

REAL/PEOPLE



Zaleski with, *from left*, Tucker the dog, Baby Joey the calf, Salvatore the donkey, Stormie the horse, Cooper the alpaca and Yogi the bull.

Inspiring stories
of friends and
neighbors, in
their own words

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Peaceable Kingdom

Where the Animals Roam Free

Laurie Zaleski founded a sanctuary that breaks down boundaries

WHEN I WAS a kid, my mom worked at an animal shelter. She brought home every animal that was going to be euthanized. We

had a pig, a horse, dogs, cats, a goose, a possum, a skunk, raccoons, all living in and around our one-bedroom house in the woods—which Mom called the Funny Farm. I always told her, “One day I’m going to buy you a farm of your own.”

I was in my 20s when we found out Mom had cancer. She died in 2000, right before I finalized the purchase of the farm. At least she got to see it. I have a photo of us sitting in front of the barn.

It wasn’t my dream to have this farm; it was her dream, but I’ve kept it going. I ran the place on my own for 12 years. I’d get up at 3:30 every morning, feed the animals and then go to my job running a graphic design firm. The farm grew to 250 animals, and my bills reached \$4,000 a month. That’s when I turned the farm into a nonprofit, run by volunteers. Today we’re one of the largest animal rescues and sanctuaries in the Northeast, with over 750 animals, most of which were unwanted, abused or injured.

Once, this college kid from Philly showed up with two starving baby bulls in the back seat of his Camry. He told me, “My landlord said I can’t keep them.” Yogi is still here; Boo-Boo got adopted by my vet. They’re all grown up now.

When you come through our gates, you see all the animals walking around loose. We don’t separate them, and for the most part, they all get along. Sometimes they bicker, sure, but they’re not violent. It’s like they know they’re siblings now. Yogi’s best buddy is Cooper, an alpaca. They’re very protective of each other.

Humans can learn something from these animals. If all these different species can get along, so can we. —As told to Gregg Segal

Laurie Zaleski, 55, is the founder of Funny Farm Rescue & Sanctuary in Mays Landing, New Jersey.

