



# Our Hen House

CHANGE THE WORLD FOR ANIMALS

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## Interview with Tracy Martin

By OUR HEN HOUSE

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*Following is a transcript of an interview with **TRACY MARTIN** conducted by **JASMIN SINGER** and **MARIANN SULLIVAN** of [Our Hen House](#), for the [Our Hen House podcast](#). The interview aired on Episode 221.*

JASMIN: So before we go to our interview today, I did want to mention that on one of our episodes that we shot for the TV show yesterday, we focused a lot on rabbits and on bunnies because Easter is coming up. And we're going to be talking to Tracy Martin in a minute from Rabbitron, and she's gonna tell us all about this wonderful sanctuary she has and the campaigns she does for rabbits, around Easter in particular. But as part of the TV show, we spoke with the people at House Rabbit Society, and they have this great video that they made with Amy Sedaris, and they gave me permission to play the audio from this short video. It's just about a minute and a half long with Amy Sedaris talking about rabbits a little bit. So I'm grateful to them and you should visit them at rabbits.org, but check this out.

[VIDEO]

*AMY SEDARIS: Hi, I'm Amy Sedaris. Did you know that rabbits are the third most relinquished animals in shelters across the United States? Why? Because so many people buy them on impulse without knowing anything about their care. That's what happened to me with my first bunny. Parents often think that rabbits are great, low-maintenance starter pets for small children, but nothing could be further from the truth. Rabbits are commitments. Most rabbits don't like to be picked up and carried around, which means they are often better pets for adults than for small children. Did you know that rabbits use litter boxes? Did you know they can live much better and safer lives indoors than out of doors? Many rabbits can live peacefully with domesticated cats and well-behaved dogs. Some even form very strong bonds with these other species. They love the companionship of their own species, but both males and females must be spayed and neutered so they can live peacefully together without having litters every month. Rabbits need lots of out-of-cage exercise time in a stimulating and rabbit-proof environment. Rabbits have healthcare needs just like other companion animals, and they need to see specially trained veterinarians. In fact, a well-cared-for rabbit can live ten years or longer, just as long as many breeds of dogs. Did you know that you can adopt a spayed or neutered rabbit from a rescue group or shelter? I did. That's how I got my second bunny! If you think you're ready to bring some bunny love into your life, visit rabbit.org for more information.*

[END VIDEO]

JASMIN: Rabbit.org is how you could find House Rabbit Society. I love that video.

MARIANN: Yeah, it's adorable. Actually, even though you've just listened to it, I highly recommend going and watching it because it's got a whole bunch of cute bunnies in it.

JASMIN: Yeah, it's a great video. And Tracy is doing such great work. She was briefly on our podcast once before when we were driving across the country. But she's going to be talking about some of the unique campaigns that she does, specifically around this particular time of the year because of all of the exploitation with rabbits. And so I'm really excited today to talk to Tracy Martin.

Tracy Martin is a House Rabbit Society educator who has a small rabbit rescue called Rabbitron located in Spokane, Washington. Rabbitron currently cares for 20 rabbits, 5 pigeons, 2 hens, 3 dogs, and 2 cats. After being frustrated for the sad fate of most bunnies bought for children at Easter, Tracy decided to try and change things. She started a public service campaign to educate people about rabbits and why impulse buying, when it comes to bunnies, is a bad idea. Tracy says, "I love all animals, but I credit the rabbits for showing me the way to living a compassionate, vegan life." Visit Rabbitron at [rabbitron.com](http://rabbitron.com).

Welcome back to Our Hen House, Tracy!

TRACY: Oh, I'm glad to be here.

JASMIN: The last time we interviewed you, we were driving across the country, and we were lucky enough to interview you in person at your sanctuary. Do you remember?!

TRACY: Yes! It was a great night. You got to see the pigeons and the rabbits and then we went out to dinner. It was a really fun time.

JASMIN: Yes, it was fantastic. And can you just remind our listeners where that was?

TRACY: Yes. This is in Spokane, Washington, and we're on the eastern side of the Washington State.

JASMIN: Yeah, it was wonderful. There was a surprising amount of animal advocacy going on in Spokane, and you definitely were a highlight, and all the fine folks in Spokane were a highlight of our trip. And I remember the -- do you remember, honey, the rabbit houses in their backyard?

MARIANN: It was like a fantasy land.

JASMIN: Yeah.

MARIANN: I felt like I was in a tiny little rabbit Disney World.

JASMIN: I'm trying to remember, Tracy, was it -- is your husband like an architect or something?

TRACY: He's a carpenter.

JASMIN: A carpenter.

TRACY: So he built our little houses, the little rabbit houses we have. Since we have so many rabbits -- I really advocate to have rabbits in the house, but we have so many that we

had to build little structures outside. So we made them like mini houses. They have insulation and heat and they look like children's playhouses.

JASMIN: Yeah.

TRACY: Yeah.

JASMIN: It's amazing, and actually, send me a few photos and we'll post them on the article that corresponds with today's podcast episode because I really think that listeners will want to look at this for themselves. Can you tell us a little bit about where you get these rabbits from?

TRACY: These rabbits are all what I call other people's rabbits. I don't go searching for them. They seem to come to me. Most of the rabbits are abandoned, and people will just drop them off after getting them, usually at Easter. Our big push is coming soon, where people will decide to get a rabbit for their child or think that it's cute for Easter and then realize just how much work they are. They're just as much care as a dog or a cat, so people aren't aware of that.

MARIANN: Exactly what is someone taking on when they get a rabbit as a pet? What kind of care do they need?

TRACY: Well, they would need about the same as you would take care of a cat inside. They need a litter box. They need toys. They need their space of their own. But unlike a dog or a cat, you definitely have to bunny proof your houses. Bunnies have teeth that grow all their lives, so they have to chew things, and so you need to give them things to chew, or else they'll find things to chew in your house, such as your books, your cords. Expensive computer chords are usually their favorite.

JASMIN: Uh-huh, yeah. I can see that.

MARIANN: Can you tell us how you got into this, and what was your experience with your very first rabbit, Rabbitron, who I think your sanctuary is named for?

TRACY: Yes, that's right. Rabbitron was a bunny that I got way back in the day at a county fair. And I brought her home and I put her in a hutch and I didn't feed her correctly. I loved her and I thought I was taking care of her correctly, but I did nothing right. And I didn't know that at the time when I had her. It was only years later when I got another rabbit and learned all the things I was doing wrong, and just how much more care a rabbit needs, such as exercise, and being played with and having toys and being spayed and neutered and feeding them hay and fresh greens, things like that.

As I was learning this, people would find out that I had a rabbit and just out of nowhere, people would be approaching me: "Oh, I have a rabbit. My kids are tired of him. Would you take him?" And then I would see these rabbits in daycares, for example, and they would be in tiny cages and they were there to so-called "educate" the children. And I don't know what they were learning from these rabbits that are depressed and sad and sitting in a cage alone, but I started trying my best to educate people around me and ending up taking in more and more rabbits. And so what really was the turning point is I realized I can't do it all. I can't take in all these rabbits. I can't continue to do that. So I decided to start a campaign.

MARIANN: Yeah. Clearly you don't approve of keeping rabbits in hutches --

TRACY: No.

MARIANN: -- which I guess a hell of a lot of them are kept in hutches. But if you do have them in the house, do they make good pets?

TRACY: Oh, they make great pets. A lot of people don't realize how much personality rabbits actually have. Most people have an experience with a rabbit that they see a little bunny cowered in the back of a hutch somewhere. Well, you're seeing a rabbit that's depressed and sad and doesn't ever get to come out and is lonely. But I can tell you that our rabbits that have run of the house will boss the cats, jump on the furniture, excited that you're home. They have different reactions than a dog or a cat, so like a dog would wag their tail, a rabbit doesn't wag their tail. They don't have a lot of expression on the surface, but once you get to know them, you start to realize their whole body language. They have all the emotions and reactions that any of our other pets would have.

JASMIN: What about rabbits and children? Do they go well together?

TRACY: People think they do, and I think that's a common myth, but it's actually the opposite. There, of course, are exceptions and kids that are really gentle with rabbits. But for the most part, children think they're cute and lose interest immediately. Rabbits are actually much better pets for adults. They sleep during the day, and they're awake in the mornings and the evenings, and just when you're at work they're asleep.

JASMIN: So we were talking about the animal exploitation around Easter. This is sad, but tell us what happens to rabbits when they're no longer wanted.

TRACY: Well, sadly most of the rabbits either languish in a hutch in the backyard until they die or haven't been fed or watered in a while, or people will think they're setting them free and actually abandon them out somewhere where they're not prepared to take care of themselves. They are domesticated animals just like a dog or a cat, and they've lost a lot of their instincts, and they've actually been bred by humans to be in colors and configurations, such as a lop-eared rabbit. They're not gonna see a predator's coming, and they don't have the instincts to hide or the coloration to hide. So sadly, if somebody abandons a rabbit, that's really pretty much a death sentence for them.

JASMIN: Mm, so tragic. Now you mentioned that you are involved with a campaign, especially around this time of the year. Can you talk a little bit about this campaign and what your goals are for it?

TRACY: Yes. Actually several years ago, it was back in 2005, I was to the point of realizing I can't continue to take in a bunch of rabbits. So I really decided, this is it, I'm going to start an educational campaign. I'm a graphic designer, and I worked at an ad agency, so I hit up my friends and asked, how do you put on a campaign? And so it really started out with some newspaper ads and billboards. And now I've branched out, I have a TV PSA and bus boards on the bus, and just try to get the word out as much as possible. And it's a small campaign. I don't really have a lot of money. You don't have to be rich to do this. But it's a way to get the message out, and it's surprising how many people do see it even though I only get a couple billboards and a few ads.

JASMIN: I think that's amazing. I mean, that kind of advocacy is one of the most important types of advocacy that we can have. And you have a couple billboards or whatever, but Spokane is not huge. And so I think that that really, really impacts a lot more people than you would think. Have you ever heard from anybody who's been impacted by seeing your educational campaigns?

TRACY: Yes, I have. And I don't really get direct feedback, so it's always an indirect sort of way. But I did meet somebody who said they were looking for a place to move and they saw a billboard, and they thought, "oh good, there's rabbit people here in town." So that was really surprising, I convinced somebody to actually move here. And then there's other interesting times where like, I'd mention that I have a rabbit rescue, and someone will tell me, "Oh, have you seen those ads?" And they have no idea it was me that did them, so it's fun to hear that.

MARIANN: So, if people want to adopt a rabbit and they think they can do a good job after hearing all of your information about what rabbits really need as opposed to what people tend to think they need, where should they go to find a rabbit? Should they try to adopt one?

TRACY: Yes, they should definitely try to adopt one. There's rabbit rescues in every state. Look for us on the website or if you're on Facebook or somewhere like that. You can always access [rabbit.org](http://rabbit.org), which is the House Rabbit Society website, for more rescues and listings of them. Or if there is not a rabbit rescue in your area, definitely just go to the shelter. The shelter is full of rabbits and especially right after Easter, so if you want to adopt a bunny, I totally recommend it. They make awesome pets, but you just have to know that they're going to live about 10 or maybe 12 -- I even have a 14-year-old -- years, and you just need to be prepared for that. But I would recommend to just adopt and not buy.

JASMIN: Yeah, absolutely. And I know that you're very involved as we mentioned with this media campaign and with educating people about the plight of rabbits. With Easter coming up and so many animal advocates listening to the Our Hen House podcast, can you give us a few pointers on best ways to spread the message about not choosing to exploit rabbits or any other animal around this time of year or ever?

TRACY: Oh, the best ways are always just doing things like reposting things on Facebook, talking to your friends, just mentioning things to people. It's surprising what things you plant when you tell somebody about it. If you happen to be in a place that does sell rabbits, I would complain to the manager or write a letter to the editor about the problems. There's so many ways you can do it for absolutely free. Or if you are passionate about rabbits or any cause that you want to promote, I would recommend too just looking into doing ads. This is like the way people get information anymore. I would encourage anyone to do a campaign.

JASMIN: Yeah. I'm looking at your website right now, [rabbitron.com](http://rabbitron.com), and I clicked on the campaign part, and these billboards you made are phenomenal: "Small animal, big responsibility." "Rabbits are not Easter toys." And you have this on the back of a bus: "Think beyond Easter. Rabbits need special care and a 10-year commitment." This is amazing, Tracy, what you're doing, truly. And I encourage our podcast listeners to go to [rabbitron.com](http://rabbitron.com) and just take a look at everything that's going on over there.

MARIANN: And I'm curious, if people do want to sponsor one of these ads, can they use your materials and put up ads in their own communities?

TRACY: Yes. I try my best to share materials, but I also encourage people to just -- it's not hard, you know, take a photo and do it yourself too, 'cause there's a certain pride in when you do it yourself. But yes, I am always happy to be a resource or an adviser or whatever. I'm always answering questions on the internet.

JASMIN: Great. Well, thank you for all that you do to change the world for rabbits, Tracy. And rabbitron.com is where people could find out more about your amazing campaign and the work you do. And thank you again so much for joining us in Our Hen House.

TRACY: Thank you!

JASMIN: That was Tracy Martin from Rabbitron. Check her out at [rabbitron.com](http://rabbitron.com).