

# SC-C.A.R.E.S.

## Exotic Animal Shelter

by Judi Burton

### The Tortoise and the Hare

"Slow Down, Animals at Play," the sign read, as a cottontail rabbit bounded across the entrance to the Coastal Animal Rescue and Educational Sanctuary, SC-C.A.R.E.S., an exotic animal shelter in Georgetown, SC. The bunny stopped and sat on its hind legs, eyeing me and wiggling its nose, as if to say, "Good day, enjoy your visit ma'am." I drove in carefully and saw another whimsical sign pointing to the left, "Parking Area with No Goats." I chuckled to myself, getting the joke that goats eat anything, even cars. Cindy Hedrick, the operator of the facility, met me next to the tortoise run, where a stately oak tree shaded the enclosure. A large tortoise with a piece of grass hanging out of the side of his mouth lumbered over to me as we spoke. "That's Abbott, he's real friendly," said Cindy. "They can feel right through their shell, so you can go ahead and pet him." A green dragonfly alighted on my arm as I gave Abbott a good rub, which he obviously enjoyed since he was scooting himself closer to me as I patted his hard shell.

"You just have so many animals here," I exclaimed while scanning the area. From what I could see in the immediate vicinity, there were horses whinnying, wolves pacing, chickens roaming, and goats bleating—not to



mention a dozen tortoises grazing. "Yes, we have over 160 animals here, and most of them are injured or cast off from previous owners. We are a no-kill/no-breed shelter, but we're running out of funding to be able to accept more animals." She motioned to Abbott and continued, "He's going to live for 100 years." "Wow, what are you going to do when you're too old for this?" I asked. She shrugged, and said she hoped someone would come along with enough funding to be able to pay people to work here. "We rely on donations, and we don't charge people to come out here and visit. We don't have a bank full of money, and sometimes it can get a bit tight, but somehow we always seem to make it," she said lightly, smiling at Abbott who was really getting into his massage.

### Wolf Talk

She showed me around the sanctuary and introduced me to a number of animals. I met a deer named Dennis who liked to lick my hand, shy foxes, and an alpaca with a temper. A horse named Cupid walked us around the facility, like a gentlemen escort, as we visited with all the farm animals. There were so many more animals with individual personalities, and almost all had

some type of handicapped condition. Not to take away from my experience with the other animals, but the biggest impact made on me was by the wolf pack. They were graceful and slender, with piercing eyes and huge, white teeth. A few lazed high up on a den-like structure while others paced back and forth, heads hanging low, watching me through the fence. "They're a mixture between a British Columbian and an Alaskan wolf," said Cindy. I was completely mesmerized by their stealth and golden-eyed stares. Some were white and some were gray, but all were absolutely beautiful. "Are they very dangerous?" I asked, immediately realizing the stupidity of that question. "Oh, they can be; we don't go in alone. We have to go in pairs, and I can't go during my moon cycle. Only a few of us can interact with them. When they want to play, their play can be deadly." To make it even clearer for me, she went on, "Their bite pressure is five times stronger than that of a pit bull or a Doberman pinscher." A flash back to a book I read in school, *White Fang*, about an Alaskan wolf came to my mind as I remembered the dogfight scenes. White Fang was a winner in the dogfights every time, because he would bite the neck and not let go, and he would never give a warning growl. One of the wolves named Anna Marie trotted over to me right as I was about to move on. I thanked her for allowing

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me to watch her and, folks, I know you will think this is crazy, but she stared at me straight on and bowed her head slowly. Cindy said, "Look at that, she's talking to you." There is no doubt in my mind that she was communicating with me, as if to say, "You're welcome, and thank you for your respect."

### Parrot Heads

The bird aviary was extremely loud and raucous. Parrots, macaws, doves, parakeets and the like screeched above one another. A few had flirtatious intentions with me as I passed, whistling and saying, "I love you." The reptile room was full of small and large cold-blooded creatures. The iguana, Godzuki, was lying on a branch looking quite content while the ball python, Monte, gave me the willies. Sugar gliders and



guinea pigs, opossums and big-eared bunnies poked their heads out of hiding places in the small mammal room as I was introduced to all. Cindy told me about her ambitions for the aviary. Her plan is to make an outdoor aviary where the larger birds will have more

room to fly and be loud. As she was telling me this, one of the colorful parrots, Geronimo, danced to the song *Celebration*, by Kool and the Gang, which was emanating from the small clock radio in the corner. "I just need volunteers and a little money, and it could be done in no time," she said while two more parrots joined the dance party, bobbing their heads and swaying back and forth in time to the beat. "Celebrate good times, c'mon! Squawk!"

### We Need Your Help

We sat down on some wooden chairs that were in a circle under an oak tree. "So, what do you need the most?" I asked. Cindy sighed and said, "We need volunteers over the age of 18 [who can] come out here and don't need a chaperone. We need simple things like any type of building materials and hardware. We could use toilet paper and food for our volunteers, peanuts for the birds, postage stamps, gravel for the driveway, paper towels, and dish soap. But, of course, the main thing we need is money." A hummingbird hovered above Cindy as she shared her wish list. I looked around and realized that this place wasn't just a sanctuary for the animals in the enclosure, but other wild animals were drawn to it as well. The bunny I met on the way in, the dragonfly on my arm, and hummingbirds hovering represented just a small amount of the activity on this piece of land. There were squirrels frolicking and small birds singing, and Cindy even told me about a curious coyote who shows up once in a while on the edge of the facility. I thought of how amazing this place is and how there's just no way it can fail. The good karma is just too strong.

Cindy and her partner, Skip Yeager, own Sweeties Chocolate Shop on Front Street in Georgetown. Proceeds from Sweeties help pay the bills, so if you happen to be in Georgetown, don't forget to stop in and buy some handmade Southern confections. The SC-C.A.R.E.S. website also has many ways to donate, from using a credit card that donates money on the percentage you spend with the card to adopting an animal. "The community is what has kept us alive for the last five years, and we really appreciate all the help we can get," said Cindy. Of course one of the easiest and most effective ways you can help is by scheduling a tour and spreading the word.

For more info on SC-C.A.R.E.S., visit SC-CARES.org or call 843-546-7893. SC-C.A.R.E.S. at 236 Abbeville Dr in Georgetown, SC, is a nonprofit in desperate need of help and support. Please make time to help this noble cause.