

## Introducing Rae Sikora

By Delisa Renideo

In last month's newsletter, I shared some of the joys of attending the Vegetarian Summerfest in Johnstown, PA with my husband, Charlie. This month I get to introduce you to a very special person we met there, Rae Sikora. As soon as I saw her walk up on the stage to address us the first night, I saw a radiant aliveness in her, and felt her energy filling the room with love and joy. We heard her speak several more times as

well as having the opportunity to visit with her personally. Both Charlie and I felt a real heart connection with her, so we asked her to write a column for our newsletter so she can share herself and her wisdom and experience with all of you, as well.

Here is Rae's story about her journey to becoming a vegan. Be sure to also read her delightful article about animal intelligence on the front page.

I was a young teenager when I walked into a leather store with my friend and told her not to buy anything because it was "just dead animals hanging everywhere." The sales clerk overheard our conversation and asked me one simple question that changed my life: "Do you eat meat?" At first I didn't understand the connection and was confused by the question. I then processed it all in less than a minute. I thought about the animals I loved, like the dog who was my best friend at the time and all the wounded wild animals I rescued. I was known as the "animal person" in my community. So, I turned to the clerk and said, "No I don't eat meat." My friend looked shocked since she had just seen me downing a hot dog before going into the leather

### My Story

by Rae Sikora



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shop. When we walked out of the shop, my friend asked me, "Why did you lie to her? You eat meat!" I turned to her with a smile and said, "I don't eat meat anymore. From now on, I don't eat meat."

Eventually I heard about these "strange" people who did not eat dairy or eggs and thought they were extreme. But, about 10 years after choosing to not eat meat, I was renting a small house from a dairy farmer in western Wisconsin. One day I heard bellowing

from my landlord's farm next door. I biked over to see what was happening and found my landlord loading small shaky calves into a truck. I asked what was going on.

"Oh, don't worry," he answered, "We are just taking the calves today. He explained *see My Story, continued on page 11*

***My Story, by Rae Sikora, continued from page 2:***

to me that there is no use for the male calves on a dairy farm, so they send them off within a few days of birth to slaughter or to a veal facility.

I didn't want to hear this information. I wanted to keep eating cheese and yogurt. I also

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didn't want to face being even more "fringe" in a world of meat and dairy eaters. I felt like I was weird enough. I went around the barn

and found the mothers with wide-open mouths bellowing and panicking. Some were pushing their chests against the barbed wire fencing and were bleeding. Now, I had no choice, I could not turn my back on what I was seeing.

From that day on I decided that I could not support the dairy industry unless I was willing to turn my back on the reality that eating dairy products means supporting the veal industry and years of suffering for cows. I became one of those "weird" vegans."



# Sharing Home

by Rae Sikora

We share the planet with a big, diverse animal family that we are just beginning to understand. If other species could speak our language, how different would our world be? How would we treat them? Non-humans have language, emotions, humor, strong bonds with their own and other species, feel pain and pleasure, are able to plan and calculate and can navigate in ways that we have yet to understand.

***If other species spoke our language, how different would our world be?***

Humans harshly judge other species as stupid or unfeeling when it is the humans, in fact, who have not yet developed a

way of understanding others. We have a difficult time understanding other humans who do not speak our language, so it is an even greater leap for us to understand other species. Most of us know  
*see Sharing Home, cont'd on pg 5*



## ***Sharing Home, continued from the front page:***

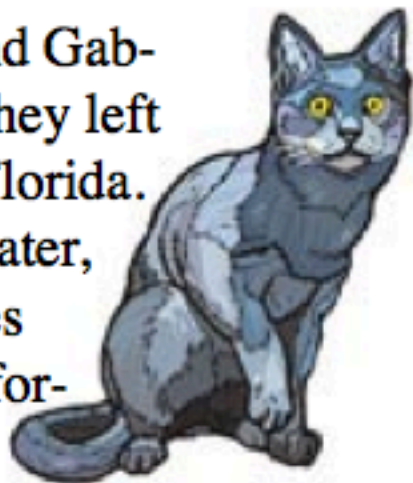
that dogs are much better at reading our emotions and thoughts and language than we are at reading theirs.

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Every day, scientists are discovering new ways to measure and understand the amazing abilities of non-humans. For example, recently, by using specially developed underwater microphones, it was discovered that fish have complex language and relationships and express emotions vocally. Scientists also discovered that for every note of a birdsong we hear, other birds hear ten separate notes. Elephants can measure the distance of an approaching sound by feeling the vibrations in their feet and can smell so precisely that they know if a bone belonged to one of their group.

Can you explain the following abilities of other species?

- When Charles and Gabriel moved to California, they left their cat, Tom, behind in Florida. Two years and six weeks later, Tom staggered into Charles and Gabriel's yard in California. Somehow, he had traveled across the entire United States to rejoin his family.



- In the UK, a two year old cow named Blackie was sold at auction to a farm. Her calf was also sold at auction, to a different farm. Blackie bedded down for the night at the new farm, but by morning, it was discovered that she had broken away and walked seven miles across unfamiliar territory to find her calf, whom she was nursing.

- In Russia, a mother cow went in search of her calf and managed to find her 30 miles away. She, too, had traveled over completely unfamiliar territory.

- Duck eggs were placed under a nesting hen next to her own chicken eggs. When they hatched, she raised the ducks as ducks by walking out on a plank and teaching them to swim, and raised the chickens as chickens.

If most other species designed an intelligence test for us humans, we would fail miserably at much of what they do effortlessly. They have the potential to be our best teachers and our closest friends if we open up to their world.

***If you have stories of animal intelligence you would like to share, please send them to [elaine@alaskaveg.org](mailto:elaine@alaskaveg.org). Also watch for more articles by Rae in future issues of the AVS Newsletter.***

***Rae Sikora is the co-founder of Plant Peace Daily ([www.plantpeacedaily.org](http://www.plantpeacedaily.org)).***