

Tiverton Lawyer Defends Injured Animals

Text and photos by FRANK CARINI/ecoRI News staff



TIVERTON — For nine years, Jake has resisted the urge to pester a blind duck, hunt a turkey with a broken leg and nag the elderly horses. This lovable bird dog leaves the property's hodgepodge of ducks, geese and other rehabbing, or visiting, waterfowl to their own amusement.

His ancestors likely would be ashamed, but his adopted family loves its stately Labrador retriever for keeping his instincts in check as he patrols the compound with his tail constantly wagging.

Jake, now 11, was the first animal adopted into Wendy Taylor Humphrey's home after the tragic events of Feb. 24, 2003 changed her life. That day nine years ago, the Providence-based defense lawyer was on her

way to western Massachusetts to review a medical case with an expert. She was about an hour and half away from Tiverton, when she received a call on her cell phone that her home was on fire.

When she finally arrived, Humphrey found fire trucks from three towns still fighting the blaze. In her burning home were her two dogs, a Doberman named Dobie and a black lab named Jake, her six cats and a goat named Mo that was recuperating from surgery. None could be saved, as the fire had smoldered for four hours. Her pets died from smoke inhalation.

She lost nine friends that day, but soon gained Jake. Someone had read about Humphrey's loss in the newspaper and called her to ask if she wanted a lab?

Grief stricken

Humphrey also needed another outlet for her grief. She trained to become a wildlife rehabilitator, and four years after her pets died, Humphrey founded the [West Place Animal Sanctuary](#).

“I just didn't want to raise money for other nonprofits,” the 43-year-old New Jersey native said. “I wanted to fix and care for animals myself. I needed to do more.”

Humphrey first started caring for baby songbirds, but quickly realized her clients and coworkers might get tired of the chirping and gaping bird beaks. Songbirds, it seems, need to be feed every 10-20 minutes from sunup to sundown — not an easy task for a busy lawyer.

“I was feeding them under tables at depositions. I had secretaries and paralegals feeding them,” Humphrey admitted with a laugh. Each sunup-to-sundown nursing lasted about four weeks.

Despite her fondness for songbirds, Humphrey turned her focus to bigger birds, such as ducks and turkeys, that need more space but less care, unless they are badly injured or sick. Humphrey has more space than she has time.

Since the sanctuary opened, Humphrey and her small staff of volunteers, two part-time paid employees and her husband, Tom Humphrey, have helped dozens of farm animals and hundreds of wild birds get a second chance at life.

The nonprofit sanctuary operates on the 8 acres of land off Main Road that Humphrey bought in the late 1990s. The historic property known as The Dr. Samuel West Place is surrounded by about 700 acres of preserved old-growth woodlands (Weetamoe Woods) and pastures (Pardon Gray Preserve).

With the help of her husband, whom she met and married about the time the West Place Animal Sanctuary officially became official in the eyes of the IRS, the couple has built a duck house, turned the property's runoff pond into a fountain of youth for rehabbing waterfowl, made the barn bigger and is in the process of adding more pastures to give each more time to heal.

That's not to say the sanctuary is always home to marital bliss. It can strain the relationship of a working couple — Tom, a Lincoln High School and University of Rhode Island graduate, works full time for Schneider Electric in West Kingston.

Watering the animals by hand was time consuming and stressful for two career professionals. The automatic animal watering system eliminated much of that stress ... until a cow knocked the system over and flooded the barn. The costs of special animal food, hay at \$11 a bale and regular veterinarian visits add up quickly.

"We've had our growing pains," Wendy said. "But once we found the right facilities, such as making the barn bigger, it hasn't been too bad. We enjoy what we are doing."

Mission accomplished

The mission of the sanctuary is to provide shelter, food and medical care for injured or orphaned wild birds, waterfowl and unwanted farm animals. The sanctuary provides both short-term and long-term care. Some animals live the remainder of their lives at the sanctuary — either because they are unadoptable or Humphrey can't say goodbye.

The sanctuary recently received two young alpacas from a traveling petting zoo. The alpacas, which were recently sheared for the first time and didn't seem to be thrilled by it, are the sanctuary's first. They are in good health, and they also aren't going anywhere.

"I'm crazy about them," Humphrey said with a big smile. "They're adorable and fun. They're also very efficient when it comes to eating, and they use a communal bathroom — they always go in the same place."

As the two youngsters prance about the grounds, the sanctuary's two 25-year-old horses — John and Whiskey — taking a cue from Jake, put up with their new roommates' enthusiasm and nosiness.

Both John and Whiskey arrived at West Place in the past four years from the MSPCA. Both needed help and care. They received both and more from the Humphreys, and are doing fine now. But Wendy knows both are here to stay.

“They’re too old to be adopted,” she said. “Nobody is going to adopt them at their age.”

John and Whiskey don’t seem to mind, especially now that the Humphreys just introduced them to April and Sassy — two female horses, one is 23 and the other 25. The MSPCA had recently received 40 miniature horses and needed to make some room. Humphrey figured it was about time her guys had girlfriends.

The sanctuary takes in anywhere from between 80 and 100 animals a year. Most are wild birds that have been injured or sick, such as the 18 mallard ducks and baby goose Humphrey picked up in Portsmouth on a recent Saturday night. “Our goal is to rehab and release these birds,” Humphrey said.

That happens most of the time, but there are exceptions, such as Peepers, a 2-year-old wild turkey with a forever broken wing. She arrived at the sanctuary as a baby in really bad shape. Humphrey believes her mother left her behind to better care for her other babies.

Peepers now pals around with Jake and 7-year-old Bullet, a retired greyhound that gave the baby turkey a tour of the compound in his jaws. After years of chasing a fake rabbit around a track, Bullet has found it more difficult, literally and figuratively, to let go of his inner desires. He still likes to chase, whether it’s flightless turkey or a 25-year-old horse.

In fact, there’s always new guests for Bullet to show around.