

# The Alternative Animal Sanctuary



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## Dedications

To Shamus, Fowler, Walter and Kira who I let down badly and to all my other early animals whom I learned so much from. To those human supporters who have gone some way to show me that there are some genuine, good souls out there who do care about animals.

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# Chapter I

## Sanctuary – The Beginnings

The Alternative Sanctuary started on a very small scale when we took in a few unwanted animals while living in a small semi-detached house in Carpenters Park Watford. Our first cat was a young female found at the stables where we kept our two horses. No one would take her on, so after feeding her for a while we caught her. The youngest of my three sisters was told to take her into the house and tell my dad how desperately she wanted to keep her. He accepted it pretty well as he did the few hundreds (maybe even into the thousands by now) that followed! Suzie as we named her had to become Suza when the vet discovered that she was a he! He moved houses with us later but always remained quite nervous.

Our first rescued horse we brought for £50 (the knacker price). He had been a blood horse at a racing yard, (he had blood taken from him regularly to give to the valued and cared for racehorses) he was only four years old and had been brought by a man for his daughter. When feed prices became terribly expensive (because there was a grain shortage) he was due to be shot. Because so many people could no longer afford to keep their horses -so many were being shot - he was kept waiting for three days locked in a stable for the knacker man. On the third day my mother couldn't stand it anymore so she bought him. He had anaemia from losing so much blood so had to be given Guinness and my mother had to go to the stables three times a day to give him small feeds. He also had to have salt rubbed into his gums to strengthen them as he had a 'parrot mouth' – a deformed jaw so that the top overshot the bottom and made it difficult for him to eat. As he got stronger he became difficult to handle and it was discovered that he had not been properly gelded (castrated.) One testicle had not descended so he had to have a fairly major operation to sort that out.

Our first rescued dog was Sunday who one of my sisters found while out on a horse ride. She was an Airedale and totally do-lally. It took hours to catch her. She was partly nervous, partly disobedient and as she got older she became deaf and blind. She gave my sister many embarrassing moments going through people's dustbins and refusing to come when called. She was named Sunday as we found her on a Sunday!

It would take too long to go through all of the histories of the animals we took in but these were really the founding cases. We moved to a bigger house in Garston, Watford and rented two fields. My father put up some make-shift stables in one of the fields (the first of many).

With the house we brought three ponies as the owner was a dealer and threw them in as part of the deal! We have been advised this was not normal practice! One was to be my first pony Ginger who spent most weekends throwing me off and leaving me with concussion, as he was not broken or backed - I was only six years old at the time! My two elder sisters had the others, Pedro and Warrior. Pedro was a grey and a wilful pony. He used to love to rub my sister up against trees, gates and hard surface and hear her scream as he trapped her leg. Warrior was a handsome 15.2hh cob.

Warrior was stolen with Connie, my second eldest sister's other pony on her eighteenth birthday. They were never found despite numerous trips to Markets particularly notably Southall which still has an appalling reputation for how the animals are treated. We would all come away in tears each Wednesday as we saw so many poor souls we would have liked to have brought had we been able to. There were also the birds and goats being sold for ritual slaughter. The handlers would shout and beat the terrified horses most of whom were in a bad physical condition. On one visit I remember a horse with scars all up its legs from bandages applied too tightly, and a lovely bay cob with a curly coat, we now know to be the sign of Cushings Disease. What also stuck in my mind was a gorgeous small child's pony who must have wondered how it come to be in such a hell hole. It had been immaculately groomed with shapes groomed into its hind quarters. We travelled the country for over a year looking for Connie and Warrior but years later we discovered that up the road from us was an illegal slaughterhouse where they probably ended up hours after they were stolen. The police had shown little interest when we reported the crime and actually were more interested in the horse trailer they stole at the same time which we really were not interested in. The only consolation was that they were not transported for miles which was small comfort for one of the worst events in our life.

My mother was also talked into buying a rabbit with the house, he was being kept in such a small cage that he could not sit up or turn around. He was named Arthur, as he had cost the owner half a crown. He was to live in a shed with the run of the garden and gained a friend called Annabel (a male also!) he would attack everyone who tried to catch him except for my four year old brother. He was sent out each night to go and call him into the shed because everyone else was scared of him! My mother still has a scar the length of her inner arm from the time she tried to pick him up!

Finally in our new home we discovered that we had inherited a cat, that responded to the name Tinkerbelle. The previous owners of the house had a cat called Tinkerbelle, they would call Tinkerbelle in for night and when, Mog (that seemed more appropriate) tried to come in as well, the door was slammed swiftly in his face. After we moved in he was very happy to find that he was now allowed to come into the comfort of the house! He unfortunately got run over on the road directly outside our house and thankfully only sustained a broken leg. He was kept in a rabbit hutch for six weeks which he hated. The idea being that this would enable his leg to heal. Sadly this was not to be the case and he managed for the rest of his life with a leg which had a distinctly unique angle to it. He found this to have an added advantage in that he could sit on top of the TV where it was nice and warm and

hang it over the front so that it draped in front of the screen to ensure that no one could see properly!

Whenever we took in a new cat, usually as the result of saving them from being put down at the vets, Mog would take them on an adventure to the A405 where the next day they would be found dead (we think he wanted to be an only cat!). After two years ten cats had been killed (one of my sisters was now a veterinary nurse and so had a constant supply of cats nobody wanted). This carnage became too much to bear so we moved again, this time to the country in Chipperfield into a big bungalow with a huge garden and 300 acre field at the back. We had to keep our, by now, eight horses in livery though. Our hand-reared cat named Mole (after the TV character) was killed on the lane just outside the house, after only two weeks and having lived safely in Garston for six years! He must not have realised it was a road as it was so quiet. Thankfully he was the only cat we lost there.

Mole was an incredible character. His mother had been killed on the A405 and left seven kittens which we hand-reared. This is now quite common practice and is quite successful but it was virtually unheard of in those days. There was no special formula for cats and cow's milk was not good them so many died. We also were unaware then that mother cats MUST lick their kittens' stomach constantly to aid digestion and enable them to go to the toilet and without this it was also fatal. We thankfully found that our German Shepherd Jet absolutely adored the kittens (when she later had puppies she was not a good mother as we think she wanted kittens!). She would lick the kittens and this was far more successful than our attempts with cotton wool. There were also none of the specially designed feeding bottles now on the market so the milk would go down the wrong way. These factors all resulted in four of the kittens dying despite our best efforts. Mole was to suffer with cat flu which is also common in hand-reared kittens and this left him with one cloudy eye and a permanent snuffle. He loved to sit on people's shoulder as he seemed to find it more comfortable for breathing? Probably he just liked the scream that resulted as he launched himself unannounced on to you. This was to cause consternation to a poor cyclist as we travelled with all of our animals down to our annual holiday on the south coast where we had a second house. We went away for the whole eight weeks of the school holidays as it was then and as the animal population grew we usually ended up having to tow a horse box full of more animals and make a number of journey's to fit everyone in.

Mole hated a cat box so would sit on people's shoulder in the car. At a roundabout he was sitting on the driver's shoulder and a cyclist driving past was so amazed he stared in at the car and lost his footing and thankfully fell inwards on to the roundabout. We had another kitten arrive shortly after named Sylvester and he looked exactly like Mole although without the problems Mole had from cat flu as a kitten. He was to get killed two weeks after we arrived in our present house directly outside in the same way as Mole. It was a rather unnerving similarity and he was thankfully one of very few cats to die at Doone Brae Farm on the lane.

After three years we found where we live now in Pepperstock where we had a small bungalow but our own land which we had always wanted. The animal population was ever growing and here the horses should be safe from theft although this has been less of a problem since there is no money in horse meat anymore (thank goodness). The cats should have been safe but still in Twenty years four have been killed. It seems nearly impossible to keep them safe unless they are kept in which we don't approve of.

We have acquired an ever growing number of animals, as we have never managed to say the NO word. These cover most species, with horses representing a majority. We also have a varied selection of; dogs, cats, pigs, goats, a donkey (a real character who made it to fifty years old), terrapins, pigeons, rabbits, guinea-pigs, chinchillas, chipmunks, budgies, cockatiels, gerbils, mice, hamsters, rats, fish, chickens, ducks, a turkey and even a Meer cat found in Dunstable which Whipsnade Zoo agreed to take!

Over the past two years a lot of building work has been completed so that the animals now have a good standard of accommodation and life is easier for myself also! In previous years my mother rehomed many dogs now all the animals who come stay for good.