

# The **Faces** Behind the Numbers

Books showcase the side of farm animals the public rarely sees



**A New York City bus** may seem like an odd place to start thinking about farm animals, but that's where Amy Hatkoff was when she spied a sign depicting their suffering. It prompted an "aha moment," she says, steering her to write about animal welfare for the first time.

Across the country in California, a similar idea hatched as Diane Leigh watched her friend Marilee Geyer's chickens frolic in a yard, strutting and scratching and clucking and cooing. Leigh commented that people would be amazed to see the animals in such a happy state.

From those epiphanies have emerged two books that show the beauty of farm animals, highlighting their intellectual and emotional complexities and subtly making a case against the inhumane practices of factory farms.

Hatkoff's *The Inner World of Farm Animals: Their Amazing Social, Emotional, and Intellectual Capacities*, published last year, shares a similar format with *Ninety-Five: Meeting America's Farmed Animals in Stories and Photographs*, edited by Geyer, Leigh, and Windi Wojdak and slated for publication this May. Both feature striking photos of pigs, sheep, cows, chickens, roosters, and other animals in natural settings, accompanied by stories of their rescues.

The animals in *Ninety-Five* are ambassadors for the 10 billion raised on land for food each year in the U.S., says co-editor Diane Leigh.

The authors chose to forgo graphic depictions of the horrors of factory farming in favor of focusing on how lovable and unique the animals are when they're allowed to be themselves. This format has the effect of implicitly questioning the agribusiness system that denies the creatures' individuality.

Hatkoff—who is also a lecturer and documentary filmmaker specializing in child welfare issues—says she was startled during her research by the growing body of scientific evidence indicating that farm animals have "complex thoughts, deep emotions, and social skills and rituals not unlike our own." Leigh and Geyer, the authors of two previous books published by their nonprofit, No Voice Unheard, hope *Ninety-Five* helps personalize the staggering number of animals killed for food each year in factory farms.

"It's hard to picture 10 billion animals a year being farmed in this country," says Leigh. "And I think there's a very special power in putting individual names and faces to those numbers. The animals in *Ninety-Five* are ambassadors for those 10 billion every year."

In these excerpted interviews, Hatkoff, Geyer, and Leigh discuss their books with The HSUS's James Hettinger.

**Q: What do you hope to accomplish with your books?**

**AMY HATKOFF:** My hope and dream is to make people think and to really touch people—to let the animals do the talking and to let people see the animals face to face. What I hoped to accomplish was to both move people [and] really to shift awareness. I found the research phenomenal—that chickens could count and use geometric principles, and pigs could play video games on the computer. And I thought that those facts spoke very loudly and would work along with the images and the moving quotes from people who have been advocating for animals throughout history.

**DIANE LEIGH:** We have a passion for issues about farmed animals, for all the reasons that you would expect: because the suffering is so immense and there are so many billions of animals that go through the farming system

in this country. When we looked around, we realized there are a lot of wonderful, very recent books released that are very full, factual treatises on farming and animal agriculture in this country, and we wanted to do something really different that really focused on the animals themselves—that basically gave people a fun-to-look-at, inviting way of actually meeting these animals, and [showed] them for the intellectually complex and interesting and charming creatures that they are. The vast majority of people in this country—the vast majority—never get to meet farmed animals, and never get to realize these things about them.

**Q: People tend to think of their pets as being clever and having emotions, but they don't think of farm animals that way. Why do you think that is?**

**HATKOFF:** Largely I think it's probably con-

ditioning, because there have been times throughout history where pigs have been pets, and they've been valued. I did a little research into the history of how our ideas about animals have been shaped. There was this thought that they couldn't think, that they had no feeling, and different philosophers have argued [that] at different times. And I think religious views have shaped it, but I think it's really cultural. In India, the cow is sacred, but here farm animals are to be farmed. And I don't think that we generally go out of the box. That was the hope of the book—to interrupt that thinking, to interrupt what's been handed down to us, and to make us think, because it's so easy not to think about them.

**MARILEE GEYER:** I think it's a deliberate tactic on the part of the agriculture industry. If you portray these animals as being dumb and unfeeling—the myth that turkeys will

## The Audacity of Porcine Hope

**Romance among farm animals** is not so different from the human variety. Sometimes it flourishes, sometimes it doesn't.

Lucas the pig of Peaceful Prairie Sanctuary in Colorado, whose story is recounted in *Ninety-Five*, has learned the perils of unrequited love and displayed the dogged determination of someone who's got it bad. Once slated for slaughter, Lucas jumped off a truck that was taking him to his final fattening place at a pig farm. Now, at the sanctuary, he's free to explore—to chase a horse or to bathe in the drinking water fountain.

Or ... to fall in love.

The object of his affection, the independent-minded sow Petunia, doesn't return his attentions. She ignores him as best she can and sometimes resorts to shoving him away.

Still, Lucas persists.

"I'm actually very charmed by Lucas the pig," says *Ninety-Five* co-editor Diane Leigh, who witnessed some of Lucas's daily unsuccessful attempts to make Petunia fall in love with him. "He's one of my favorites. He's just ... so irrepressible and so hopeful all the time."

He's got reasons for his optimism. At hog farms, pigs like Lucas are quickly removed from their mothers (who are impregnated again as soon as possible), then moved to filthy, crowded, windowless "grower houses" where they stay until being slaughtered at the age of 6 months, notes *Ninety-Five* co-editor Marilee Geyer. At the sanctuary, in contrast, he's "free to feel and express his whole being and all of his emotions and attachments and loves."





## A Love to Crow About

**Theirs is a story of two creatures** completing each other: Libby was largely silent when she arrived at Peaceful Prairie Sanctuary. But Louie the rooster spoke up enough for the two of them. When Libby was accidentally locked in a barn while it was being cleaned, a distressed Louie turned frantic. He communicated his friend's predicament by pacing outside the barn door, crowing his alarm, flapping his wings, stomping his feet, and tapping the ground with his beak.

"They separated themselves on their own from a flock of hundreds of other birds that are cared for at that sanctuary, and just clearly adored each other," says *Ninety-Five* co-editor Diane Leigh. "We saw Louie scratch for food and call her over to get it when he found it."

When Libby was unable to climb up to join her companion in his treasured roosting spot in the rafters, Louie even decided to forgo comfort and settle in next to her on the ground. Roles were eventually reversed when Louie grew ill and was secluded for treatment. It was Libby's turn to wail and search for her partner; she eventually found him in a locked rehab room, according to the account by *Ninety-Five* contributor Joanna Lucas.

Louie died last fall, followed a month later by Libby. "She was blue in her last days without her love, and that couldn't be helped, but she was never alone," Lucas wrote in an e-mail. "She, like Louie, lived and died surrounded by love, thanks to [Peaceful Prairie Sanctuary]."

look up into the sky when it's raining and drown is absurd—but if you perpetuate these myths, you can convince people that their feelings don't matter [or that] they don't have feelings. And it makes it that much easier to do what the agriculture industry does to them. But when I tell people that my hens, who were rescued from an egg farm, jump up on my lap when I'm sitting outdoors in a chair and look me in the eye—seemingly saying, "Hey, what's going on?"—people are quite frankly shocked to hear that because they would never consider such a thing, because of what our culture teaches us about these animals.

**Q:** I would guess that, as you talk about animals falling in love and so on, you run the risk of people thinking that you're anthropomorphizing?

**GEYER:** Oh, sure. It's funny. You observe these animals, and to me there's no question about some of their behavior. You can certainly tell when a pig or a cow is happy and content, and when they're fearful, and when they're scared, and when they're in pain. Isn't that the important point? I can tell by looking at my dog when he's happy or anxious, and it's not a leap to extend that to other animals.

**Q:** Do you think we're at a point where the public is starting to become more attuned to these issues?

**HATKOFF:** I feel there's a tipping point in awareness. It's like going green now. It's becoming very hip and cool to be very careful about what we're eating. So I think the field has blown wide open.

**GEYER:** The response to Jonathan Safran Foer's book *Eating Animals*—I think that would have been unthinkable 10 years ago or even five years ago.

**LEIGH:** I've been an animal advocate all my lifetime, and I never really expected to see the kind of progress that we've seen in my lifetime. People, more than ever, want to know where their food comes from, and they're showing a mainstream concern [about] the animals that end up on their plate, about how they're treated. What we want to do is show them who those animals are.

## Justice ... and Compassion

### Justice's story reads like a fairy tale.

Now a "cover cow" who graces the jacket of the book *Ninety-Five*, he was headed for slaughter when he escaped from a truck and ran. A wildlife officer subdued him with a shot from a tranquilizer gun, serendipitously saving him: The new drugs in Justice's system made him unfit for human consumption.

Justice arrived at Peaceful Prairie Sanctuary as a scared steer who, according to his caretaker, had "banged himself up terribly" on the trailer ride heading to the slaughterhouse, breaking his left horn. But Sherman, another steer at the sanctuary, saw Justice's agitated state and started licking him through the fence to calm him down. That act of kindness appears to have made an impression on Justice, who's now made it his mission to ease the fears of all the scared newcomers. He'll stand by them—all night if he has to, as in the case of a terrified sheep named Rowdy who stopped crying after his new friend came to his side.

"And he does it consistently; he does it across species," says



*Ninety-Five* co-editor Diane Leigh, who visited Justice and wrote the chapter devoted to him in the book. "Everyone who goes to that sanctuary talks about Justice. He has such an aura around him, in the same way if you met a really profound person, you would get that same kind of thing. His lesson of just utter kindness and wanting to relieve other creatures' suffering and fear—it was very moving."



## a legacy of kindness

*I've loved animals all my life. When I was a boy in New Orleans, my household included ducks, chickens, and an Irish setter named Tim. After retiring in 2006, I had time to devote to our local animal shelter, where my mission is to spread the word about spay/neuter and adoption. My fabulous golden retriever Julie and I also visit local hospitals and nursing homes as part of the shelter's animal assisted therapy program.*

*I chose to become an HSUS Humane Legacy member because, being from New Orleans, I was especially touched by the rescue effort following Hurricane Katrina. It's an excellent example of The HSUS's work—they rescued untold numbers of dogs and cats, many of them ending up here in the Coachella Valley.*

— Neal Boden, Palm Springs, California

Join The HSUS's Humane Legacy program by leaving a bequest in your will or living trust. Contact us at 1-800-808-7858 or [bequests@humanesociety.org](mailto:bequests@humanesociety.org), or visit [humanesociety.org/bequests](https://humanesociety.org/bequests) for details.



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