



Our Hen House

CHANGE THE WORLD FOR ANIMALS

a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization

Interview with Laura George

By OUR HEN HOUSE

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*Following is a transcript of an interview with **LAURA GEORGE** conducted by **JASMIN SINGER** and **MARIANN SULLIVAN** of [Our Hen House](#), for the [Our Hen House podcast](#). The interview was conducted in person, at Coming Home Sanctuary, on August 5, 2013.*

JASMIN: A few weeks ago, after we covered the Farm Sanctuary Hoedown, we were able to stop at another sanctuary on the way back. It's called the Coming Home Sanctuary, and it's also in upstate New York, not far from Farm Sanctuary. It's just a small sanctuary that Laura George runs, and Laura is a vet, so she has a unique take on what it's like to run a farmed animal sanctuary. And as I've said a million times, I truly believe that at the heart of the sanctuary movement are the small sanctuaries like Coming Home Sanctuary, and the ambassadors that run them, such as Laura George.

MARIANN: And one very, very extraordinary rooster.

JASMIN: Oh yeah! Welcome to Our Hen House, Laura.

LAURA: Thank you. Thank you for coming.

JASMIN: We're so excited to be here at Coming Home Sanctuary.

MARIANN: We're actually in Laura's hen house.

JASMIN: Actually in the hen house, so this is what a real hen house is like. It's not a apartment in lower Manhattan where media is created.

MARIANN: It's not that different.

JASMIN: Pretty similar.

MARIANN: I could live here.

JASMIN: I could actually live here. It's amazing what you've done here. Tell us about Coming Home Sanctuary.

LAURA: Well, it started out as a sanctuary that I wanted to start for factory farm animals and also rabbits. The rabbit enclosure has taken a little bit more time to organize because it needs to be more like a house than a barn. So we just rescued a few different animals along the way. We have cows, goats,

chickens, pigeons, quail, all from either cruelty cases or hatching projects gone bad, or just found as strays walking around Brooklyn -- a lot of these animals are from New York City -- and Queens. So we sort of build as we need So it started out with a cow barn, and then we got our first chicken, and then we built the pigeon aviary. So it's kind of just evolved over time.

JASMIN: We met a lot of incredible individuals today, and one who really sticks out for me is Rudy. Can you tell us a little bit about Rudy's story?

LAURA: Sure, Rudy is, he's an American game rooster. He's a gorgeous little boy. He came to us a few years ago from a cruelty case out on Long Island. It was a case where the farmer had abandoned 100 animals. They were all starving. He had arrived without any feet, and it took many, many months of bandaging and cleaning and pain medication and all kinds of different things to try to get him to a point where he could function with just the stumps that he has to walk on. So I put these little special padded booties on his feet every week or more often if it gets wet outside. I'm thinking about getting him some little moccasins or some kind of galoshes for the snow. But he does really, really well, and he's a gentleman, he loves his girls. And so he's done really well.

JASMIN: You feed him blueberries and then he feeds them to his ladies?

LAURA: Exactly, so if you give, no matter how many you hand feed to Rudy one by one, and keep telling him, "This one is for you, please swallow it," he will just gently, without crushing it, walk over to one of his girls and set it down in front of them. He just takes care of them first. It's very hard to get him to eat any peas or blueberries or anything. He will always give them to his girls first.

JASMIN: Same thing with the hawks? He protects his ladies?

LAURA: Yes he does. If he hears a hawk, even if it's really far away -- they have protective netting over where their outdoor garden area -- but if he hears one, he will stand out in the middle as if he's going to defend them. They're -- he tells them all to go inside and they do, and he stands outside and just waits for this hawk to come, and it never does because there's a netting above. But he's a very protective little guy.

JASMIN: You're a nonprofit, is that right?

LAURA: Yes, we're a 501(c)(3), so all tax, it's all tax-deductible, all the donations, so...

JASMIN: Before I forget, can you just tell us your website?

LAURA: Sure, it's cominghomesanctuary.org.

JASMIN: I think it's amazing that we keep meeting people who have these small sanctuaries. And I was just saying before that I think in so many ways, this is what the heart of the sanctuary movement is now. It's really, thanks to those who were there first like Farm Sanctuary, it's evolved to become a vast movement of smaller sanctuaries run by heroes like you, who are largely unrecognized, and yet this is the heart of the sanctuary movement.

MARIANN: Yeah, and it's growing, and this sanctuary like so many of the others we've seen is beautiful, and the animals are perfectly kept. I know that you're a veterinarian, Laura. Can you tell us a little bit about your practice and how being a veterinarian -- obviously -- everybody out there is saying, like, well, oh well, no wonder she can do this. But tell us how being a vet has really helped you take in some of the animals with very special needs.

LAURA: Sure. So I'm mostly a cat and rabbit veterinarian and small mammals. But being a vet definitely has its advantages. I'm able to do all kinds of minor procedures that need to be, you know, if there's any kind of wound or anything like that. And especially if it's a special needs animal, I've had blind animals, I have one now. And Rudy's, you know, Rudy's situation requires specialized care every week. So it definitely helps because if I have a sick animal, I can always bring them to work with me. But, and the main reason I went to vet school was really not to go into private practice, but to start a sanctuary, so I now do both because I have to. But my first choice would be to just be living and breathing and being here at the sanctuary 24 hours a day.

JASMIN: Where is your practice?

LAURA: It's on Long Island, so I'm just there a few days a week.

JASMIN: We were talking about the fact that it's hard to find a practice that represents your values, is that right?

LAURA: It's very difficult, yeah. So we do a lot of trap-neuter-release work with different, we work with a lot of different cat rescue and rabbit rescue groups, so it's very largely -- we have a big component of rescue work at the clinic. But we do have obviously private clients too, but we do a lot of that other work too.

JASMIN: An ethical veterinarian, imagine that.

MARIANN: Yeah, I know, they're so hard to find, I mean, somebody who really gets it about animals. I -- people who are able to -- I guess Rose doesn't count as a rabbit or a small mammal, so she wouldn't be within your bailiwick. But it's tough to find veterinarians who share your values. I know you have taken in some of the animals here, you mentioned that you have a lot of animals from New York. But one of the special rescue scenes from New York is the yearly Kaporos -- is that how you pronounce it -- the Kaporos ritual. And can you tell us a little bit about your experience there and the animals you've rescued from that?

LAURA: Sure. So the last couple of years we have adopted rescues from the Kaporos ritual, which takes place in a couple of different areas in Brooklyn, where I guess people of the Jewish faith will show up at these, they're sort of tented off areas on the corners of really busy blocks. And the idea is that they -- a prayer is said in some way -- and then these chickens are picked up, and their wings are pinned behind their backs or they're picked up by their legs, and they're swung around the rabbi's head, and at that time, all of the person's sins are atoned for and something like that. So it ends up in slaughter right in front of the person, so the chicken's throat is slashed at the end of the ritual. So--

JASMIN: And this is done once a year with a particular holiday.

LAURA: Right.

JASMIN: Yeah, it's Yom Kippur?

LAURA: It's Yom Kippur, yup. And so I've gone there the last couple of years and protested. I know Karen Davis was there and everybody. And so sometimes we'll find chickens that have been, that have survived, that are in the pile of dead chickens that are, usually they're just in shopping carts and big buckets, and it's just, it's a bloodbath, it's horrible. So last year we had one that had a broken leg, so he, after he healed, he was fine. I'm not sure how his leg was broken. It may have just been rough handling from the crates that they bring them in. And so we have, we now just have one left. They're broilers, so they tend to gain weight really fast and unfortunately start -- they suffer from a lot of different diseases like heart disease and it's a tough life for them. But we try to make it as happy as we can and give them some girlfriends and some good stuff, so it's a sad ritual that I hope that is, if enough people on the inside can revamp it, they can actually -- the different rabbis have said that swinging money above their heads is just as effective as a live animal. So hopefully that will -- the bag of money will replace the live chickens.

JASMIN: It's just unbelievable, but it's so sad to think of, especially as we're sitting here, standing here in such a hopeful, beautiful area, and what you've done is so incredible, remarkable. It's amazing to be here. Thank you so much for letting us into your hen house, and for doing all the incredible work you do. Say the name of your website again.

LAURA: Sure, it's cominghomesanctuary.org.

JASMIN: [Cominghomesanctuary.org](http://cominghomesanctuary.org), thank you Laura.

LAURA: Thank you so much.

JASMIN: That was Laura George from Coming Home Sanctuary. It was so thrilling to be able to visit her sanctuary.