



Giving Shelter

Smitten with a pair of shaggy cows, a couple finds purpose — and a haven for cast-off animals in need of a little love.

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PHOTOGRAPHED BY LISA NICHOLS

Belle is one of the two original Scottish Highland cattle who won Oscar and Lynn's hearts, inspiring them to start their sanctuary.



A view of the cow barn across the pasture.

The postcard-worthy property is hidden away in the sylvan hills of Litchfield, a few miles from the iconic town green. The arrival is long and winding, with a driveway that dips and loops and eventually opens up to reveal a handsome, post-and-beam barn home clad in rough-sawn pine. Once a dense forest, the land surrounding it has been cleared to create fields, pastures and paths, grazing land, a cow barn, two chicken coops, and a pig barn. Next up: another barn, a place for meetings, and an aviary on a rise overlooking the farm, to which Ronnie, a resident turkey, will hopefully relocate from his temporary quarters in the house.

This is home to the JP Farm Animal Sanctuary and its founders, husband and wife Oscar Janssen and Lynn Printy. The couple has lived here since 2019, quietly, busily, intentionally—and sometimes comically—with a menagerie (they’re quick to call them family) of animals they’ve saved from varying degrees of misfortune.

“What we do here is show compassion to the animals we take in, and try to inspire compassionate living,” says Oscar. The couple (along with Oscar’s sister, operations manager Britt Janssen) gives refuge to animals that, for a litany of reasons, no longer serve a purpose in the agribusiness industry—like Belle, the cow who fell ill and was deemed no longer capable of breeding; or Rusty, a rooster who escaped a live market; or Victor, another rooster escapee who lived happily in a condo community until he ticked off the neighbors by crowing too much.

The animals have come from breeding farms, livestock markets, even a university agriculture program. The sanctuary’s day-to-day mission is to keep the animals that live there well-fed, groomed and looked-after. At last count, they housed three steers, four cows, four pigs, two hens, three roosters, two dogs—and Ronnie (who was grieving his late buddy, Bernie, which is how he ended up at the house). The operation is small, but the business of running it is hard and dirty—if immensely satisfying—work.

Make no mistake: At the heart of JP’s mission is the conviction that people should stop breeding, confining and killing animals for food. Oscar, Lynn and Britt are strictly vegan, but they know that labels can be polarizing to some. “If you eat meat or not, it’s up to you,” Oscar says. “All we hope is that we can inspire you to think about where your food comes from.”

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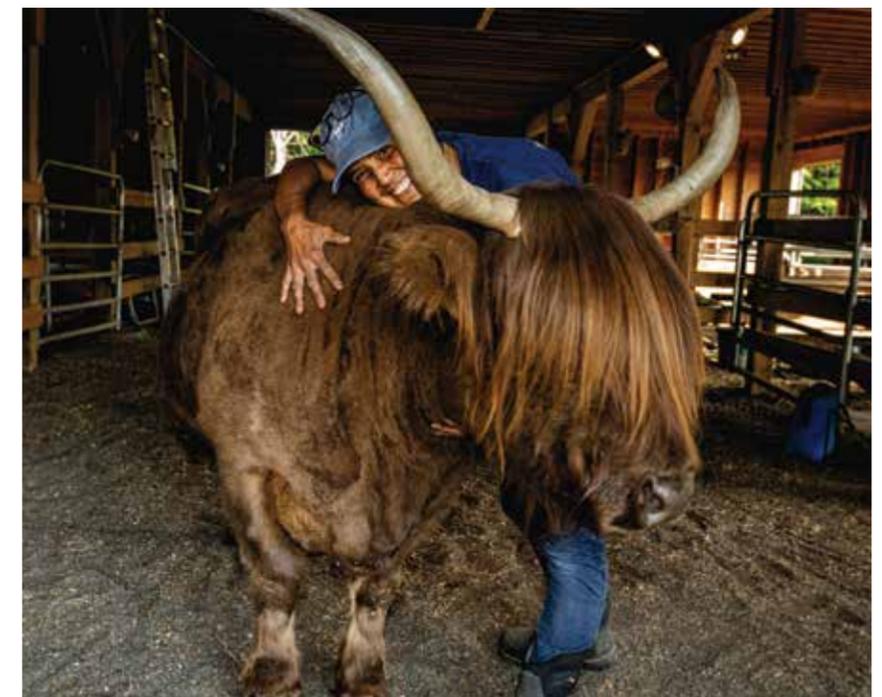
(clockwise from top left) Ronnie, a heritage turkey, likes to show off his beautiful brown and white feathers. When you sit with him, he slowly dances around until you get close, and then he’ll let you rub his keel (chest) for a bit.

Another original member of the Scottish Highland herd, Ethan is called a “unicorn” because he has only one horn.

Britt, the sanctuary manager (and Oscar’s sister) with Rusty, a Rhode Island Red rooster who loves meeting visitors.

Britt gives Tallulah a hug. She describes the Scottish Highlander as “full of enthusiasm and sass.”

Moza, a Duroc pig who came from a breeding farm, was slated for slaughter when the Farm Sanctuary rescued her and placed her with JP. She loves attention, rooting and a good belly rub.



Meet the herd

Here are some of the furry and feathered friends who call the JP Farm Animal Sanctuary home.

Belle (third from top), a Scottish Highland cow, was the first animal adopted (with her calf) and the reason JP was founded. They call her “the alerter.”

Copper is a cross between a Holstein and Jersey cow and was unable to breed after giving birth only once.

Allie, a Holstein cow, was rescued from a dairy farm when her milk production slowed. She’s best friends with Copper.

Rusty (top), a Rhode Island Red rooster, escaped from a live market, and now loves tractor rides and mingling with the cows and pigs.

Beanie Tofu and **Dolphin** (bottom right), “the pink girls,” are 5-year-old Yorkshire Cross pigs rescued from a college agriculture program.

Ronnie is a heritage turkey who was adopted through the national Farm Sanctuary’s adoption network.

Ethan (second from top) is a Scottish Highland steer who was rescued from the same meat-breeding farm as Belle. They call him a “gentle giant.”

Tallulah is a Scottish Highland cow who was neglected and had her calf taken from her. She was very apprehensive at first, but is now trusting and loves to be brushed.

DJ (bottom left) is a Yorkshire Cross pig rescued from a college agriculture program. He loves mud baths and exploring in the forest.

Bruce (a Scottish Highland/Angus steer) and **Evan** (a “deer-like” Jersey cross steer) are best buds. They were named for the title characters in the movies *Bruce Almighty* and *Evan Almighty*.



says. As impassioned as they are, they say it’s fine with them if the message they deliver is less stern. “We’re 100 percent behind the softer message,” she says. “We want people to be mindful, to think about being kind to animals.”

JUST UNDER 10 YEARS AGO, Lynn and Oscar were enjoying successful careers in corporate aviation (he is a pilot and she a flight attendant) while renovating a charming farmhouse in Newtown. Life was good and they were happy, but they felt like they wanted more—to *do* more.

After much discussion, they arrived at the idea of providing a home for farm animals in need. “We hadn’t really been around farm animals growing up,” says Lynn. “But we both had the same feeling that perhaps we could do something, that we should be doing something to help give farm animals a better life.”

Oscar had always been intrigued by an unusual breed of Scottish Highland cattle, so the couple took to visiting some at a farm in eastern Connecticut. They got attached and a plan got underway. They volunteered to foot the vet bills for poor Belle, and fashioned a small refuge on their property in Newtown so they could adopt her and her calf. In short order, they took in another cow and her calf, and two steers, all sweet creatures with thick coats and prominent horns.

It wasn’t long before the land proved too cramped and the couple’s passion too great for the project that had started percolating in the couple’s minds. Soon to follow would be the purchase of the Litchfield property and its ongoing improvements.

The JP sanctuary is small by measure of many others like it, but it’s part of a larger, diverse system of rescue organizations around the country. The best known may be Farm Sanctuary; founded in 1986, it has grown from a grassroots organization that relied solely on volunteers to a national organization with 100-plus staff members and more than 1 million members and supporters. “We provide lifelong, individualized care for animals at locations in Watkins Glen, New York, and Los Angeles,” says Ashley Pankratz, senior manager of rescue and placement.

Oscar and Lynn had been following Farm Sanctuary for a long time before they rescued their herd, and it was through the group’s Farm Animal Adoption Network that two congenial calves, Bruce and Evan, came to live with them. The two arrived from different but equally dire circumstances. Bruce, a Scottish Highland, was born on a beef farm, while Evan, a Jersey, was a dairy farm reject.



(clockwise from top left) It can be a bit startling to walk into Oscar and Lynn’s home and be greeted by a turkey. After Ronnie lost his buddy, they invited him into the house, where he lives with the farm dogs, Ace and Oliver.

Now a social creature, Tallulah was anything but when they rescued the Scottish Highland cow from a neglectful situation in the meat industry.

Lynn with Evan, a steer who was once so sick his very survival seemed in question. He’s now healthy and strong. When Evan was much smaller, he could fit in the hay bin ... he thinks he still does!

Oscar and Lynn next to a lounging DJ (front) and Mozza, who is quite possibly engaged in a spirited round of rooting.



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They didn't feed properly after they were born, and once it was determined they were failing to thrive, time started running out. The Farm Sanctuary staff took them in, nursed them back to health and soon after transported them up to Litchfield, where JP welcomed them home.

“We're always inspired by Lynn and Oscar's dedicated and thorough approach, and by the kindness of their communication,” Pankratz says. “We appreciate the photos and updates they share with us of animals placed with them through our program, and we're excited to continue to work together. Collaboration between sanctuaries on rescue, placement and animal care is essential to our work,” she says.

A TOUR OF THE PROPERTY is filled with laughter and anecdotes tinged with melancholy as tales are told about how the animals got there—and how they now live together in harmony. “Oh, they absolutely all have relationships with each other,” Britt says. “Sometimes the relationship is, ‘I like you.’ Or, ‘I don't like you.’ Or, ‘I love you.’ Or, ‘You know what, you were annoying me the other day.’”

She calls out to Tallulah, a Scottish Highland grazing in the field beyond the barn, and the giant cow lifts her head, beginning a slow walk toward Britt, who recalls the day Tallulah arrived from the Farm Sanctuary in Watkins Glen. “She had not been handled at all. They fed and cared for her but she was a little bit wild and afraid of people,” she says. “When she got out of the trailer, she just strutted into the barn and went directly to her room.”

Tallulah just stared at them in silence for the

next three weeks—or at least they think she was staring, because she'd never been brushed and had dreadlocks hanging over her eyes. “One day we noticed she had a cold. Oscar decided he'd take the opportunity to brush her—and she let him,” Britt says. “He just kept going. She just stood there. He broke her in. A while later I was cleaning another room and I hear a really low moo. I said, ‘Tallulah? Is that you?’ I turned and looked at her and she looked at me and she mooed again. Now she's just a honey who needs to be loved.”

Belle, one of the original Highland cattle, looks up. She's the boss, Lynn says, but it took a little time for the newcomers—Copper and Allie were nibbling nearby—to learn that when Belle comes over to eat, they have to move over. “It's not that she's mean. Not at all. She's just saying, ‘Hey, I'm here.’”

The tour continues down to visit the pigs, four of them—Mozza, DJ, Beanie Tofu and Dolphin—all seemingly content, even on a day getting hotter by the minute. Oscar picks up a garden hose and commences cooling them off. They roll in the mud, but wait patiently for treats as Oscar brings out a bag of peanuts. The pigs routinely get belly rubs and have lotion applied to their feet because they're prone to calluses, Lynn says. She explains that because pigs are being genetically modified to produce lighter meat, they need sunscreen on them all the time. And they eat well. “I cook for them and Britt cooks for them,” Lynn says. “We cook veggies, food that's good for them.” Adds Oscar, “Sometimes I come in from working and see something cooking on the stove and I have to ask... ‘Is this for us?’”

The brood is tended to twice a day—for four hours in the morning and four in the afternoon. At 10 p.m. they all get a late-night wellness check. “It's supposed to be to replenish water and pick up poop,” Britt says. “But sometimes we'll all go out there, and we've been known to hang out and play with them. Everyone is equal, if one gets a treat or a hug, they all do. There's no favoritism.” In the same way, all three caregivers share the bulk of the workload—from feeding and watering to cleaning out stalls and administering medicine.

“WE'RE ALWAYS TALKING about what comes next,” Lynn says. “We're getting older and we want to keep this going.” Oscar adds: “The plan is for this place to always be here, so the animals will always have a place to go.” They say they have to temper growth with practicality. “There are a lot of people out there with big hearts and they make the mistake of overdoing it. They mean well, but rescue too many animals,” he says. “It breaks our hearts but we decline animals all the time. These guys are treated so well. If the standard goes down, then it defeats our purpose.”

Britt says the hardest thing is getting help: “We have volunteers and one steady person, but need two more. It requires commitment and stamina; we've never been in better shape,” she laughs. “We need people to work four-hour shifts, but just one a day, and they need to live within, say, 30 minutes. It can be hard in winter. Every sanctuary we work with, that's the ongoing crisis, getting steady help.”

They finance most of the daily operations themselves; as a 501(c)(3) organization, they accept tax-deductible donations, and hold fundraising events throughout the year. Visitors are welcome by appointment; information is posted on their website and on social

To learn more about Belle, Tallulah, Rusty and friends, go to jpfarmanimalsanctuary.org and follow them on Facebook at [facebook.com/jpfarmsanctuary](https://www.facebook.com/jpfarmsanctuary) and Instagram at [@jpfarmanimalsanctuary](https://www.instagram.com/jpfarmanimalsanctuary).

To learn more about the wider sanctuary movement, go to farmsanctuary.org.

media. They're also intent on growing the educational component of the organization (Lynn and Britt held virtual classes for school groups during the pandemic).

Animal rights activists say sanctuaries like JP's play a key role in the movement nationwide, but does it ever feel like they're not doing enough? Oscar thinks for a minute: “We consider these guys ambassadors for what we're trying to do,” he says. “We do it every day, 365 days a year, whether it's hot or it's cold. If I ever need motivation on a 2-degree day, I just think of how much they need us.”

“It's like I have this metronome in my head... with every tick of the meter, I know there's an animal being taken to slaughter,” he says. “So, in our own way, I feel if we take care of these guys, we've contributed some semblance of relief, in the big picture.”

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Lynn and Oscar sit on the hill that overlooks their sanctuary property.

Three of the four resident pigs, DJ, Dolphin and Mozza; they all love mud baths, belly rubs, and getting treats, especially peanuts.