

Willoby

The door to the isolation room at The Dalles Animal Shelter opened to the deafening sound of barking dogs. Inside the room resided one forlorn little rabbit. She was in a small wire cage with a plastic floor, a water bottle, food dish, and a colorful mobile of wooden vegetables hanging from its roof. She sat alone in the room day after day listening to the barking dogs on the other side of the door. She had been there two weeks, and though the shelter was doing its best to accommodate her, she was clearly frustrated by her circumstances. The velvety brown rabbit placed her slender front feet on the door of the cage and looked inquisitively towards the people who had entered her room, all the while, biting the wire of her door. She hopped around in a small circle within her cramped quarters, clearly looking for a way out.

The shelter manager stated that the rabbit had come from a family that had gotten her at the county fair back in August. She had been a 4-H project. The family was getting rid of her because she had scratched their son's face and their plan was to release her into the wild. What changed their minds was a mystery.

As I listened to the shelter manager's story of the rabbit, I immediately began thinking of how I was going to get the rabbit out. I knew that I could not take her, as my home was occupied by a very large, old cat. It would be a bad mix, and I knew better than to chance a predator/prey combination. So, what to do?

I got busy looking up organizations that took in rabbits here in Oregon and made numerous inquiries. All had the same response "We're full" or "We only take rabbits that are on death row at the shelters." This was strike two, the first strike being that I could not give her a home myself. I had no more options that were suitable, and that was most discouraging. I called my mom to vent.

Now, you must know that my mother just happens to be Caroline of the Rabbit Sanctuary in Simpsonville, SC. My intention that afternoon was only to commiserate with the one person I knew would understand how badly I felt at not being able to help the little rabbit. I knew too, that the Sanctuary was at its capacity, and that Mom had just taken in three rabbits from the Greenville Shelter. So, it was a shock when she said that she could make room for one more rabbit!

I wasted no time in making the arrangements with the animal shelter to have the rabbit transferred to the care of the Sanctuary. I made the necessary flight arrangements and planned to have the rabbit to SC within a day. I was elated, but I should've known that things were going too smoothly. The next day, which was January 5, brought a snow storm that made traveling through the Columbia River Gorge more treacherous than usual. It was too risky to drive the two hours to Portland and there was a strong possibility that the flight would be cancelled. The rabbits exodus would have to be postponed. Was this strike three?

Because of the continuing bad weather, work commitments, and limited flight times, it would be another week before the rabbit could make her departure. I managed to visit with her throughout the week and to bring her fresh greens to eat. I quickly fell in love with her. She reminded me of a Rex rabbit I had the pleasure of knowing when I was a teenager. His name was Soy and he was a very special member of our family. This rabbit was also a Rex and possessed many of the same Rex characteristics as Soy. And, they were the same castor color. Her personality was sweet and friendly. She desperately wanted company, and was clearly fed up with her accommodations.

The week dragged on and on. When finally, Friday arrived, the scheduled day of the bunny's flight, all was in order to pick her up from the shelter. I collected her after work and took her home, where she would have a few hours of R&R. She didn't waste any time either! As soon as I opened the door to her carrier, she was out and rodeoing around the living room! She carried on exploring and racing around the living room for two hours! Clearly, she had some pent up energy. It was a joy to watch her. It was clear to me that she had not come from a family that had been unkind to her, as she was so at home and friendly. She seemed to have no fears at all, which I was very glad of.

The drive to the airport was uneventful, and soon the rabbit, who I named Willoby, was on her way to the Sanctuary. I was excited for her because I knew what kind of life awaited her there. Though she had not been mistreated, her future could have been perilous. She was almost set "free" which could have been her death. While at the shelter, a science teacher wanted to acquire her as a classroom "pet". Fortunately the shelter manager declined the teacher's offer. Adoption too has it's risks; one never really knows the fate of an animal once it is adopted out. Lastly, I'm truly thankful that Mom had room for "just one more". If not for her dedication to helping rabbits, "just one more" rabbit may have faced a perilous future.