

Freshman Seminar Class Travels to Woodstock Animal Farm Sanctuary

Written by KIERA LANNI | PHOTOGRAPHY/LEISURE EDITOR
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Dr. Christopher Hirschler's "Animals; Life, Death, Kindness and Sin," freshmen seminar class took a trip to the Woodstock Animal Farm Sanctuary on Saturday, Oct. 24th.

Eleven students from Hirschler's class, and a few outside members, went to the sanctuary for a tour from the sanctuary's co-founder Jenny Brown.

Hirschler's class explores the different ways people interact with animals, and how they affect our health, emotional, and social lives. There is a service component of the class as well. During the weekend, the students volunteer at the Monmouth County SPCA as cat socializers.

One of the assigned readings is *The Lucky Ones* by Jenny Brown. The peer learning assistant of the class, Amanda Sanford, a sophomore nursing major, said that the book had greatly affected the class. "We read the book in class, and a student inquired about taking a trip," she said.

The intention was for the class to be able to volunteer, but the farm had just relocated from Woodstock to High Falls, NY in order to be closer to NYC. Due to this, they were not able to handle a large group of volunteers at the time, but a tour was still possible.

Hirschler felt the trip would provide students with a perspective that reading a book alone could not give them. He said, "I think what's exciting is to be able to have those pages come alive. They just read about all those different animals and their personalities, and to actually be able to interact with and see the animals, and get to see and hear Jenny Brown. I think it will be powerful."

The trip was completely voluntary to the students in Hirschler's class. "Today was homecoming, so the students made a choice to come here rather than go to homecoming. I don't know, but I think this beats being drunk in a parking lot," said Hirschler.

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According to Brown's biography on Woodstock Farm Sanctuary's website, woodstocksanctuary.org, Brown had previously worked as a producer, director and post-production supervisor. She used to take undercover trips to stockyards in Texas to film the abuse farmed animals would face. These experiences made her decide to give up her career in TV, and dedicate her life to helping farm animals and giving them a voice.

Brown and Doug Abel opened their sanctuary in Woodstock in 2004. In the beginning they only had the chickens rescued from a factory farm and a rooster dumped in a NYC school yard. Their sanctuary has since grown in animals and support, and has recently moved to High Falls NY in 2015. The sanctuary now has over 300 animals rescued from abuse and neglect or donated to them.

When the class arrived to Woodstock Sanctuary, Brown greeted the group with her dog Sophie in tow. She brought the class through each of the animal's pens, including the chickens, the cows, the pigs, the sheep, the goats, and even a llama.

The students had the opportunity to jump into the pig pens, feed the goats and cows, and stroke all the animals while looking into their eyes to make a unique connection a book or video could not give them.

It was not just a petting zoo, however. Brown told each of the animal's stories, while explaining the cruelty that these animals face in the meat industry. Brown said, "I want people to meet them, to interact with them, to see them as individuals, and to stop eating them. If I can be a voice for them, that's why I do what I do. I want to raise awareness about their suffering."

Sanford felt the trip was very meaningful. She said, "It was educational, it wasn't just about looking at them or touching them. It was different from anything I've ever done before."

Naomi Lee, a freshman music industry major, said it was inspiring to see Jenny Brown in real life, and to see the animals described in the book in real life. "My favorite part was seeing the animals that were hurt and then seeing them rehabilitated, and the stories that Jenny was

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telling.”

Hirschler hopes to make the trip to the Woodstock Sanctuary an annual one. “Next year I think it will be more planned, earlier in the year, and it will include some volunteer work; three or four hours in the barn,” he said.

The sanctuary is always looking for volunteers. Steve, a volunteer, said there is a lot a volunteer can do. “Cleaning up after the animals, assisting on tours, helping maintain the grounds, cleaning the medical building, and helping deliver hay to different barns.”

Brown encourages college students to volunteer at her farm. She said, “You’re at an age where you start rethinking things, questioning your indoctrinations, questioning your upbringing, question society’s beliefs, and habits.”

Overall, Brown wants visitors to her sanctuary to think critically, to realize that animals are more than just food. Her mission is to make the world a more compassionate place, and the student’s in Hirschler’s class definitely felt that on their trip. Brown said, “I just want to do a little thing like change the world. I want to make the world a better place for animals.”

PHOTO TAKEN by Kiera Lanni

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