

PEACEFUL PRAIRIE SANCTUARY

A safe haven for rescued farmed animals who have been given a second chance at life



WHY BEGIN AGAIN

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Monday, January 01, 2007

Two years ago today, Celeste sang for the first time. It was New Year's Day 2005. We had brought her gifts of grapes, which she had received and consumed enthusiastically, practically drinking the grapes off the stems like wine, eyes closed, head thrown back, mouth open to receive the nectar (and to demand more). She loved treats, she loved company, she loved stimulation, she loved novelty and, as we learned that day, she loved music.



celeste

Celeste spent her short life a cripple. Hunched over, unable to use her hind legs, she sat up, on her good days, like a dog with a hump on her back. On her bad days, she just lay on one side and didn't get up at all.

Rescued from a family hog farm the day before she was scheduled for slaughter, she arrived at the sanctuary with a broken back, and she never walked more than a few steps at a time, although she did move around her safe world, her barn, by dragging her crippled hind legs from place to place, and busied herself with rearranging the straw bales, the blankets, the feed bags and, occasionally, her barn mate, Ponza.

Once in a while, she got up and walked around proper, on all fours but, as her condition worsened, she limited her activity to sitting up to greet visitors. And then, towards the end, she spent most of her time lying on her side.

There were many days when the only question was: "is it time?" Every time, the answer was: "No". Not our answer. Hers. She didn't want to be "put out out of her misery" - it wasn't misery to her, it was her life. And it was fierce with meaning to her.

We kept trying to measure her life in degrees of comfort. And those are important measures. But she measured its worth in degrees of meaning (that absolute certainty, down to the marrow, that something is important), and degrees of joy (not happiness, not pleasure, but the fierce joy of drinking dawn like spring water, and eating dusk like supper), and degrees of love (not love that scintillates, but love that pulls you like a river, that draws you, body and soul, into the mystery of another day despite the pain, despite the darkness).

Her eyes were always filled with light, her mind was always awake, aware, alert, open to receive the world, her spirit, strong to her last breath, her will to live, learn, and grow, absolutely unbreakable.

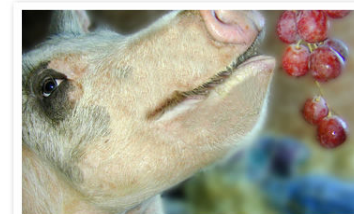
The moments of triumph we recorded and celebrated in Celeste's life were the big, dramatic, visible ones, those moments that demonstrated OUR view of a full life not hers, what WE thought a full life should be.



celeste leaves her barn and suns herself!

Celeste stands up!
Celeste walks a few steps!
Celeste goes into the next barn with no help!
Celeste visits with the potbellied pigs
(and scares the beejeebers out of them!)
Celeste takes a mud bath in front of her barn!
Celeste leaves her barn and suns herself on the front porch!
Celeste sings!

Those are very important standards - health, comfort, happiness - but, as Celeste felt beyond doubt, all the way down to her broken bones, they are not the reasons why life is precious.



"drinking" grapes right off the stems

On that New Years Day in her barn, 730 days ago, the CD player played old French songs and I sang along as I stroked Celeste's belly. Glacial dusk sky, dead of winter. It was an old French love ballad whose rich words are meaningless to all who don't speak French, just as Celeste's rich language is meaningless to all who don't speak pig. But the music captured and expressed what we all feel beyond language. Celeste propped herself up, sat up, her face a few inches from mine, cocked her head, looked me straight in the eyes. I sang directly to her: *"Il y a longtemps que je t'aime, Jamais je ne t'oublierai."*

She uttered a sound I had never heard her, or any other pig make. A series of open mouthed, melodic, rhythmic, throaty purrs. A musical response. I repeated the refrain: *"Il y a longtemps que je t'aime, Jamais je ne t'oublierai."* She listened, wide mouthed, as though waiting for her turn. I paused. She repeated her musical reply.

We did this till the song ended, each of us responding to music with music, to deep, universal feeling with like feeling. "Il y a longtemps que je t'aime, Jamais je ne t'oublierai." "I've been loving you for so long, I will never forget you".

She sang in pig, I sang in human. We understood each other. Not because we were especially gifted at inter-species communication, not because we knew each other all that well, but because we both knew the love, the grief, and the hope of being alive in a soul burdened body.

That day with Celeste, that New Year's Day, was a true-blue new beginning. It revealed then, and it continues to reveal now, the only reason why beginning again - a new day, a new week, a new year - is worth doing at all.

When the darkness of the world seems overwhelming, unstoppable, crushing, when beings like Celeste, who love life and sing about love are being turned into meat and handbags by the millions every day, when the pain of loving them seems unbearable, the answer is NOT to stop loving, NOT to stop caring, NOT to add to the darkness.

The answer is to love more, deeper, wider. To love despite the darkness and the pain. Indeed, to love because of it.

To love those who need it most desperately, not only those we happen to like, to love because your love is profoundly, vitally needed, not because it is self-gratifying. To love as though life depended on it. It does.



celeste sings!

This is what being vegan means.

Securing, one vegan meal at a time, a space in the world where innocents like Celeste can simply keep what is rightfully theirs - their life, their freedom, their meager, pathetic, or truly magnificent shot at happiness, refusing to take their lives simply because we have the power. It is the only thing worth starting a new year, a new day, for.

How many hapless individuals like Celeste would be killed for my taste buds this New Year, if I weren't vegan? 50, 100, more? How desperately would each and every one of them cling to life, fighting to their last breath, against all hope? What would their last sounds on earth be? What IS the sound of complete despair? How many times would it be voiced this year, just for my culinary pleasure? Do I really want to start a New Year like this, let alone live through each and every one of its 365 blood-soaked days?

Celeste left this world entirely on her own. She had been forced into existence by human greed, she had been a prisoner of a crippled body all of her short life, but she exited entirely on her own terms, just before noon, one summer day.

Celeste, wherever you are:
"Il y a longtemps que je t'aime, Jamais je ne t'oublierai." "I've been loving you for so long, I will never forget you".

This will be a life-filled year. Maybe not happy, maybe not comfortable, but beautiful, and true - like your life. Worth living. Worth beginning again.



worth beginning again

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Enhancing the Lives of Animals Through Ethical Decisions



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celeste stands up!

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