

Tower Hill Stables Animal Sanctuary

Annual Newsletter December 2022



Dear supporters, welcome to our annual newsletter – another year seems to have flown by in the blink of an eye...

We were hoping that post the lockdown years, things might start to return to normality, but now we seem to be in the midst of a *cost-of-living crisis* - which has unfortunately continued to erode the monthly and ad hoc support for the Sanctuary rescues :(

It's been another incredibly busy year as those who follow us on our social media pages will already know, but for those that don't we have picked out a few of the events to describe in detail in this letter, plus we have included a really nice interview that Fiona gave during the year which I'm guessing most readers may not have seen online.

And so... 2022 started with a series of problems – hmm, bit of déjà vu there. At the start of the year, we had some storm damage and quite a few trees came down at the new farm site. Thankfully no-one was hurt but it created a lot of work to get the rather large trunks cut up and moved away as they had fallen onto the yard area, breaking the fences of course too in the process – we also lost some Perspex roofing at the Asheldham site which has since been replaced.

Additionally, we had some burst pipes to deal with at the farm site outside in some of the stables as well as a leak in the house which came down into the Kitchen which was not exactly ideal.

The 3rd “*problem*” was that the tractor went wrong 😞 Given the scale of the operation and the size of the hard standing areas it is not feasible to keep them clear of muck by hand as we like to scrape down with the tractor twice a day – particularly important in the Winter time as the fields are shut off meaning that the 70 horses and around 50 cows are wintering in the barns and hard standing and believe you me when I say they can generate a considerable volume of manure on a daily basis which much be cleared onto the muck heap daily to maintain a suitable living environment.

So getting tractors fixed is always a major priority. Likewise, with the “things” that “attach” to tractors – as our trusty yard scraper was no longer “scraping” as its thick rubber scraper was completely worn out it had to be replaced, which was done in February



Old scraper on the left with Percy's new rubber bit fitted on the right. We apologise for the emaciated state of Fiona's arms. This is caused by a severe lack of protein, her having been vegan now for some 50 years (hehehehehe)

This year we rescued a number of race horses through a contact at a local racing yard.

As highlighted on the Panorama TV program this year, thousands of race horses are slaughtered each year – those fail to make the grade, get injured in training or break down on the course. Sadly very few are afforded any sort of retirement.

Belle was due to be shot, but we managed to get her to the sanctuary in time. She is a very beautiful girl and settled in happily at the new farm site.



We also welcomed Red, now called Mouse and Rose bringing the number of rescued ex-racehorses to 11



Little Maria was born at the sanctuary after her pregnant mum (Tia) was taken in.

Unfortunately and ultimately very sadly, Tia rejected Maria and had started to become aggressive towards her as the baby tried to suckle. We were forced to separate them apart from at feeding times when we would hold Tia as still as we could whilst her baby took milk.

However after a few days and nights, it started to become too dangerous as Tia really did not want Maria near her and we were risking injury to Maria and ourselves, so we made the decision to hand rear little Maria from that point.

She came home to the Sanctuary and we set up a pen in the house where she was fed with milk replacer every few hours.

At first things went well as Maria did well and we drinking all her milk up. However she developed a swelling on her front hoof which our vet treated with antibiotics, however it transpired that whilst she had had her mothers colostrum, she either did not have enough or it was not of sufficient quality to provide Maria with an effective immune system and she had contracted an infection which needed her to go to hospital for a scan.

Maria was taken to the Royal Veterinary College where it was revealed that the infection had got into her bone and tragically, there was nothing that could be done. We had had such high hopes after all the problems and treatment we had previously with Blossoms baby "Foaly" last year who had a similar infection, but hers had not entered the bone and had been successfully treated.

We were left totally bereft and heartbroken. But there isn't time to grieve for long - you have to move on as there are 500 plus animals at the Sanctuary who need us both to be 100% on our game 24/7.

In the summer we introduced a new sponsorship scheme called 'Sponsor a Nose'!

The idea being that supporters could select a piggy nose to sponsor on a monthly basis and we would then send the full picture of the chosen rescued pig for whom the sponsor would be helping to feed 😊

Here are the Piggy noses who were interested in being in the scheme – the scheme is still live on our website, so if you would like to sponsor a nose for someone – or yourself – please follow the link here [Nose — Tower Hill Stables Animal Sanctuary](#)



The animals had a treat in store when we were paid a visit by Jessica Bollywood who plays the violin and wanted to play music for the animals. We met up at the farm site where Jessica played to the cattle as they sat grazing in the River field overlooking the estuary. Watching the cows and some of the horses listening was an amazing experience.

Unfortunately when Jessica embarked on a rendition of the song called 1000 years to the Highland Gang, they thought we were going to make them watch all 3 of the Twilight films which featured this song – with hilarious results – see the video here [Facebook](#)

Throughout the year a number of our supporters did their own fund raisers to help us with the colossal feed costs and between them raised many thousands of pounds.

Mentioning just a couple, Hollie did a “stepathon” in which she did 50,000 steps in one day to help the gang and Lydia lost her locks in favour of a “buzzcut” to help the gang – Huge thanks to these guys who raised a couple of thousand pounds between them, and to all the other supporters who staged events/runs/marathons to help with the bills.

Towards the end of the Summer we were tagged a great many times concerning the fate of 4 little girl pigs. They were living at essentially what is a petting farm in Suffolk and were part of an un-planned litter.



Sadly, their brothers had already been slaughtered, but before this had been organised for the girls, one of the employees at the centre was trying desperately to find a place of safety for these little girls and had started a campaign on Facebook to save them and dozens of sanctuaries and safe places had been contacted to see if they could help

We probably had about a dozen people message us who, having seen the girl's plight wanted to know if we could help. However our initial response had been that given our existing workload and the very difficult financial environment we were not best placed to help. Besides, with over 300 shares of the appeal post, we felt sure that someone somewhere would step in...

The girls had a deadline to find a home before the petting farm owner had said they would be taken to their deaths and so as stress levels continued to rise for the girl who was trying to save them extra efforts were made to reach even more people who might have been able to help.

We kept an eye on the situation, but on the final day when we saw that no one else would help, we said we would take them as we could not just sit by and do nothing.

Explaining that we could only do this if additional funding was forthcoming, it was lovely to see so many new people took our regular monthly donations to help – some 50 people – which was fantastic and has enabled the girl's costs to be covered without placing further burned on our already somewhat burdened position.

The girls we placed into the area formally occupied by Stanley Snuffles Pig, who had previously decided to move house up to make his HQ in the stable nearer the back of the main stable block which he shares with Mr Chai ...& on occasion Janet 😊

The 4 girls, Suki, Hettie, Winter and Marilyn have done very well and are growing fast. They are going to be bigger than Florence, and probably will be as big as Janet and her sisters who also live in the main stable block (when not visiting Chai!). At some point we will integrate them with the Piggies who have free range of the main stable block – probably in the Summer.



A few years ago, Fiona had been asked to talk at the inaugural Himalayan Vegan Festival, but it had been delayed, and delayed again due to the international situation. However it finally went ahead in September and Fiona spent a few days in Kathmandu where she delivered a number of talks about her work and met with a number of supporters who were local and who had travelled to hear her speak.

In case you are not aware, Fiona uploads videos about the sanctuary animals, her running, eating and lifestyle to her Patreon page which is exclusive for her Patrons who support her – some 130 people.

There are over 140 exclusive videos on the platform which you can join from just £1 a month with all proceeds going to help the sanctuary animals. We kept the minimum subscription low as we realise that existing sanctuary supporters might also want access to these videos, but access can only be gleaned with a subscription to Patreon. So hopefully an extra pound a month is achievable for those that might be interested, or we thought that supporters can reduce their existing sanctuary subscription by one pound, to balance it 😊

Fiona’s Patreon is at www.patreon.com/fionaokes

Fiona received a call from a local farmer who had taken in a feral cat some months earlier, which he had been feeding, however she had just had kittens and they did not want to keep them. He asked if we would take them. We waited till they had been weaned and then collected them.



They are very naughty indeed and currently living with Biscuit at the Asheldham site.

On the left is Marie, Pebbles, Fred and on the right on the other side of the glass is Mr Biscuit who has been wearing that look of bemused consternation for some time now



Just to mention a couple more animals who were saved this year having nowhere else to go – Doris & Olive the Pigs arrived a few weeks ago and are at the new farm site.

They will move up to Piglet Wood in the Summer where there is a purpose built enclosure for them to live in.



Lastly, we were contacted by a farmer who had 3 very young highlands, well 2 Highlands and one Vaynol (similar to a highland) who were not 'doing well' – i.e., were not gaining enough weight to be worth the effort for the farmer – so he wondered if Fiona would be able to give them a home...

They are very small, but doing well and have all integrated with the main Highland herd ☺ - Artemis, Ardonis and Dennis

As mentioned at the beginning of this newsletter, below is an interview Fiona did with Vegan for the Animals back in June



Jordi Casamitjana interviews the amazing super-vegan activist Fiona Oakes who for decades has been spreading the vegan message breaking marathon records while looking after animals in need in her sanctuary in England.

I feel humble.

Every now and then you meet someone who makes you feel humble. You do lots of things, you keep yourself busy, and you achieve many of the goals you were aiming at, but you still feel that it is not enough. And that is because we tend to compare ourselves with others, rather than just value our progress for what it's worth. So, when we meet people who work much harder than we do, achieving amazing feats that most people can never get close to, and doing it almost as if it is not a big deal, it humbles you. It makes you reconsider the magnitude of things, and you feel smaller.

This is not a bad thing, though. We all carry an ego with us — well, most of us, the non-enlightened humans, do — which tends to get inflated by itself over time, distorting the perception of who we are, of how big and important we are. And then we fall into selfishness, arrogance, disdain, petulance, conceit, and all these types of negative emotions which may be useful survival tools in special circumstances, but most of the time do us more harm than good. So, when we witness something that has the effect of deflating our ego, this is a healthy thing for us — and anyone around us. And when that happens, you experience a very distinct feeling. You feel humble, and that humility feels right, feels good, feels healing.

The last time I had this feeling was a few weeks ago when I interviewed someone who I wanted to meet for a long time. I had attended several talks/interviews of her before, watched documentaries about her, read about her achievements, and I even spent an afternoon with some colleagues of mine doing some maintenance work to her extended “home”. But I never had a chance to have a conversation with her, until now. So, I was extremely pleased to interview Fiona Oakes, the amazing vegan activist who has gone where many have not gone before.

She is something else. It's hard to try to define her in a way that makes her justice because, in some respects, she appears to be a combination of contradictory personas. For one side, she seems super-human, achieving amazing feats of endurance and physical prowess, breaking unbelievable marathon records which only the most elite athletes can get close to, and working incredibly hard not just competing but looking after hundreds of animals at her Tower Hill Stables Animal Sanctuary in Essex, England (she wakes up every day at half-past three in the morning and only has one meal a day). On the other side, she seems very down to earth, very unsophisticated, very real, very unprivileged, very earthly, very unpretentious, and very humble. For one side very extraordinary and for the other very “ordinary”.

Meeting her was like how I think it would feel to meet a revered Buddhist monk, who lives a simple life of austerity and service, but then achieves extraordinary feats of physical and mental endurance. But that analogy does not quite work as Fiona feels far more “normal” than that — not in an ableist way but in the sense that she feels like one of us, not an enlightened being who has already left us.

On the homepage of the Fiona Oakes Foundation, you can get a pretty good summary of her physical achievements:

“Fiona has competed in over 100 marathons and finished in the top 20 in two of the world's Major Marathon series (Berlin and London), along with winning the Main Start and placing

top 20 in the Great North Run. In conjunction with an illustrious road Marathon running career in 2012 Fiona became the first vegan woman to complete the gruelling 'Marathon de Sables' — a race she has completed twice more since — and in 2013 won the North Pole Marathon (yes, at the North Pole!) and it's 'sister' race the Antarctic Ice Marathon. She now holds four Guinness recognised World Records in endurance events including being the fastest woman to run a Marathon on every Continent. Fiona's successes are even more impressive when one learns she lost a kneecap as a teenager, causing her to experience constant pain when running."

But that's the thing. Despite all this, she is not really an athlete as such. Despite beating elite athletes at what they do best, she is not an elite athlete herself. She is a vegan activist because the only reason she has broken all those records is to be able to promote veganism to a wider audience and help more animals in need. Every single race she has run she has done so with a vegan body, as she has been vegan almost her entire life. And when she is not running for the animals and ethical veganism, she is working hard to look after 500 or more animals living at her sanctuary. Her activism does not stop. Everything she does is a form of activism. Everything she does is for the animals.

Do you want to know how she does it? Well, she'll tell you herself.

Fiona's Vegan Journey

Some vegans have been vegan for so long that they cannot remember when they become vegan. For Fiona, being her and being a vegan are the same thing. She has always been the ethical vegan she is today. Therefore, she has to rely on others to tell the beginning of her vegan journey:

"I never really remember a pivotal or a light bulb moment. I'm going back to my mom to actually convey to me how I was behaving as a child because it's kind of pre my memory. All she remembers is that I was always very drawn and attracted to animals in terms of wanting to nurture them, and wanting to care for them. So, for instance, she remembers I never had a dolly. I always had cows and cuddly toys that were always like that.



It was a total rejection of meat from a very early age. I wouldn't have it near me. It's almost like I knew internally, rather than as a thought process. And I think, when I was three, I was just rejecting pretty much food. She had to be very careful what she fed me, so I just got by on vegetables. We never had milk in the house. That was something that my mum couldn't stand either. And then, I think it was that after the age of about three, four, or five, I started to be able to articulate what I was feeling in a little bit more understandable way.

I realised that I didn't become vegan at age six because I didn't know what a vegan was at age six. I just knew what I was, and it was my personal preference. It was who I am. It was just expressing who I am.

I was brought up in a very working-class area in middle England and the Midlands. My dad was a miner and my mum was a pianist, a music teacher who turned to nursing slightly later in life. So, I wasn't brought up in some privileged bohemian kind of environment. It was nothing like that. And there were no vegetarians in my family, let alone vegans. But my mom had had a music teacher at the grammar school she went to who was a vegan lady, who knew Donald Watson, and she was able to articulate to my mum in adult terms what I was feeling — and likely subconsciously thinking — as a child. And without her, things might have played out differently.

My mum has always been supportive, so I had one person in my life that absolutely understood. She didn't really understand veganism, she didn't really understand the love of animals, but she knew something was very different. I got an older sister who was completely the opposite of me, so my mum sensed — as mums do — that something was different in her child, and she supported me.

And it was a very rough journey. She got a lot of peer pressure from my family; my grandparents, my father, and my sister even, for allowing me to be vegan. But then, it developed into something more, in that my mum went to nursing in later life, and I was hospitalized quite a lot in my teenage years through an orthopaedic condition. Back then, veganism was aligned with an eating disorder, and my mum was accused of child abuse for allowing me to follow this path. It was very difficult because bearing in my mum was then training to be a nurse. We were relying solely on her salary in the house, a lot of pressure was put on her — because my dad was on strike — and it was difficult. It was quite traumatic.

Her argument was that the only abuse would be to lie to her child and force her into doing something that in later life she would regret — forcing her to try and eat meat or dairy.

I can remember that I just loved animals. I didn't want to harm them. I didn't want to harm my family. I consider animals, all animals, and all humans, as part of my extended family, and I do not wish to inflict anything upon any one of them that I would not wish to have inflicted upon myself. And that's basically it. I'm vegan for the animals."

The Sanctuary That Was Never Planned

You may think that opening an animal sanctuary is something that requires years of planning if you do it at a scale where you will be responsible for the well-being of hundreds of big animals for life. It's not always like that:

"After being vegan for a few years, it was my dream to have a sanctuary. I never thought it would become a reality. I'm not from a privileged background. I never saw a way of having it anywhere where I could keep animals and nurture them. My dream became a reality in 1996.

I had been doing rescue in a very small way from my own property and renting land from farmers. I've got eight rescued horses. One of them, a retired racehorse that I've been rehabilitating for several years, had an accident at the farm where they kept him due to the negligence of the guy who owned the land. He allowed people to go on there and shoot rabbits when I was at work. Oscar, being a racehorse, became very frightened at the gunshots. He'd run into a fence and nearly lost his hindquarter. He was 13 weeks at the vet, and at that



point, it was like we'd been standing on this precipice not knowing how to jump or not jump. But we just had to do something because we realised that there was no way I could continue trusting these beautiful creatures that I cared for more than life itself to somebody who didn't share my values.

As a family, we vowed that if there was any way possible, we were going to try and raise enough funds to find a deposit to buy a place where, if Oscar could come home, he could come home to somewhere that I could care for him on my terms. And that's how the sanctuary started. I didn't start a sanctuary. I started a place of sanctuary for the animals who I'd already rescued. I was like grabbing an opportunity. A complete curveball had been thrown at me and that was the pivotal moment. It was recognising it and 100% going for it. And just running with it.

Fiona Oakes with Rosie at Tower Hill Stables Animal Sanctuary

It was tough to raise the deposit to even get the huge mortgage to buy the place. I had a great aunt, auntie Nancy, who was 98. When my mum told her what was going on, she went to a bed and underneath the mattress, she got a thousand pounds in a sock for funeral money. And she said 'just take it and give it to Fiona. We've got to make this happen.' So, it wasn't something that was just handed to me on a plate. It was all my family, great aunts, grandparents, and everybody, just pooling together to try and make this ultimate dream come true for the animals.

It's just outside of London, in a place called Essex. The sanctuary has grown. With horses, you can put them on liveries, but can't put a cow on livery somewhere, you can't put a pig on livery. You've got to have your own place. And it's just grown and grown from there. Now I've got around about 500 animals. We've got a huge herd of cows, a huge herd of horses, I've got four different sites. It's just expanded.

I couldn't have planned it. It was the seizing the moment and running with it for the animals. And literally, there were no role models; no plan to follow. It was like making it up as you go along, and just sensing that there's an opportunity and I've got to seize it.

I'm a realist. I see the magnitude of the problem we're facing, what have I got to shout about. Animals are suffering, people are suffering, the climate is suffering, the world is suffering, and humanity is suffering. I'm just doing a tiny little bit, trying to make a tiny little bit of a difference. I don't want to be put on a pedestal. I've not got any great talents. Rather than moaning about what I haven't got and I can't do, I'm trying to identify what I can do, and going with that.

After a few years, I realised that this is not good enough. It's good for the animals who I can physically touch at that very moment, but at the end of the day, it's not solving the problem. It's really not getting to the root of the problem.

Some people say it gives you great joy to see the animals at the sanctuary. Yeah, for sure it does, it's beautiful. I'm looking out the window now and I've got three elderly cows on my lawn, yes, that's great, but I don't tend to look out there and see Rosie, Ermintrude, and Dawn, the three elderly cows. I see all the Rosies the Ermintrudes and the Dawns that are going through these horrible situations every day that I can't help. The faceless victims, if you like."

Like many genuine vegan animal sanctuaries, the Tower Hill Stable Animal Sanctuary — where I have volunteered once enjoying seeing how content the animals are in the big space available to them — needs a lot of work and funds to feed the animals, so if you can help them please do by going to their website and learn how you can help.

Running for Good



Fiona Oakes running for Vegan Runners

At one point, as a real-life Forest Gump, Fiona started running...well, it wasn't quite like that. She first became a vegan firefighter woman in a world of carnist firefighter men — to show them what veganism can do — and then, this happened:

"I joined the fire brigade, and I did that for a year or whatever. I then thought 'this is still not enough. I really want to showcase veganism in a positive light. What can I do?' This was back in about 2001, and at the time, in the UK, Paula Radcliffe was doing really well in the marathon, and she was breaking world records, doing really well. It got all the hashtags attached to it. The toughest event on the athletics

calendar, mentally and physically 'brutal', you've got to be extreme, etc. I thought 'this is what I want to say I am, and I'm vegan'. So, I thought, 'well, if I can just compete a marathon, that's got to be definitive proof that as a vegan person, you can do anything. And that's when I set about trying to train for a marathon. It was just, 'if I can do that, that's great.' And I didn't expect two years later to be standing on the elite star at the London marathon next to Paula Radcliffe. That was another dream come true.

I went off and I did my world records. It was very difficult. It wasn't something I wanted to do. I didn't particularly want to be away from the sanctuary running and I didn't want to travel that much. Somebody has got to get out there and break down these stereotypes that if you're vegan you eat lettuce, and you look like you've just been drugged up. Somebody's got to do something. And nobody was doing anything. So, I thought, 'okay, if I can, I will.'

That's how we started Vegan Runners. Back in 2004, I was running for an affiliated club. You have to run from an affiliated club to get on certain start lines, wearing a vest. So, Peter Simpson and I were running for the vegetarian cycling and athletics club because it was the only running club that had any sort of relation to the reason we were actually running.

When I started getting in really good times, winning races, Peter said, 'you do realise you're going to be on the elite start, you're going to be starting with the best women in the world, you're going to be 45 minutes ahead of the main field and all the other runners? What about we try and start a vegan running club where subliminally people cannot deny that word out there?' I can't go around a race with 50,000 runners in Berlin or London and say 'Hi, I'm Fiona Oakes, I'm vegan...' You can't do that. But if you put yourself in a position where there's an elite enclosure, and somebody in a vegan vest is walking alongside Halle Gabriel Selassie or Eliud Kipchoge, that's undeniable proof, visual proof to everyone, that vegan equals excellence. Veganism equals the best. And that's when we started vegan runners. Back in 2004, Peter did the administration legwork, and I did the legwork running. And now, that's grown to this massive club with a huge membership.

I was only ever out there running because I wanted to promote veganism in a positive, peaceful, and proactive way. It was never anything about athletics for me. I run for the animals. I never particularly feel very proud of anything I've done because animals are suffering and I'm not proud of that."

If you want to see what running these sorts of races is like, it's worth watching the feature-length documentary *Running For Good*, directed by award-winning filmmaker Keegan Kuhn (who also directed *COWSPIRACY: The Sustainability Secret*, and *What The Health*), which is following Fiona's attempt not only to set a new global record in endurance racing but to compete in the "toughest footrace on earth:" the Marathon Des Sables.

Running for Good can be watched on Amazon Prime Video for free

Media Hostility and Manipulation



Fiona Oakes running in the Sahara

Fiona quickly learnt what she was up against. She thought that being the best while being vegan would immediately open the eyes of many people about veganism — as around that time most people still believed that it was unhealthy — but what she learned was how much powerful the

animal agricultural industry was in trying to silence her message.

In particular, she discovered how hostile the media was. I can't imagine how disappointed and heartbroken she must have been in seeing how all her hard work to send the vegan message out there in mainstream society was constantly sabotaged by the media. If you think I am exaggerating, read this:

“People do not understand how alien vegans were to people before social media came along. And it's only in these past few years that it's become almost acceptable and mainstream. People were aggressive towards vegans. I've got countless stories of hostility from mainstream media and commercial press to acknowledging the fact that I was vegan, and that was the only reason I was out there. If veganism ever made the headlines, it made it in a negative way.

In 2016, I came back from the big multi-stage race in Namibia, having done really well in it — with all the kind of sexy bits attached, like lions chasing the back runners, and all this kind of thing. And out the phone rang, and it was the BBC. I thought they would ask about the race that I just had done, but they were asking about a woman who died on Everest. They wanted me to comment on it because she was vegan. I said ‘well, I didn't know, but I dare say, like many other people who sadly passed away on Everest, it's because it's a very dangerous place to be. I'd had a friend pass away in the Himalayas the year before who wasn't vegan.’ And then he kind of tried again and he said ‘what about this case of the vegan child in Italy who was malnourished?’ That's what it was very much like.

Sadly, for the road marathons that I ran, I kept upping the game almost because I wasn't getting the publicity I thought for the vegan cause. They latch on to the facts ‘firefighting animal sanctuary owner with one kneecap wins the marathon.’ I remember, about 2012, the Daily Mail did an article about ‘Inspirational Woman of the Year’, and I'd done the interview. I remember thinking ‘this is brilliant; this is mainstream people who are going to see what I've done, and why I've done it. The reason behind it. They're going to have to acknowledge that.’ So, my mom toddled off to the local newsagent to get 50 copies of the Daily Mail. I'm reading through it, and it never mentioned the fact that I was vegan.

These things have been a real heartbreak to me. It's almost as if things have been manipulated in a certain way to not showcase what I want to show. I did an article for Runner's World. A very mainstream global running magazine. They were showcasing I've come top 20 in London marathon, top 15 in Berlin. I'm a complete amateur who's told they would never walk again properly, let alone run. I'm proudly running with my vegan runner vest on, and it was a real big thing to get a full three-page spread in a magazine. And when I opened the magazine, I was really disgusted, because there, in the first line, was that I'd come top 20 in my age group. Now, I'm not devaluing any age group runner, but I've come top 20 overall. It was almost like it was engineered to dilute the magnitude of what I've done.

In 2013, when I returned from the North Pole marathon, BBC breakfast did contact me. They said, 'you could come to Salford; we want you to open and close BBC breakfast.' I've cracked it. This is what I wanted. The phone rang about half an hour later, after I'd been off the initial conversation, and they said 'we just want to run through a few things; like arrangements, what time you'll get there, hotels, all this kind of thing. And, by the way, we don't want you to mention the fact you're vegan.' They just didn't want to know about that part of my life.

When I got back to the UK in December of 2013 after my marathons, absolute blank. Nobody was interested at all. I had somebody from the Daily Mirror lined up who wanted to do an article, but in the end, he said, 'look, I've been told I can't do it. I've been told no. A lot of the advertisers pay our wages, and we're not going to do a country advert for everything that they're promoting by doing a big spread on you.'

It was that year when James Wilks first had the idea of making the film: The Game Changes. He had actually come to the UK, and I was the only vegan athlete at the time that was out there doing anything. He came and filmed me for three days just before I went to Adelaide for the Australian leg of my world records. He went back to Hollywood, and for more than two years, he couldn't get any funding for the 'Game Changers', because there was no interest. It was a blank. It was taboo.

Imagine how hard this was before social media. Can you imagine what it was like? The only tool you'd got was the mainstream media and press. And trying to get them on board was a monumental challenge, to say the least. You couldn't just say what you wanted. You couldn't just be who you wanted. It has been a very tough and challenging path. But you don't give up, because any amount of mental or physical suffering that I say I've gone through, is trite when you think about the animals, and how much they are suffering. So, you just get on with it, and literally, take your vest, put your Plymouth on, and keep going. That's how I've always managed my life."

And she keeps going indeed. As I write this, Fiona is in Africa training for Running for Good Ultra, a seven-day 250 Km run in the Sahara desert starting the 20th of October 2022, done for the good of each other, the animals, the planet, the environment and the future generations.

What About Plant-based Fake Meat?



Fiona Oakes winning the Antarctic Ice Marathon

For the first ten years, I was a vegan, I eat lots of junk food. I felt that I was vegan for the animals and the environment, and my health did not matter much. I was, of course, wrong, as without good health you cannot help any animal — in the same way, that when you are flying on a plane the flight attendants instruct passengers to put on their oxygen masks first before helping others to get theirs in the case of a drop of pressure. Therefore, in my second decade as a vegan, I gradually move away from junk food and embraced the wholemeal plant-based diet. Part of that path has been gradually reducing my consumption of fake meats and plant-based food that tries to replicate what fully meat-eaters consume, as not only are unhealthy than the plant-looking-plant-food-minimally-processed alternatives, but I don't think are a good

strategy to get us to the vegan world sooner. Fiona has been breaking physical endurance records all over, so her diet must be one of the healthiest on the planet. Therefore, I asked her about her view on fake meat products.

“I think it's just commercial exploitation of the animals in a different form, to be honest with you. Probably I am an idealist. I can only speak from my own perspective, but if you see wrongdoing and genuinely feel wrongdoing, you don't need some fake replacement product to stop you from doing wrong.

I don't buy into the replacements, like the vegan butcher, and things like that. To me, veganism isn't just about food. It's about the whole way you live your life and perceive the life around you. All I see is that people say veganism is about health. I just see people buying into this highly processed food, appallingly packaged, transported, and produced. Very expensive and complete rubbish, which I don't have myself. I've no wish to have that sort of stuff.

I eat one meal a day and I eat very basic food. I don't feel the need for replacements because I've never had the products in the first place. And I've never craved them or wanted them when I knew what it involved to produce them. I've got 500 other mouths to bother about. I've got food. I don't go to bed wondering where the next meal is going to come from. I don't go to bed with a hungry stomach.

Vegetables are what I eat; very locally, very humbly. It's very basic and inexpensive. What always gets me is when people say, 'oh, but being vegan is really expensive'. It's as inexpensive, or as expensive, as you choose to make it, if you're prepared to put the effort in. I don't really care if I live off beans and potatoes for the rest of my life so long as nothing has

suffered to give me what's on my plate. So, yeah, the one meal a day. I am very busy. I get up at half-past three in the morning, and I work. I thrive on work.

I've been dealing all my life with what seems like an absolutely hopeless situation for the animals, but at least I haven't been in a situation where I've been rendered helpless. There have been things I've been able to do along the way to make a difference for them, even if it's only a tiny difference. I've got a body and the mind that sustain me to be able to do that, and I turn out and I work. And through work, I kind of lose myself. I sit down at the end of the day, and I enjoy my meal. I'm lucky."

Do Only Non-Human Animals Matter?



Fiona Oakes at the finish line of the North Pole

Despite Fiona talking in such a colloquial style that makes you think she may be a local villager who spent her entire life in the Essex countryside, we should not forget how far she has travelled all over the world — who among us has been to Antarctica and the Sahara Desert? She has

been around and must have seen very interesting stuff, stuff happening to animals, and to people too. I asked her what is her opinion about those who say veganism is only about animals, and vegans should not waste time on humans in need.

"I think there's too much anger in the world, too much toxicity in the world. I don't know where we're going with that. I've got some dislike of social media. I think it's a great tool, but it's become a very toxic environment to live your life through. I just want peace for everyone. I want people to let go and stand back and think. I just want peace for the animals because the animals are innocent. I can see why people lose faith in humans because there always tends to be an alternative agenda. And the animals don't have that.

I'm very much into this holistic approach. I believe life's a big cycle and I think we should help each other. I can see the perspective of people who see other humans as evil instigators of the world's decline. They've got no time for the environment; they've got no time for people.

For me, I think, we should help each other. I truly do believe that.

I've got an abhorrent distaste for suffering, whether it be humans or non-humans. I can't stand the idea of suffering and making another creature suffer. The planet, the environment, and each other; will we ever work together? Possibly not. Possibly it's just an ideal.

It's very easy to go out there and be negative. It's very easy to sit there and think there's nothing I can do and get very angry about it. But that tends to just engender more anger back. I found that doing something positive — i.e., running — peaceful, and proactive, going out there and showing what you can do, is just my way, rather than just shouting angrily at people and telling them what to do.

Until we address the way we treat animals, we will never treat each other better. While we judge another creature and its fate on the way it appears to us, we're never going to get past this judgmental side of how we see each other. I think that we are constantly trying to solve problems in the wrong way. If it was a building, we're coming on the ground floor or the second floor, and we need to get to the foundations of how we perceive life, and what is important. And that's all based around how we treat animals and what we inflict on some animals."

When earlier I tried to describe my impression of Fiona saying it was like meeting a Buddhist monk, I mentioned that I don't think this was quite the right analogy. But I have found a better one now. For me, meeting Fiona was like meeting a time traveller. Someone who lived in the future vegan world and travelled back in time to ours. Someone for whom being compassionate, and being an ethical vegan, is the most normal thing to be — as everyone will be in that world. A futuristic traveller with a determination, endurance, and physical drive that seem paranormal now but must be standard in that future world, where for generations people live in plentiful austerity, mindfully eating a few plants and not wasting any time in mindless quarrels and violence. Someone who cannot believe what is happening to the animals right now because their ordeals were inconceivable in her world. Someone who is one of us, perhaps just a better version of ourselves, but still us. Someone who has not abandoned anyone and is working hard to liberate all sentient beings.

Fiona looks like someone who, one step at the time, one animal at the time, is trying to return to the vegan world she once might have lived in. And she is doing that by being a totally dedicated complete vegan activist tirelessly reaching out to everyone.

Positively and proactively running until peace returns for all



How can you help the sanctuary?

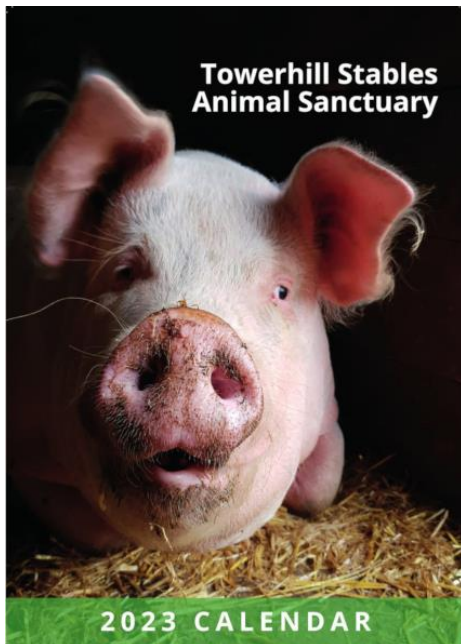
Firstly huge thanks to everyone who is already helping us with the running costs of caring and feeding so many rescued animals. It does require a colossal sum each month to carry on – approx. £30,000 each month.

This breaks down as around £22k feed and the balance is vets bills, farrier costs, rents for the 4 yards we currently use (in addition to the Tower Hill Stables site and Gracedale Farm site), muck heap removal costs, straw/bedding, maintenance, disposals, repairs, vehicle costs and improvements. A lot of money, but less than £2 per day per rescued animal which we believe represents extremely good value 😊

Monthly support is of course the most important way of helping, as our costs are ongoing and committing to help each month is hugely important in ensuring our longevity. As we mentioned earlier, the cost of living crisis which has followed the last 2 years of chaos has seen monthly support decline and we are currently around £5-7000 short each month (donations vs. costs) This year the shortfall has been covered by our reserves and also a couple of individuals have been incredibly generous, but if we are to continue, we do need to find more supporters willing to donate a pound or more a month as our reserves will not last forever.

We have over 30K followers on Facebook – if just half of them donated 50p a month the animals would be secure

Our website has all the details on how to set up a regular donation at this link here <https://www.towerhillstables.org/donate-1>



Our website also lists the many other ways you can support the sanctuary – from helping to promote it through wearing our range of [Tee shirts](#), from [shopping online](#) and earning commission without costing you a penny to volunteering. Check out the ‘**Ways to help**’ link at our website [here](#)

We have calendars again this year which can be bought for a suggested min donation of £12 (production cost was 100% increase on last year’s batch which we suggested a £10 min donation. 😊)

All the images feature the rescues at the sanctuary and were taken by volunteers 😊

You can grab your copy at this link [here](#)

Fiona’s bespoke cross running shoes are still available [at this link here](#) with 10% of the proceeds going as a donation to the sanctuary

Signed copies of Fiona’s book are still available [at this link here](#)

Our 'Wishlist' is continually being updated with items that we need and that will help make things easier - it can be viewed [at this link here](#)

Individual fund raisers are of course another great way to raise funds – Fiona herself ran 52 miles on Christmas Eve (all update videos on her [Patreon](#) page) and raised an amazing 52 hundred pounds!

52 miles on Christmas Eve for the Animals

£5,267 raised of £7,000 goal

227 donations

Share

Donate now

Jane Christopoulos
£50 - 10 hrs

Sandra Wilson
£10 - 3 d

Clare Walker
£25 - 3 d

Natalie Khoiz
£20 - 4 d

Kerry Lashley
£5 - 4 d

See all

See top donations

Fiona Oakes is organizing this fundraiser to benefit Tower Hill Stables Animal Sanctuary.

Percy will be running a double marathon (with his assistant & trainee Fiona) on Christmas Eve, starting at around 7pm and finishing all being well on Christmas morning - just in time to start the morning jobs at the sanctuary!

They are hoping to raise enough funds to pay for the sanctuary running costs for one week - that's some £7000 - which is actually less than £2 per animal per day and includes all the feed costs plus the yard rents, the maintenance of vehicles and yards, farrier costs, vets and muck removal costs

If you want to do something like this – not of course necessarily 52 miles! – it's easy to set up a page like this and set yourself a challenge – could be to climb Snowdon, or run a mile – anything that you can think of and every penny raised will be used to help feed and care for the gang at the sanctuary

Thanks for all your support and help – we simply cannot do this without our supporter base

Feel free to share this letter with your friends, colleagues and family to help promote the work and to engender further support

Peace and blessings for 2023

Fiona, Percy, Percy & Meg xxxx

