



**UPDATE  
APRIL 2018**

I reckon this is probably the saddest update I have written. I guess there is truth in that old saying “when it rains it pours”, though of course even to type those words hurts at the moment. There has been no significant rain at all and that means we’re in for a grim winter as there is no growth in the paddocks and the duck dam has dried up. I’ve already begun buying hay to feed the sheep and goats and will have to continue this through until at least mid-spring. Each morning, the woollies and Virgil and Norman (the goats) are standing at their respect gates waiting for me to appear with biscuits of hay for them and we repeat this each evening. The true scope of the situation is brought to light every morning when I let the main duck flock out of their night house and some of them barrel off towards the dam only to find that, like yesterday, there is no water in it. While they have paddling pools some of them prefer the freedom and space swimming on the dam gives them. Sadly it will be months at least till they are able to do that again. There doesn’t seem to be any good news in the short-term with recent media reports that “seasonal conditions are worsening across 90 percent of NSW”, after the Bureau of Meteorology announced the first three months of this year were the driest for more than 30 years.



On Easter Monday, news broke that a truck carrying 108,000 one-day-old chickens had crashed on a major road about a half-an-hour from here. I knew it was only a matter of time before I was asked what assistance I could provide, as people associated with an organisation I work closely with and are great supporters of the sanctuary, Vegan ACT, made their way out to the crash site to search for survivors. They got there about 16 hours after the actual crash, which authorities claimed to the media had been “cleaned

up” and that 83,000 survivors had been put on a replacement truck and 25,000 had died and been buried. When these concerned citizens arrived at the site they could hear the chirping of chicks and began to digging, recovering 140 chicks who were still alive, yet burried. These chicks came here – sadly they haven’t all made it – some of them had visible injuries, others internal injuries. Those still alive will hopefully go on and enjoy a fulfilling life here and at another sanctuary (which has agreed to take some of them in), unlike those who "survived the accident" and were "saved" by the authorities only to be sent off to an intensive broiler farm, where they will have seven weeks to grow before they are collected and sent to an abattoir to become someone’s roast chicken.

There were so many things which made me see red over this including the warnings on media reports that: “some people may find the images distressing”; yet most of these same people have no problem cutting into a chicken breast or chewing on a chicken wing or leg... the hypocrisy of it all. And then the attacks began about the people who “took it upon themselves” to go and investigate. Through the media they were castigated by the authorities who said they should have contacted the RSPCA if they were concerned – yet it doesn’t appear the authorities, those responsible for the clean-up, did exactly that and the excuse seems to be it was a public holiday. Again the double standards angers. Here are some quotes from a media report:



*“The council said its employees worked for more than 15 hours to save 80,000 animals, while the dead chickens were buried.”*

*“This is a day where they’ve got a day off and they’ve been called to an emergency and they’ve put a 15-hour day in to assist with police to ensure other road users weren’t distracted by trying to avoid chickens on the road.”*

Video and photographic evidence collected during the recovery of the buried live chicks found on site have been passed on to legal representatives.

The first ten days with these surviving bubs is probably the most stressful I’ve ever experienced in the 20-years I’ve been living hands-on with the rescued and unwanted. From their arrival I knew most of these bubs were facing an uphill battle. They had just been hatched in incubators, packed into a truck, which then crashed and that was their first 24 hours of life. Given the chicks were being transported and hadn’t been debeaked was a sure indicator that they were broilers (chickens bred for their meat rather than eggs). Chicks in the egg industry are sexed after hatching – the boys being killed due to being of no economic value as they don’t lay eggs, while the hens are put into "growing sheds" for about 15 weeks before they are transport to farms to spend a year-and-a-half laying eggs before they are round up and killed. Plus broiler bubs aren’t debeaked as they don’t live long enough for aggression from being kept in such tight circumstances to begin to become an issue.

Past experience with rescued broilers has proven that most usually succumb to heart, respiratory or mobility issues within 12 months and that is due to the genetics of how they are bred. I am hoping that some of these bubs make it that far and beyond given the trauma of their first day on this world. And yes the whole irony of the timing of this whole incident being around the religious festival which is Easter isn’t

lost on me. Plus, it was, as I realised a few nights later while comforting one dying bubs that it had been 20 years from the first time I saw inside a factory farm in Australia and the horrors associated with it.



To top things off the other morning when I woke, surrounded as usual by some members of The Pride I became aware that one of them didn't respond to my shuffling feet under the covers. I switched the light on and there was Jasmine curled up like she was still sleeping but she was dead. I picked up her body and cradled her, as her sister Sasha, who arrived with her in 2009 was seated beside me. Usually Sasha wakes me wailing to be let out but not this morning. And Sox, the matriarch, and to be honest the one I thought would go first given her age and health, was sitting not far away. Jasmine hadn't been ill and was still her usual self the previous night when she came inside for dinner and bed. I guess it was just her time.

Death at a sanctuary like this is par for the course given many arrive here injured or suffering, though when a being, who has spent probably 95 percent of their evenings with you, curled up beside you, dies unexpectedly it is a little harder to take.

Jasmine had had a tough life. Before she and Sasha had come here they had gone through a few foster homes as no one wants to adopt older cats. I'll never forget the first day they went out exploring because it was the first time I saw a snake (a brown) and I had to coax them back inside before they investigated. Jasmine comforted me as I took medicinal wine to recover from the incident of seeing a snake in real life around my home – up until then I was an innocent little city slicker making a tree change.

Jasmine has now travelled the rainbow bridge to be reunited with some of those she knew during her time here and others who preceded her. It is taking me a few nights adjusting to not calling Jasmine and Sasha to come in.

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