved nothing more than to sit in one of her litter boxes. Our guardians kindly left tasty treats for us in them, but still. I wondered why they had packed her litter box and I went and left some droppings in the vacant corner on the way out. I lay in the shadows behind our home, a most pleasurable and relaxing hideaway, one that Sheridan frequented, and had recently shared with me. I was not able to sprawl out and relax like usual.

I remembered as Sheridan and I continued to live as neighbors and try to leave droppings on each other’s lawns, we slowly started to get used to each others faces, scents, and presences. Through the fence, we’d engage in a little nose-to-nose action one night, a little mutual carpet gnawing another night. The owners put our litter boxes back to back and Sheridan seemed to delight in sitting in hers while I was in mine. But then again she was always in hers, one of her many. That’s when I first started dreaming about her licking my head, though I didn’t think it was much more than a dream. All that perpetual teasing through the fence left me famished and dry.

On Wednesday, our guardians got up very early and sat around with the phone in their hands for an hour. The woman made the call. Afterward she sat on the couch and her face looked clearer. The voice on the phone said that after some force-feeding, Sheridan was eating some on her own. She was weak but it looked positive. Sheridan would need to stay there until Monday.

I’m so glad she is going to pull through! When she comes back I swear I’ll bathe her every night if she wants, I’ll give her all the greener bits of the salad, I’ll let her have the nicer corner of the sleeping area and I’ll even stop trying to get her to lick my head (for a while).

I wasn’t sure what to do during the days without Sheridan. We are creatures of routine and she was certainly hard-wired into my routines. I half-heartedly wandered around the areas we usually went through, but nothing caught my eye. I felt her all around me—her natural perfume was pervasive at all our regular haunts, yet I felt so alone. In the end, I spent most of the days inside the house. Waiting? Pining? Killing time? Who knows. Finally on Sunday night our guardians returned with great news: Sheridan had made a full recovery and they would be picking her up tomorrow!

I went for the happiest run at top speed, through the narrowest passages, and up the easiest landings, around and around as fast as I could. Sheridan and I usually do this together. It takes a few circuits around the house before we poop out, looking like a couple of extra throw-rugs afterwards. Once you start you can’t stop.

I firmly resolved to treat Sheridan wonderfully, including not bothering her about the licking, and helping to make sure she never got sick again. I would also be willing to bathe her regularly, to help out, if she so desired (I did!).

On Monday I tried to mount Sheridan as soon as I saw her. Our guardians had to separate us, and then later put us in a bonding pool just like the one at Suzie’s house. Sheridan was unbelievably delectable and sublime; her coat all radiance and gloss. The man sat with us while Sheridan alternated between cowering behind him and vying for top spot. I alternated between nature and decency, her tempting backside both my lifeline and noose.

We spent two days and nights in the pool re-bonding. I’m not quite sure how this works but it does; it’s something about learning to communicate while being cramped in neutral territory together that does it. All we have is our food, water, and litter, and the pool is encased in metal fencing. By the end Sheridan wasn’t scared or resisting, and I wasn’t aggressive. Hierarchy established, we got down to some serious cuddling.

I remember when Suzie first pushed my body up against Sheridan’s for our first cuddle. I was so scared, I didn’t know we could be that close and not run away from each other. I was even scared to breathe! I liked it so much I didn’t want to move because I was afraid it might end, so I sat there, still as an old redwood.

Sheridan may never lick my head and I still crave it horribly. And she doesn’t want me to lick her head either, an idea of which I was growing quite fond. But as I follow her gleeful gait through our singular pastures, exhilaration fills my pores, and objects regain brightness and shine. She has me wrapped around her silken paw, and that’s where I’ll stay.

Need help with bonding? Check out Georgia House Rabbit Society’s wonderful step-by-step guide!

rabbit.org/bonding-rabbits-a-how-to-from-georgia-hrs
LEAVE A LEGACY FOR THE RABBITS
PLEASE CONSIDER HOUSE RABBIT SOCIETY IN YOUR ESTATE PLANNING

Please contact HRS Executive Director, Anne Martin, at anne@rabbit.org for more information.