

# Animals find 'safe haven' on couple's farm sanctuary

Lisa Iannucci, For the Poughkeepsie Journal 3:03 p.m. ET March 22, 2017



Photo: Frank Becerra Jr./The Journal News

When Maddie, a goat who lives at the Safe Haven Farm Sanctuary in Poughquag, laid her head on Bill Crain's lap, he knew he had made a difference.

"Every time she saw a human it meant possible death," said Crain, co-owner of the Sanctuary with his wife Ellen. "It took a long time, but it was one of the greatest moments for me. She finally trusted me."

It's exactly the kind of feel-good moment that Crain was going for ever since he and his wife decided to open Safe Haven.

Their desire to rescue farm animals came while the couple, living in Manhattan at the time, drove by a live meat market — otherwise known as a slaughterhouse — and saw two goats peeking their heads out.

"I thought that if I ever had a farm sanctuary, I was going to get those goats out of there," said Crain, a professor of psychology at The City College of New York.

According to the Humane Society, approximately 9 billion cattle, chickens, ducks, hogs, sheep, lamb and turkeys are slaughtered every year. The Crains wanted to do their part to save the animals, so in 2006, they purchased a 40-acre farm in Poughquag that came with a barn and two houses.



Bill Crain, co-founder of Safe Haven Farm Sanctuary, talks about the different animals at his Poughquag farm March 13, 2017. *(Photo: Frank Becerra Jr./The Journal News)*

“It took two years to repair the property because it was literally falling down,” Crain said.

In 2008, Bill and Ellen, a recently retired pediatrician, opened the Safe Haven Farm Sanctuary. They hired a caretaker and continued to live in the city during the first two years, but commuted back and forth to work on the property. “It got too hard to rely just on the caretakers, so we moved up here permanently four years ago.”

Their first rescues were goats from the live meat market, including one named Maddie.

“Some people will say that we helped the market by buying the goats, but at the time, I just thought of those animals and wanted to get them out of that terrible place,” Bill Crain said.

“Maddie was pregnant and had her baby on the farm,” Crain said. “The baby boomed out so we named him Boomer. Almost every animal we have on the farm has been abused or rescued from slaughter, so they naturally feel very wary of you. When they finally accept, or call out for help, or come over for, just to hang around us, it’s one of the gratifying moments.”

Ellen Crain devoted herself to caring for the animals fulltime.

“It’s a great feeling, like you’re really helping them and making their lives happy, but there are also a lot of really sad moments if they get old or get a serious illness and pass away,” Ellen Crain said. “We try our best. We’ve taken many animals for care who need special, intense, emergency kind of treatment.”



**Bill and Ellen Crain, co-founders of Safe Haven Farm Sanctuary, stand outside their Poughquag farm March 13, 2017. The two are passionate about animals and protecting them on the farm. (Photo: Frank Becerra Jr./The Journal News)**

The couple’s goal is to give the animals the best lives that they can have.

“All of them have lived terrible lives at the hands of humans,” Ellen Crain said. “We also want people to come meet the animals and have a chance to interact with them and see how complex their personalities are. We hope it will help to change minds and maybe hearts. It would be wonderful for all animals if people could expand pets to include farm animals; they are the worst treated of all.”

The farm animals are always surprising the Crains.

“One of my favorite stories is with our turkeys,” Bill Crain said. “These four turkeys came to us as babies from a factory farm where they were raised and to be used for slaughter. Every waking moment they milled about noisily and were constantly moving.”

One day, a group of Girl Scouts wanted to hold a ceremony in the barn with the animals and Bill Crain said he was surprised at what he saw.

“The girls took turns reading pledges that they'd made, like, 'I will always honor animals;' it was very moving,” he said. “They formed a circle and took turns going to the middle to read their pledges. The young turkeys stopped milling around and joined the circle with the Girl Scouts, sat down and quietly looked at the leader as if they were listening to the pledges. All of us were amazed. It was as if they understood what was going on. Sometimes animals bring a deep sense of peace to the farm.”

Their most recent adoption is a north Nigerian goat.



**Bill Crain, co-founder of Safe Haven Farm Sanctuary, plays with a sheep at his Poughquag farm March 13, 2017. (Photo: Frank Becerra Jr./The Journal News)**

"The goat was emaciated, had pneumonia and had wax on his horns and ears and face," Bill Crain said, adding he believes it might have been used in a ritual sacrifice.

"At the farm, he's very mischievous," he said. "One day, Ellen didn't know why a fan was on, it was about 5 degrees out. The goat had climbed up high on a narrow ledge and was pulling the fan cord with his mouth at different speeds. He's a lot of fun."

Today, the farm is home to approximately 100 animals, including goats, sheep, chickens, ducks, turkeys, horses and pigs, and one partridge. The farm employs two full-time staff members and hosts several volunteers. It is open to the public for visits and hiking, but advance notice is required by calling the farm ahead of time.

"We're short on money though," Bill Crain said. "It's very expensive and we haven't had very much time to do fundraising, so we've been depleting our savings."

The couple is applying for grants and the farm's website provides donation and sponsorship opportunities.

"The issue that I think about all the time is how can this place go on after Bill and I can't drag wheelbarrows around anymore," Ellen Crain said. "It's a big issue because it's hard to find funding. People often think it's better to give money to one of the big sanctuaries, but I think it's important for small sanctuaries to be able to keep going because we really do good work."



**Bill and Ellen Crain, co-founders of Safe Haven Farm Sanctuary, play with some sheep at their Poughquag farm March 13, 2017. The two are passionate about animals and protecting them on the farm. (Photo: Frank Becerra Jr./The Journal News)**

## If you go

Safe Haven Farm Sanctuary is at 542 Gardner Hollow Road, Poughquag; call 845-724-5138; email: [farmanimals.crain@gmail.com](mailto:farmanimals.crain@gmail.com); visit <http://safehavenfarmsanctuary.org/>

Bill Crain's book, "The Emotional Lives of Animals & Children: Insights from a Farm Sanctuary," was published in 2014 and can be found at Amazon.com

*Lisa Iannucci is a freelance writer. Contact her at [features@poughkeepsiejournal.com](mailto:features@poughkeepsiejournal.com)*