



ralph the poodle

WHERE ALL THE DOGS GO

Thursday, April 4, 2013

Interview With Dancing For Animals!

There are so many amazing charities out there that help animals and I love being able to talk with some of the people that are apart of them, because they seriously do so much to help out all the furbabies out there that are in need. I recently was able to talk to Liz at Dancing for Animals and she was so nice and wonderful. I also kind of feel like this interview is happening at a sort of appropriate time, because Dancing With The Stars is on TV so they kind of go hand and hand. Except not really, I just watch so much reality TV that I am almost always able to somehow connect it to something in my day to day life. That's a bad habit, but it would be pretty cool if the stars on Dancing With The Stars were dancing to help out animals in need. Anyway, enough of my rambling, here is the interview with the ah-mazing Liz from Dancing for Animals.

- Could you tell us a little bit about Dancing for Animals?

Dancing for Animals is a non-profit, 501c3, organization that is dedicated to raising funds via dancing activities in order to give grants to animal welfare organizations, to educate people about animal issues and abuses, to improve the lives of all animals, and to inspire community involvement and volunteering. www.dancingforanimals.org

- We really love the idea behind Dancing for Animals. How did the idea for this organization come about?

I've loved animals my whole life. When I was in highschool, I volunteered at a shelter. As I got older, I started writing letters to politicians about animal issues and became a member of many animal rights organizations. Over time, my involvement increased as I read more and more about animal issues and abuses. I became an ovo-lacto vegetarian in 1997 because I felt like a hypocrite when it came to eating animals. It became clear to me that if I couldn't look in the eyes of an animal and kill them myself, why could I let someone else do it for me? At that point, I'd also learned about the horrible cruelty involved in the food industry. With the knowledge I gain, I believe I have a responsibility to change in order to bring myself into alignment with what I believe is right. When I learned about the abuses to dairy cows and egg laying hens, I became a vegan. In 1998, I moved to a brownstone with a yard and started noticing all the cats on the streets of Brooklyn. My sister was already practicing Trap, Neuter, Return (TNR) which is the only humane method of caring for feral cat colonies or community cats. The cats are humanely trapped, spayed/neutered, their left ear is ear-tipped (so anyone can see they've been spayed/neutered), and returned to their colony where the caretaker provides shelter and food. This reduces the overpopulation, fighting and the spread of disease, and the number of cats killed in shelters. So, my sister coached me and, since then, I've managed a couple colonies and taken many cats off the street. I've led TNR workshops and coached many people on how to take care of the cats in their neighborhood. I also held screenings of the documentaries made by Tribe of Heart, www.tribeofheart.org, to educate people about animal issues. But, as a lot of animal activists do, I always had this yearning to work directly with animals and dreamed of an animal sanctuary. But, in reality I knew that there were many, many wonderful organizations doing the hands on work of saving animals. I also knew how incredibly hard it was to run a sanctuary. And there was one unifying thing they all needed, which was money. So, I decided that since I already had a source of generating income via my dance instruction that I would become a fundraiser to help the organizations already doing the hard work. People could have fun, learn how to dance, and help their fellow animals at the same time. Thus, Dancing for Animals was born. I've given grants to the Brooklyn Animal Resource Coalition (BARC), Slope Street Cats, Kitty Kind, Muffins' Pet Connection, Paws for Love, & Kodi's Club, I'm looking to give two more grants in the next couple of months.

- Where would you like to see Dancing for Animals go this year?

Mostly, I'd like to create a couple big annual fundraisers that people can identify with Dancing for Animals. At this point, it's still just me and my primo volunteer husband. I'm working on finding some dedicated volunteers to help me with this goal. I would love some volunteers with social media marketing skills, graphic design skills, and event planning skills.

Long term, there are so many things I'd like to do. Just a couple: I'd like to inspire people to hold dances all over the country and donate the money to DFA or their local shelter or animal welfare organization. I'd like to create a school curriculum that teaches kids to think about their relationships to animals in their lives and social/community responsibility, and organizational skills to create an event (dance) where the proceeds are donated to the animal welfare organization of their choice.

- What has been one of your favorite events that you have been able to do for Dancing for Animals?

I always have fun teaching dance. So, every class I teach for DFA makes me happy because I'm doing two of my favorite things: dancing and helping animals. I'm currently teaching Ballroom & Latin classes at Embark/Peekskill, www.embarkpeekskill.com. We just finished up a course in Argentine Tango. I believe the next course will be in West Coast Swing.

However, this year I have to say that I have really loved joining forces with Rational Animal (RA), www.rationalanimal.org, for their Mother's Comfort Project. The project brings volunteers together to sew beds and toys for shelter animals. I loved the idea, but could never make it to their sewing sessions. So, I asked Susan Brandt, the founder of RA if I could organize a Westchester chapter of Mother's Comfort Project. She was as excited as I was at the idea. So, I organized it and held the first session on March 2nd. A wonderful sewing store, Fabric Mart, in Yorktown Heights, NY donated their workshop space. RA provided the fabric and batting. DFA provided more batting and organized the event. Eighteen volunteers came and we made 132 beds and 79 catnip toys! The beds and toys were donated to the SPCA in Briarcliff Manor and Pets Alive Westchester. I'm planning on holding 4 - 5 sessions/year.

-If someone wanted to get involved in helping you with your ah-mazing organization, how could they do that?

As mentioned before, I'd love volunteers with marketing & event planning skills. But also, if anyone wanted to organize/create an event in one of the NYC boroughs, I would be thrilled and more than happy to brainstorm and help make it happen. And, if you don't live in the New York area, I'd be very excited for people to start holding their own dances or parties to raise money for Dancing for Animals. Or give the money to your local shelter. If I've inspired you, that makes me happy. I can be reached at lizp@dancingforanimals.org. Or leave a message at 212-946-1824. Donations can be sent to Dancing for Animals, 5 Hilltop Drive, Cortlandt Manor, NY 10567.

- We always have to ask about the pets of the person we are interviewing, so could you tell us a little bit about the pets you have? And do they ever get to help out in the Dancing for Animals day to day tasks?

Well, currently our animal family members include two cats and a young foster kitty (which I socialized from a colony in Ossining). I rescued Peeps from my backyard in Brooklyn when he was about 12 weeks old. I never saw a Momma cat or any other kittens. I thought he was feral, but as soon as I trapped him he turned into a mush and we fell in love. He is actually the only rescue we have ever kept in our family. Ellie was rescued from the Brooklyn CACC by a kind woman who saved her and her babies from being killed that day. We had just lost our beloved boy, Tigger, and were looking for a friend for Peeps. When we met the little boy which we named Desi B., we also met his Mom (now Ellie). No one wanted to adopt the mother, so we did. The beginning of this year was extremely hard as we lost Desi B. to heart disease. So, Peeps & Ellie are my only two family members right now. My crazy foster boy, Smokey, is now a love and such a cutie. He plays fetch! And, lastly, I still have one feral boy outside, Uzo. I relocated my Brooklyn colony when we moved to Westchester because no one on my block would take over the mantle of caring for them. Uzo is the only one left.

They all help by sitting in front of the computer and knocking papers on the floor. But, actually, the biggest way they have helped over the years is by tolerating the fairly constant in and outflux of cats in need who have lived in our office (in Brooklyn) and here in Westchester, in our guest room. I imagine what they're thinking, "Here she goes again...another one."

Thanks so much to Dancing for Animals for letting us interview them! We love their charity and think it is a pretty cool idea! If you all are interested in learning more about Dancing for Animals or would like to talk to them more, simply check out their website here. Once again, thank you so much to Dancing for Animals for letting us interview them!

Until next time,
Ralph :)