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An Unlucky Rabbit's Foot

By WILLY TARVER

Editor: BETH WOOLBRIGHT

MY NAME IS WILLIAM, and I'm an English Angora. After being unceremoniously abandoned by our first human family, my brother (Shakespeare) and I were rescued and adopted from the Baltimore chapter of House Rabbit Society in 2008. Most people know the two of us as "Willy and Shakes." We have become somewhat famous nationwide because we are constantly chauffeured around in our baby stroller and we offer free pet therapy visits in the nation's capital (thus, we tend to get a bunch of publicity). Maybe you even read last year's feature story about us in the national magazine, Rabbits USA? Or glimpsed us sitting in our red wagon when the Humane Society of the United States wrote about us on its website? We definitely get around.

I will admit that being discarded and abandoned in our early lives was puzzling to us, because (let's face it) we are so ridiculously cute. That terrible experience was the first time I came close to dying. It was proclaimed by a vet that Shakespeare and I wouldn't have survived much longer than another week if we hadn't been immediately discovered and nursed back to health. HRS saved our two lives and eventually found us temporary



"I will admit that being discarded and abandoned in our early lives was puzzling to us, because (lets face it) we are so ridiculously cute."

foster homes, plus never stopped working to find us our forever home.

Our PTSD (post-traumatic bunny shock disorder) was finally replaced by living a very charmed life, and nowadays we often eavesdrop as our human mommy whispers to people—who are astonished to see us riding everywhere in our blue stroller—and informs them that we don't know we are r-a-b-b-i-t-s. This never fails

to make people grin. Perhaps it is because of all the people we've made smile that so many people stepped up nationwide to save my life the second time I almost died. As it turned out, I had an unlucky rabbit's foot.

Last August, my bouncy bunny bink became broken. There was "stop in my hop" because my foot hurt. At the onset, I just had a little limp. Although Shakespeare and I are cuddled and brushed every single day (FYI: we get ear and tummy massages every night at bedtime, too), my Angora fluffiness initially concealed the fact that an inexplicable tumor had grown near the tarsal joint on my right hind leg. After a few days, I started to bite at the spot, and it bled. That sunny afternoon, Shakespeare and I were outside playing in our backyard so when my mom saw the blood, she thought that I might need stitches from cutting my foot somehow. She scooped me up and took me to the doctor. With the Angora fluffiness shaved away, he examined my condition. My mom sobbed inconsolably when he said the "C" word. There needed to be more tests, but he believed it was cancer. After second opinions at two vets, the verdict was in. A decision to amputate my leg would need to be made (quickly) if choosing to try and save my

So, she spent hours waiting (like humans do for each other when someone has surgery) until my ordeal was over and then requested to see me.”

life. My mommy's agonizing began. All I could do was trust her.

The second vet had performed an initial (less complicated) surgery designed to spare my leg by entirely removing the tumor, or debulking it, as much as possible. We were informed, thereafter, that the malignant tumor (a high-grade, poorly differentiated, sarcoma) had aggressively attached itself to my ankle bone. Marinell Harriman at HRS telephoned with encouragement for my mommy—asking her not to rush to judgment about euthanasia. She offered a gentle much-needed reminder that every day is a gift—even after such a diagnosis, and that our little lives are still worth saving. I sat on my mommy's lap, and her tears were falling onto my face. Mommy held me tightly and asked me what I wanted to do. I cuddled, as my reply.

Maybe it's an unusual request at a veterinary hospital, but my mommy was determined to be there at my "bedside" and comfort me when the anesthesia wore off from amputation. She didn't want me to awaken in the unfamiliar confinement of a cage, missing a limb, smelling other animals all around, and feeling understandably frightened and alone. So, she spent hours waiting (like humans do for each other when someone has surgery) until my ordeal was over and then requested to see me. She was informed that the first 24-48 hours would be critical but also given some reassurance that I came

through the procedure fine. The veterinary staff told my mommy that she could not hold me so soon, and she understood it was for my own good. She explained to them that she just wanted to sit with me and talk to me, so that I could hear her



Dr. Lisa Carr of VCA Veterinary Referral Associates and "Wonder Willy" after his quick recovery.

voice. It made me happy. Although heavily sedated, I heard her say, "Hi Willy, mommy's here. Mommy loves you." The metal door of my cage had been left ajar for her. I felt mommy reach in and rub my ears. She was careful. My right ear still had the IV tube attached. I tried to lift myself

up and move closer to her, but to my distress and surprise, I fell over clumsily. I did not realize that her eyes had filled with tears or that she was smiling through them because I was responding to her voice. All I knew was that she was with me, petting me. For a long time, she sat by me and talked baby talk. (Well, of course, I understand baby talk, duh.) She promised to faithfully come back to see me tomorrow. On the second day, when my mommy arrived to visit me, we went into a private lounge and she held me all day long. We sank into the big comfortable sofa, and I was lying against her chest and cradled in her arms. I slept several hours that way. Later, mommy told me that she was grinning as she watched me sleep, because I was dreaming and snoring! Before she went home, I demonstrated for her that I could already do an "improvisational hop" on the carpet. It wasn't quite as graceful as ballet, but I was doing it and could cross the entire room. Later that same night, the hospital suddenly called my mommy—which definitely made her panic. But it was good news. I was doing so well that I could go home already if she wanted to drive back to get me. Of course, she did! My extraordinary surgeon, Dr. Lisa Carr of state-of-the-art medical VCA Veterinary Referral Associates, exclaimed that she had never seen a bunny recover so quickly or well before. My mommy swears I am such an inspiration, and calls me *(continued on page 9)*



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House Rabbit Journal

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Bunny Truisms:

Wisdom collected by watching wise rabbits from Journal editors and Rabbit Center staff

RITA RICHARDSON:

↪ The past and the future are not nearly as important as what's right in front of our noses.



↪ Nibble holes and hay bits are perfectly acceptable fashion accessories.

↪ It's important to pay attention to every little detail.

↪ A well-placed nip can take care of the problem way better than a bunch of hemming and hawing.

↪ Every day is a brand new adventure!

↪ Strangers are just friends I haven't marked yet.

↪ It's important to consider something from every angle before deciding what to do about it, and always reserve the right to change your mind.

↪ A snack and a nap (and possibly a good run) can do wonders for one's mood.

↪ It's important to stick to a schedule.

↪ If it doesn't smell good, don't waste your time on it.

↪ How others classify me (i.e., lop/agouti/handicapped/etc.) has absolutely no bearing on who *I* choose to be!

↪ One of the best cures for a frown is the sight of a bunny binkying.

↪ I'm not chubby; I haven't shed my winter coat yet!

BETH WOOLBRIGHT

↪ The most beautiful sight in the world is a bonded pair of rabbits.



↪ The closest distance between two points is out of another bunny's mouth.

LINDA COOK

↪ It's a little like clean laundry, a little like spring. There's no sweeter smell than a healthy, clean bunny!

KRYSTAL CITTY

↪ Bunny kisses are like candy.

MAUREEN O'NEILL:

↪ If you leave it on the floor, it's no longer yours.

↪ No animal has a cuter butt than a bunny.



↪ There is no space too small for a bunny to fit.

MARINELL HARRIMAN

↪ The caregiver's greatest relief is the first nibble, by an anorectic bunny, on a dandelion leaf.

↪ The happiest music is the "Carrot Symphony" (that is, multiple rabbits chomping carrots).

↪ The freshest smell is a bunny's parsley breath (or



could be the foulest after cecotrope consumption).

AMY BREMERS

↪ Dandelions and clover are not weeds to be killed; they are treats to be harvested.

(continued on page 5)

Rabbit Scents

It's the smell that makes sense to a house rabbit

BY LINDA COOK

EVERYTHING MAKES “SCENTS” TO RABBITS. What's more, they make scents on practically everything as well! That's why it's important for rabbit companions and caregivers to understand why rabbits leave their scent, and how profoundly scents can affect rabbits.

“Scent is actually the base work for their whole social structure,” said Dr. Kathy Van Buer of Animal Family Veterinary Care Center in Davenport, Iowa. “Rabbits are super-territorial. Both the males and females have scent glands and

they do a lot of scent marking. They have chin glands, anal glands and the inguinal glands (inside their flanks).”

The extent to which rabbits mark their territory depends on their sexual maturity, reproductive status and their age. “The dominant males and females mark more frequently than their subordinates,” Van Buer says. “The boys and girls mark their own territories and they know the smells. We call it ‘chinning’ – they'll rub their chins on things in their territory and on each other. They're actually scent marking

when they do that. To us it's odorless.”

Rabbits' keen sense of smell is also used for detecting food, Van Buer says. “If they get a cold or something which affects their ability to smell, they won't eat because they can't smell. They're obligate nasal breathers – they have to breathe through their noses. Their noses are working all the time.”

The good news is many rabbits can be calmed with certain herbal scents. Donna Jensen, manager of the Burrow Inn, a rabbit foster home in San Francisco, discovered this when she was a volunteer at a humane society in the 1990s.

“Most of the animals came in so stressed,” says Jensen. She successfully began to use Bach Rescue® Remedy, a unique combination of floral essences, to soothe them.

“I like the spray because you can spray it around and inside a cage. It's important to direct the spray close to the rabbit's mouth so they can ingest it,” says Jensen, who also sprays rabbits' bodies and ears with the substance. “It seems to calm them, and we would actually observe this in action.”

When Jensen began introducing rabbits to each other, she sprayed both parties. “The one who was visiting to meet another rabbit would usually be stressed because of the car ride. After the rabbit was sprayed with Bach Rescue® Remedy, people would notice how calm their rabbit was,” Jensen says.

“It's especially good at the vet, when animals are more stressed,” Jensen said. “If they have to have a procedure done it helps to calm them. Sometimes you have to spray it several times, depending on how stressed they are.”

Rabbits' sense of smell can cause trouble in a household with other animals, says



Evka Vašková, of Slovakia, Europe. “If you have a rabbit and try to introduce another animal—especially a rabbit—you will need to be prepared for potential problems.”

“When my first rabbit was the only animal in my household, I noticed she wanted us to have the same smell,” says Vašková. “When I used some perfume, she waited while I knelt down to her, then she sprayed me.”

Whenever Vašková changed clothes, “I could be sure that she would mark them with her chin so we would have the same smell.”

When other rabbits arrived, even though Vašková thoroughly washed her hands, they could smell each other. “Their sense of smell is so good that simple soap is insufficient to hide the smell of another rabbit. You have to use vinegar first.”

Despite the constant washing of her hands, her third rescued rabbit didn't always like the smell of her hands. “Sometimes she was content when I petted her and she licked my hands, but sometimes she bit me,” Vašková remembers.

One new arrival sniffed certain locations in the house, “especially places where I put her for the first time, like the sofa where she now sits and waits for me.” Although the rabbit sometimes would dig and tear at the sofa, for example, Vašková changed a blanket on the sofa and the rabbit stopped “attacking” it.

When the new rabbit discovered Vašková's bed, “She smelled the rabbit who used to live there earlier, although the cover was freshly washed and changed. She started to dig on it and, because I didn't change it soon enough, she started to use it as a litter box.”

Vašková realized the rabbit was “acting territorial. She started to consider that room as her territory, and protected it

against other rabbits. She didn't want to sense another rabbit in her territory,” Vašková says.

Marinell Harriman, editor of The House Rabbit Journal and author of The House Rabbit Handbook, has learned a long time ago not to underestimate a rabbit's response to olfactory messages. “Whenever I came near her, my sweet little lop Daphne would flatten herself on the floor, head extended, ready for some ear rubs. One day, however, she sniffed the hem of my bathrobe and then stood up on her hind feet and scratched ferociously with her forepaws.”

Harriman had brought another rabbit into the house, “but she was in a different room and completely out of sight,” Harriman said. “Here I considered only seeing and not smell. I had been in the other room, brushing past the other bunny, perhaps even getting sprayed. These were the odors I brought back to Daphne.”

A few weeks later, Harriman's husband Bob learned his own lesson about rabbit smell. After working on the car he sat down on the floor with his rabbit buddy, Bandit. Expecting a session of petting and stroking, Bob was instead met with angry snorts and growls.

“No way was Bandit going to allow that nasty-smelling hand near his head!” said Harriman, who told her husband, “Don't take it personally. It's the carburetor cleaner, not you, that he dislikes.”

Because rabbits are aware of their power when they mark territory by spraying or chinning, “as caregivers, we must learn how to mask the bad smells and add good smells when needed,” Harriman says. ■

To find Bach Rescue® Remedy, do a websearch—it is available in numerous locations and online.

BUNNY TRUISMS (continued from page 3)



- ☛ You know a bunny owns your house when... pens and baby gates are part of your decor... you ask for a Dustbuster or electronic sweeper for Christmas... a friend's husband asks why there is hay in your kitchen sink.
- ☛ Being owned by a bunny is more satisfying than “owning” a bunny.
- ☛ Happiness is having a bunny fall asleep on your forearm — even when your forearm, upper arm, hand, and shoulder have also fallen asleep.
- ☛ There's nothing as cute as a bunny yawn.
- ☛ The ambivalence of poop: No problem to sweep up and makes a great fertilizer, but easy to mistake for breakfast cereal until it's too late.
- ☛ Bunnies can be fearless... New person? Eh, nip her on the toe to show her this is your room. New dog? Eh, charge at him to show him you're the boss. New jingle-bell toy? Aaaaahhhh!!! ■



My \$2,000 Bunny



“The closest vet who could perform the surgery was four hours away. . .”

BY LINDA COOK

How much is your rabbit's life worth? One day last year, my foster bunny Rhett showed me how much his is.

Rhett, usually so outgoing and inquisitive, spent his out-of-pen time hunched in his litter box, even declining to be petted. Concerned, I gently picked him up in order to inspect him and take his temperature. When I touched his belly, however, he squealed in pain. I felt a black-bean-sized lump near his rectum—and immediately took him to one of my vets.

Showing me an x-ray, my vet gave me the news: Rhett had a huge stone lodged in his urethra. It couldn't be flushed back

into the bladder; he would need invasive surgery to remove it. And if it weren't done almost immediately, Rhett's bladder would burst, causing an extremely painful death. The closest vet who could perform such a surgery was four hours away, and my vet warned me it would be expensive. I didn't hesitate; I told her to book the appointment. Price for an exam, x-ray, pre-surgery blood work, and pain medication: \$320.

After a few hours of restless sleep on the floor together, we left. Once there (cost of gas: \$55), the specialist told me that the surgery would be more complicated than my vet had anticipated, with less chance of survival. Tears streaming down my face, I nodded to, of course, do it. On my way

out though, I had to pay half of the estimated bill: \$650.

For the next three hours, I sat in my car, praying and thinking about if I hadn't rescued him, Rhett would probably be in a cage with no one noticing his pain, probably not even noticing him until he lay dead. Any amount of money this ordeal cost would be worth his not suffering. When I finally got the call that the surgery went well, I cried with relief. For the rest of his life, Rhett would need bi-annual urine tests, annual x-rays, and occasional other tests, but he had survived. After spending some post-surgery time with him, I left to buy veggies to bring back—six different kinds to ensure that he would eat at least one of them—(\$10), get a hotel room

(\$85), eat something (\$15), and sleep.

The next morning, after a \$3 cup of coffee, I stopped by the clinic to visit. When I walked in, Rhett looked up at me in recognition. Although he was weak, he pushed his head against my hand, wanting me to pet him. The clinic staff had to practically force me to leave an hour later so that they could feed him and he could rest before I picked him up that evening. I went back to the hotel, ate a \$12 lunch, checked out, and just kind of wandered around the rest of the afternoon—spending another \$10 or so on gas.

I had plenty of time to think. Rhett was “just” a foster bunny, yet I never hesitated to pay whatever it cost to help him. I’m not poor, but I’m certainly not wealthy either. Even when I was a cash-strapped graduate student though, I put a several-

PREPARE FOR THE POSSIBILITY OF AN EXPENSIVE MEDICAL SITUATION

Budget for your rabbit as you do for the rest of your family, remembering that rabbits need annual exams.

Learn about common rabbit ailments and the costs of treating them.

Decide where your rabbit will go if something happens to you that renders you unable to care for him or her for either the short or long term.

Plan ahead how you may be able to make—and save—a little extra money if you need to.

Adopt a rabbit (or another rabbit) only if you will financially be able to care for him or her appropriately.

hundred-dollar vet charge on my credit card. Even after school when I was pretty much living on macaroni and cheese, I paid for weeks of acupuncture to make my rabbit with kidney failure more comfortable. Even when I was laid off for a year, I took a couple extra freelance jobs when one rabbit developed an ear infection and another needed surgery for tooth spurs.

How can some people have the attitude that “it’s just a rabbit” and not pay for what he needs? How can some have a price limit on treatment cost? And worse, how can some have their rabbits euthanized instead of treated? When you choose to have a rabbit, you choose to be responsible for his life; you commit to doing whatever she needs.

Sometimes, keeping this commitment isn’t easy. For example, should you take a chance on a long-shot surgery for your rabbit instead of pay your mortgage bill on time? Should you charge monthly treatments to your credit card when you pay only the minimum as it is? However, doesn’t your rabbit deserve a chance? Isn’t he a part of your family? Wouldn’t you regret not doing something to help her?

When I picked up Rhett to bring him and his multiple medications back home (\$710), I was told he would need to have a follow-up check-up, including a urinalysis (\$40), in a couple of weeks. Fortunately, my own vet could do it at home. On the trip home, I stopped to get some coffee (\$2), eat dinner (\$13), and fill up my gas tank (another \$55).

Every morning when Rhett gallops toward me to get his banana slice and every evening as he stretches out beside me and “purrs” contentedly, I feel so grateful for his life. Rhett’s total cost so far: \$1980+; his total worth: priceless. ■



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Channeling Sherlock Holmes

Use your power of observation to detect illness in your rabbit

BY MARLENE LARKIN

SHERLOCK HOLMES HAD OUTSTANDING observation skills. He was able to spot minute inconsistencies and items that were out of place and from those observations make deductions that amazed those around him. Like Sherlock Holmes, the single greatest “tool” you have to help detect illness in your bunny is your own power of observation.

Rabbits, with rare exception, are silent communicators. They are also masters at hiding illness, so as not to appear easy prey. Signs of illness may be as subtle as lying down in an unusual way, making “grinding” movements with their teeth, facing a wall, or lowering their activity levels. These little indicators may be clues to a serious problem. More obvious signs of illness, which may still be hard to detect, may include hunching up or refusing to lie down, reducing food intake or rejecting favorite treats, breathing quickly, panting, or shivering. Often, if symptoms reach these levels you may have a very sick bunny or even one who is in shock.

Before a villain had an opportunity to strike, Sherlock Holmes’ objective was to catch the crook and prevent the crime. He began by examining the clues at hand. To



help prevent the “villain” (in this case, illness) from striking your bunny, you can do the same:

➔ Feel your rabbit’s belly on a daily basis. Gas, bloat as the result of excessive gas, and gastrointestinal (G.I.) stasis are some of the most common illness in rabbits, and G.I. stasis is one of the most lethal. Gently place your hand under your bunny’s tummy and apply a very slight squeeze — like trying to see how ripe a piece of delicate fruit is while being careful not to bruise the fruit.) Get to know what your rabbit’s gut normally feels like. This way, you’ll be more likely to notice if your bunny may have bloat (when the gut is

usually hard and distended) or G.I. stasis (when the gut may feel partially empty), and you can get him or her to your veterinarian for diagnosis and treatment.

➔ Observe how active your bunny is at different times of the day. If normally your bunny is playful at exercise time but cannot be coaxed out for its usual joyous “binkies,” that is a clue that there may be a problem.

➔ Monitor how much your rabbit eats and drinks. Look for decreased intake of either food or water. Offering a favorite treat is one of the best tests to see if your bunny is feeling normal; refusal is usually a sign your bunny doesn’t feel well.

➔ Notice if there is any drooling when eating or difficulty chewing or biting into certain foods such as a carrot. These may indicate tooth problems, which are usually treatable but if left untreated can cause much more serious problems.

➔ Examine what your bunny’s normal feces and urine look like. Note the usual size of droppings. Decreased size and/or quantity is a sure sign of illness that should be treated quickly. Sludge in the urine (gritty, toothpaste-like consistency) can hint at a bladder problem that also needs quick treatment.

➔ Watch how your bunny normally holds his ears and head. If you see one ear drooping slightly when both are usually straight up, his head tilted slightly, or your bunny shaking his head or scratching his ears more than normal, your bunny may have an ear infection, wax build-up, or a parasite infection and require treatment.

➔ Pay attention to normal overall posture in your bunny and also movement when he or she hops and plays. You’re more likely to catch problems such as bloat,

“... don’t forget that Sherlock Holmes had a very important partner: Dr. Watson.”

arthritis, and injuries such as to its paws or fragile spine if you know how your bunny normally sits, stretches out, and hops.

Although Sherlock Holmes had an exceptional memory, he was not hesitant in taking notes of his observations. Consider keeping a notebook for your bunny, both in times of good health and in times of illness. One of Holmes' skills that made him so effective was that he was able to remain detached in his observations, so as to not pre-judge what clues were presenting themselves. When you think a "crime" may be afoot, so to speak, you can use your notes to remind yourself what "normal" looked like when you were in a calmer and less-worried state. Also, if you keep records when illnesses occur, they can help you to see possible patterns of illness that you can discuss with your veterinarian.

Finally, don't forget that Sherlock Holmes had a very important partner: Dr. Watson. In your case this would be your experienced rabbit veterinarian. By using his extensive medical training, Dr. Watson was able to help Holmes make deductions and help catch the culprit. Unlike Dr. Watson, however, your veterinarian takes on more of the Holmes super-sleuth role. And, while working as a team, your power of observation is what provides the initial clues that your veterinarian uses to solve the case.

Doing something that you most likely already love to do—watching your bunny—is one of the greatest tools at your disposal to promote a long and healthy life for your beloved pet. To quote Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the creator of the Sherlock Holmes character, "Holmes, you see everything," to which Sherlock Holmes replied, "I see no more than you, but I have trained myself to notice what I see." ■

UNLUCKY RABBIT (continued from page Wonder Willy! Guess what? Now, I already have some pet therapy appointments to encourage children who have survived limb loss. When I first got home, mommy kept Shakespeare in another part of our house. However, the next day we all spent quality time together. Shakes binked me hello. (In my heart and in my imagination, I binked back.) We snuggle a lot nowadays, and he helps me in so many extra ways. My mommy is in awe, she says, of how Shakespeare props me up on one side if I need him to, and cleans my right ear for me, since I have no back paw to reach there any more. We are a wonderful duo, even more than before. By the way, I can still follow Shakes throughout our house whenever he mischievously hops up and down the stairs. Due to my long Angora hair, nobody even notices that I



am missing a leg when we go visiting, so I don't even have an inferiority complex. Sometimes when I have an itch, I forget that I cannot scratch on that side. However, I've learned to lean up against objects to scratch myself. Hey, we're not dumb bunnies y'know! Please don't ever rush to judgment about euthanasia. Our lives are worth saving. I've observed that if humans are faced with a life-threatening diagnosis, there is typically no debate about whether to proceed in scenarios



Willy visiting children, Easter, 2012.

where limb amputation could save a life. I'm so grateful that my mommy reached out to Marinell, who offered her invaluable support and advice, and Adam Goldfarb (with the Humane Society of the United States, at that time.) They both were instrumental in saving my life when my mommy was distraught and didn't know what to do. Mommy thought existing might be a hardship for me after amputation, but I still really love living. Naturally, I am learning to creatively "work my disability" to receive a little extra spoiling. Thanks, so much, to the wonderful individuals and organizations that gave donations toward my veterinary bills—and literally helped save my life with funds. Bless each of you. Have you ever noticed that when a tragedy strikes human beings, there's often testimony afterward about how amazing the human spirit is. Everyone, let's all contribute to making it true that the humane spirit is equally powerful. *With Love, Willy* ■

The Endless Circle of The Three Hares

BY JULIE SMITH, PhD

A SNAKE EATING ITS TAIL is one well-known version of the endless circle. Called the Ouroboros, the snake with its tail in its mouth connotes the primal unity of all things before time, as well as the cycle of birth, death and rebirth, applicable even to the universe itself (the “eternal return”). The endless circle of three hares shares some of these meanings with the Ouroboros but is its own special variant.

Transmission of the Image

No less than four major religions adopted the image of the circling hares: Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. The earliest surviving examples were painted in Buddhists caves from the sixth through the tenth centuries in Dunhuang, China (www.threerabbits.net). Seventeen of these cave-temples contain images of the circling hares imposed on a lotus blossom. Spreading west from Dunhuang along the so-called Silk Road, a network of interlinking trade routes that connected Asia with Europe during the Middle Ages, the image emerged in central Asia, southern Russia, India, and Persia (modern Iran). In Europe the circling hares or rabbits appear in churches in France, in churches and synagogues of Eastern Europe (most spectacularly the three-hares window on the outside of the Paderborn Cathedral in Germany), and in English churches.

England has more images of circling hares than any country. They occur primarily in roof bosses, that is, carved wooden discs or plaques at the intersection of the ribs of the church ceiling. The greatest number is in Devon county, in the far southwest corner of England. There one can find over 29 roof bosses with the circling hares (see for example, figure #1) in seventeen different churches, the earliest from about 1450. In 2000, art historian Sue Andrew initiated the Three Hares Project in order to locate, photograph and study these images, aided by photographer Chris Chapman (www.threehares.net).

History of its Meanings

According to interpreters, each religion used the image to signify meanings related to its worldview. Because Buddhism combined the circling rabbits with the lotus plant, we have important clues to its significance. The lotus flower emerges each



FIGURE 1: *Medieval roof boss. South Tawton, Devon, UK. © Chris Chapman. The Three Hares Project.*

day from mud to bloom into a flower of incomparable, unsoiled beauty. Thus, it signifies rebirth, particularly rebirth from sullied material existence into a spiritual flourishing. In other words, for Buddhists, the lotus represented the awakening human consciousness from spiritual ignorance to perfection by means of many rebirths or reincarnations, just as the lotus arises each day from the muck. One might see how the chasing rabbits complement this theme. Individually, the hares represent the mundane physical world and its carnality; but through the visual puzzle, they escape from the ordinary into a miraculous unity wherein three anatomically complete rabbits share only three ears.

Christianity too found the image congenial, particularly to its ideas of the virgin birth and a triune god. As the hare was thought to be hermaphrodite--able to reproduce without sexuality--it lent itself to associations with the Virgin Mary and can often be

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seen in paintings with her. The composite image of three hares also expressed the Christian paradox of a three-in-one god. In England, the chasing rabbits sometimes appear adjacent to the “Green Man,” a pagan, Anglo-Saxon figure signifying nature. Together the two are perhaps intended to represent a contrast between earthly and spiritual realms.

Contemporary Reworkings

For contemporary artists, the image has more psychological than spiritual significance. Illustrator Jackie Morris (www.jackiemorris.co.uk/) has several paintings of the theme and has written about it in her blog. For her, the chasing hares sometimes represent the taxing repetitions of life and work, one might say “the rat race,” the feeling of being on the edge of madness and the sense of the world turning upside down. Morris also links the image to the role of art: the constant struggle to continually ask and try to answer questions. In one of her circling-hares images, two of the hares fade into the background while one emerges as prominent, suggesting escape from frustrating repetition, from continual action with no outcome. Likewise, in Karen Fawcett’s lovely sculpture reminiscent of medieval roof bosses (Figure #2), one of the hares appears about to leave the circle.

For these artists, as well as for most of us moderns, linearity—forward movement toward a goal—is the way we like to think of our lives in time rather than as a cycle, which we often associate with boredom, psychic exhaustion, futility, and failure, basically “getting nowhere.” But the circling hares may comment on linear time as an illusion, as do some modern artists using a variation of the endless circle--the loop from visual technology such as film or video. The film strip seems to depict forward action but is comprised of continual repetitions of the same frame with minor changes, and the linearity of film is available for endless replaying. German artist Helke Baronowsky entitles one of her video installations “The Hare and the Hedgehog” (2000). It shows cyclists perpetually moving forward and passing each other and yet continually falling back only to repeat the same passing action again and again. The title comes from Grimm’s fairy tale of the hedgehog and the hare that is its own version of the endless circle.



FIGURE 2: Hare Quest.
Courtesy of Karen Fawcett and Imagine Gallery, Long Medford, Suffolk, UK.

The hedgehog defeated the hare in a race by getting it to rerun the race over and over until it dropped from exhaustion. The hedgehog accomplished this by placing itself at the beginning of the racetrack and its wife at the end of it, so that each time the rabbit ran the course he found the hedgehog already there and thought he had been beaten. He continually demanded to repeat the challenge until he dropped dead of fatigue.

Are the hares in the endless circle content to run in place as part of the larger unity/relatedness of all things, or are they like the hare in Grimm’s tale, obsessed with breaking out and heading straight ahead toward a future goal? In other words, are they satisfied just “to be” or are they desperately trying to “to become”? Perhaps the coolness of the image is that it signifies the compatibility between these opposites: constant activity toward a goal may be an end in itself quite apart from ever reaching it—an encouraging puzzle for rabbit activists and one perhaps that rabbits already understand in their own alternative consciousness. ■

1. For a discussion of the loop, see Anne Barlow, “Circle as Cycle.” *Afterimage* 29.5 (March/April 2002), pp.12-13.

HOUSE RABBIT SOCIETY

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ONE OF HOUSE RABBIT'S SOCIETY'S primary goals is to help animal shelters with caring for, promoting, and adopting out the rabbits in their care. To that end, House Rabbit Society has been providing information to shelter for over 20 years. Our website has a section devoted to shelters and rescue groups: www.rabbit.org/rescue. Here shelter staff and rescuers can find documents on rabbit care in the shelter, temperament testing, information on conducting large-scale rescues, dealing with animal confiscations, and abuse and neglect cases. We also have compiled a wide variety of forms, flyers, and posters for shelter use. These include cage/personality cards, intake forms, surrender questions, adoption forms and questionnaires, foster home contracts, and care packets for adopters. We also have colorful flyers and posters geared towards hanging in shelter lobbies and small animal rooms, which provide educational information about rabbits in a graphic format. We even have Spanish and French translations of some of these documents and flyers. We also offer Emergency Rescue Grants: small grants (\$100-\$1000) that we send to shelters and rescue groups who find themselves overwhelmed with large rabbit rescues.

Thanks to our expertise in this area,

House Rabbit Society was recently invited to give a presentation at the 2012 Animal Care Expo, hosted by the Humane Society of the United States in Las Vegas. This annual event is aimed at animal shelter staff and rescuers from around the world, and offers classes and workshops on everything from fundraising to marketing to conducting cruelty investigations to animal care. HRS Shelter Manager Christina Merritt and HRS President Margo DeMello gave a powerpoint presentation

“We are now discussing other ways that we can further support shelters in their work. . .”

on caring for, promoting, and adopting rabbits in the shelter, and the talk was very well received. That presentation is now linked to our website, on the shelter pages.

HRS also had an opportunity to host a booth at the Expo, giving us even more exposure to thousands of shelter workers. Thanks to Maria Perez and Linda Walden of Las Vegas House Rabbit Society, and Judith Pierce and Tamara Swanson of San Diego House Rabbit Society, our booth was set up with educational materials and

sale items, and we were able to reach countless people with our message.

We are now discussing other ways that we can further support shelters in their work, and are talking about hosting shelter staff at the HRS Adoption and Education Center during workshops that would provide animal care managers, behaviorists, and other interested staff with hands-on information about caring for rabbits in the shelter environment. Watch our website and this Journal for more information as this idea takes shape!

Back Issues of HRJ

There was a time when the only way to read back issues was to write to an assigned volunteer, who would make photocopies and mail them to you. It was cumbersome but the only way to fill in new members with what they had missed.

Now you can read nearly all of the past Journal articles online. A few of them have been removed due to relevance over the years, but others have survived all the way from 1988.

Browsing through the web archives at <http://www.rabbit.org/journal/index.html> will give you some idea of what HRS was doing in the previous two decades. You can follow its discoveries, growth, and success. Enjoy your reading. ■