

Today marks the 15th anniversary of A Poultry Place and this morning as I had coffee and watched the daylight emerge amongst tendering to various feline requests for pats, cuddles and breakfast, I flashed through the many happenings that have become part of my existence for the past decade-and-a-half.

At the time I established A Poultry Place, Atchin Tan, was the only other place in Australia I was aware of which was a sanctuary for rescued 'farm animals'. It was the place, not far from here where I lived for almost two years before setting up on my own. It is amazing to see how many other sanctuaries have since come into existence to provide more forever homes for these beings and promote better community awareness of how we treat those designated as 'farm animals'

I say 'farm animals' because I'm uncomfortable with that term — to me the word 'farm' evokes an image for most people of a place of peace and tranquillity but the reality is those designated as 'farm animals' are not allowed that, they are purely seen as economic units for humans to ultimately exploit. Instead, I choose to refer to those beings, designated as 'farm animals' as 'food animals' because ultimately that is how my fellow humans view them. However after 15 years sharing each day amongst their presence you change your opinion and realise 'food animals' can be just as affectionate as the cat or dog humans refer to as 'pet'.

There's been many, many highlights, no achievements, during that time that I am proud of including:

- * having provided temporary or permanent shelter to 2565 individuals;
- * working with organisations such as Animal Liberation NSW and Animal Liberation ACT (amongst others) on campaigns focusing on the way humans mistreat chickens, ducks and turkeys;
- * providing a space for fellow activists to come and spend some time with those they are campaigning on behalf of (while doing a few chores);
- * being invited to do a TEDx talk and various media interviews;
- * having someone write a song about me;
- * mentoring and advising others who want to set up sanctuaries catering specific for 'food animals';
- * getting some educational institutions to stop hatching projects.

And of course there have been lowlights:

- * The realisation that despite your best efforts you can say yes all the time to all requests for rehoming and then having to come to terms with your decision;
- * The realisation that despite your best efforts some beings are destined to have short lives because of the way they were bred and their treatment by humans;
- * Drought.

A few years ago when I referred to A Poultry Place as 'my baby' a person got quite upset — saying I couldn't compare what I did to being a parent. My opinion differs. After all, I have nurtured what was a barren block of land into a thriving environment, which not only provides sanctuary to those I take in but also provides much needed natural habitat to native mammals, birdlife and reptiles who have moved in. Furthermore, just like a human parent, I work to earn an income to pay for the wellbeing of those who live with me — their food, medical expenses and housing needs. Like a parent, I have to make decisions which affect those in my care and take responsibility for them. But apparently my analogy is shared by all — oh well

So far 2016 year has been busy with already 31 new residents joining us. Most have been hens, which

makes the task of introductions easier.

The reasons they have come here vary — people have been moving and couldn't take them with them for one reason or another and of course others have surrendered them because “they no longer lay”.

In most of the cases people were genuinely looking for safe homes where their feathered buddies could live out the rest of their lives, so it was a nice way to start the year - to be in a position to help out a few dozen feathered friends.



Two girls came here from a guy moving to Melbourne who had been unsuccessful finding “another chook keeper willing to take them because they stopped laying some time ago”. I told him this is a common attitude of many towards chickens — they expect something in return from them like an egg a day. He was genuinely surprised given that his gals hadn't given him an egg “for months” yet they were “part of the family”.

Four hens came down from Sydney for similar reasons: *“I currently own 4 free range chickens who have enjoyed the delights of a big backyard, and plenty of variety in their meals for the last 3.5 years. Sadly I am moving home and am not able to take my chickens with me. Our ladies have stopped laying recently, which while a little sad, actually wasn't a big deal for us, but is proving hard to find someone that would want to look after them going forward I was wondering if you know of any places who are like 'retirement' homes for chickens. A place where our chickens can see out the rest of their time in a nice space, maybe even alongside some other chooks?”*

On the other hand I also had to deal with this: *“our hens Chloe and Courtney have ceased to lay effectively so we're looking to replace them. We'd like to place them in a good home if possible to make way for the new arrivals.”* I discovered the chickens were named by his kids and considered to be “pets” — I couldn't help but wonder if the human offspring of this guy will be treated similarly when he and his partner grow tired of them

But the prize for the most stupid person I've had to deal with in recent times is this idiot: *“Hey I'm after some older hens. Ok if not laying. I have one hen left after the dogs ate the others. I just want some company for her so I'm just after some free birds that no one is after it wants to keep anymore if they are not laying.”* The fact that this guy was referred to me by someone who knows me just added to the situation — as if I would rehome hens to a place where they are free food to the dogs I told him I couldn't help but offered to take in his single girl — I got no response.

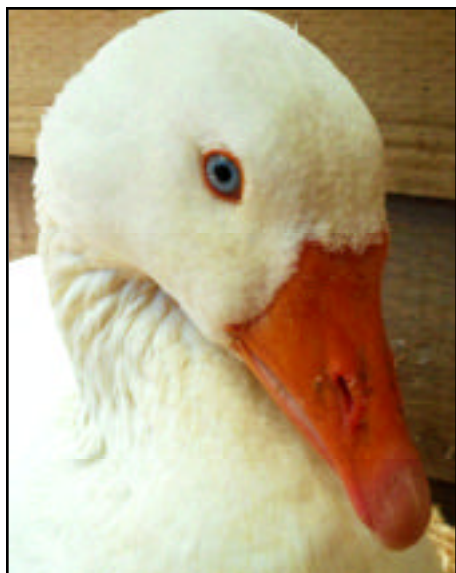
But it hasn't been all about the gals — a few new boys who have arrived — both results of school hatching projects. One of them was young Fluffy (pictured right), who was just eight-weeks-old when he arrived. I have managed to get him living with the other youngsters who I mentioned in the last update.



With the school year starting soon please remember to speak out against any plans to do one of these projects at your kids schools.

Towards the end of last year I agreed to take in two cats — Narla

and Shirin. They were the companions of an acquaintance Jacky, who tragically lost her life while on assignment overseas. I didn't know Jacky that well, but we immediately bonded the first time she came to visit A Poultry Place as we had lots in common — having worked as journalists and our interests in both animal rights and human rights — having worked for various related NGOs and having a few common current/former work colleagues. Jacky had boarded her two bubs at a cattery for her absence but sadly she did not return so her friends set about trying to find a forever home for them, which is when I got involved. I know rehoming adults cats, especially two who are bonded and need to stay together is not an easy task — so I said they could come here if there were no other offers. I felt it was the least I could do for Jacky. After six months in a cattery I thought it would take some time for Narla and Shirin to accept me but it didn't — within days they were happy in my company, talking to me, wanting pats and cuddles, rubbing themselves up against me — they accepted me as their new human. Jacky had rescued both of them so their background is a little unknown but from their behaviour she obviously let them know that there are some good humans out there. Given they had been in the cattery for so long I thought it would be weeks, even months before I could get them living with the other members of the A Poultry Place pride but miracles do happen and with weeks they were getting along fine with the others — Christian in particular (see photo).



Fittingly the last new face of 2015 arrived a few days before Christmas — a goose rescued by wildlife carers from a caravan park in a nearby village — no doubt most likely dumped there. No doubt you have heard the phrase “Christmas goose” when I googled the term I found this: “The goose has been perfectly created to make for the ideal Christmas feast. Geese are ready to be eaten twice a year. Once when they are young or ‘green’ in the early summer and again when they are at their fattest and ripest toward the end of the year after having feasted on fallen corn. It also has the softest fat in its category of animal.” Of course this newcomer is safe from ever being considered dinner and has fitted into the goose gaggle here.

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