

Spark & Ollie

By Becky Hummell

Last fall while walking on the beautiful grounds of the facility where I work, I noticed a large hutch nestled under a group of old oak trees. Two rabbits were housed in the hutch, separated from one another by an empty center pen. The wire hutch was securely built so the rabbits were safe, but that was the only good that could be said of it.

The rabbits had no bedding, forced to live on the bare unyielding wire. Their water dishes were slimy and their feed dishes were encrusted with moldy food. Feces was piled high in each rabbit's bathroom corner. I was saddened to see the conditions the rabbits were forced to live in; they deserved better. I did some checking around at work and learned that the two rabbits were once part of an educational program that was now defunct. Permission was granted to me to visit the rabbits when I wanted to, my aim being to have access to them and improve their living conditions. After thoroughly cleaning their hutch and scrubbing their dishes, I purchased fresh straw and piled it high in their pens to give them warmth and softness under their feet. Every evening after work, I brought them fresh greens to eat. But there they sat, day in - day out like two stuffed toys in a cupboard.

The winter of 2014 was exceptionally cold. One night the temperature dropped to nine degrees, and another night to eleven degrees. On one blustery Friday evening with a snow storm on the horizon, I hurriedly wrapped their hutch in clean heavy duty trash bags (it was all that was readily at hand), fastening them as best I could to the wooden frame of the hutch with my office stapler. I bedded them with extra straw then dispensed copious hay and pellets. Though they now appeared cozy and warm, I drove home from work worried about how they would weather the frigid snow storm that was headed their way. I would have to wait through the weekend and hope that the makeshift tarp would hold.

Monday brought more snow, which made it impossible to get to work. Tuesday was no better. As I watched the snow blowing and piling up outside my home, I could only hope the trash bag tarp was protecting the rabbits from the intrusive wind and snow. On Wednesday, the skies cleared and the temperature shot up to 40 degrees, which cleared the roads in a hurry. As soon as I arrived at work I went immediately to check on the two rabbits. Thankfully the trash bags had held through the strong winds and blowing snow. I could see the burrow each rabbit had made in its straw and in each burrow, a safe, warm bunny. They still had pellets and hay, but in each rabbit's water dish, there was a block of ice. I set about fluffing their straw and getting them fresh water and greens, which they were happy to have. They seemed to have weathered the snow storm just fine.

Because each rabbit was nameless, I had simply addressed each as "Bunny". As I got to know them, they became Spark and Ollie. Ollie has a brown and black tortoise shell coat and is the friendlier of the two. He has an inquisitive nature and loves to burrow in his straw. Spark, who resembles an Eastern Cottontail, is petite with sparkling eyes. Both rabbits are shy with people but Spark is especially so, perhaps as a result of his solitude.

As spring approached I feared that the rabbits, though well cared for now, had no meaningful life. They were merely existing, marking time in a wire pen. Each rabbit was aware of the other, yet utterly alone, and though their hutch was in a beautiful rural setting, they could not be a part of it. It was a sad existence for such gregarious animals. I mustered my courage and asked my employer if I could have the rabbits, and to my surprise and great relief, Spark and Ollie were relinquished to me. I wasted no time contacting the Rabbit Sanctuary to secure them a permanent home.

Spark now lives with Dottie (it was love at first sight), and Ollie lives with Morning Glory who arrived at the sanctuary last December. They spend their days digging in the dirt, eating, relaxing and socializing with their neighbors. A far cry from the isolation of their hutch under the oak trees. Thanks to the Sanctuary these two rabbits are no longer marking time, but enjoying each day to its fullest.