

## Microsanctuary Life

From [Allison Hess, VLCD, MainStreetVegan.net](https://www.MainStreetVegan.net)

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Sanctuaries are the backbone of our movement for justice. They are a crucial part of providing refuge, education, and connection.



*Image credit: Kristen Hess*

As soon as I could walk, my love for cats was profound. I carried a sample of cat food in my backpack for the day when I'd care for a cat of my "own." That love blossomed on my grandparents' farm in Iowa during sunny summers.

On that farm, I also had the opportunity to hold an egg in my hand while the tiny chick pecked away the shell. She wanted to see the world and worked so hard to move towards the light. My awe for that tiny being felt no different than what I felt for any of the cats I loved.



*Annie. Image credit: Allison Hess*

I've done my best to offer a home to as many felines and canines as possible over the years, beginning with my beloved first cat, Annie.

However, something was missing—or rather someone. It was those that many interact with only on plates.

*Our microsantuario became a response to helplessness and hope in equal measure.*

Starting each day caring for individuals brought into the world to become food has tipped the scales for me, on most days, towards hope.



*Opal, Rosie, and Beatrice. Image credit: Allison Hess*

Several years ago, I learned about a large rescue happening in Colorado led by [Luvin Arms Sanctuary](#). Thousands of chicks (still cheeping) had been left for dead when a farm, marketed as producing free-range, all-natural meat, went bankrupt. Three of those brave individuals came to live with me, a chicken care novice! I was nervous and excited. We learned together.



*Hattie and Jane. Photo credit Allison Hess*

One year later, two survivors of the [brutal Kaporos ritual](#) joined our flock. Hattie and Jane arrived in Indiana on a cold fall night thanks to activists who had been onsite in New York City and those who drove birds across the country to their new homes. The babies were traumatized, yet still willing to trust. We learned together.

### **Edith Lillian**

Last month, Edith Lillian entered our lives. She had been left without food or shelter, with 20 other hens, in a small pen in the mud and heat. We were connected thanks to the work of [Uplands PEAK Sanctuary](#). Edith Lillian had quite a bit of healing to do, and it continues. She is curious, tenacious, and one of the sweetest girls I know. We are learning together.



*Edith Lillian. Image credit: Allison Hess*

Thinking about the possibility of starting a microsanctuary of your own?? If I can do it, you can do it!

## A Few Tips

1. **Research and plan ahead.**
  - *You will learn as you go. Breathe.*
2. **Collaborate with microsanctuary folks and humans at bigger sanctuaries.**
  - *Both have a place. It's my experience that, for the good of all, we need sanctuaries of all sizes to fit together like puzzle pieces. There simply aren't enough homes for all who need safety. And, if we truly accomplish what we seek to do as a movement, more safe places will be needed.*
3. **Ask for help.**
  - *We all need it sometimes. Brave people ask for help.*
4. **Protect yourself like you do the individuals who live at your microsanctuary.**
  - *Living as a proud and positive vegan is profound.*
5. **Know your limits and practice saying "no."**
  - *It helps me to remember that saying "yes" also means saying "no" to someone or something else.*
6. **Stay open.**
  - *There is so much good in the world.*
7. **Feel your feelings.**
  - *Direct animal care is some of the most challenging work I've done. It is also some of the most meaningful. My animals—chickens and cats—have rescued me over and over again, simply by being themselves.*
8. **Laugh.**
  - *The state of things is decidedly unfunny. However, laughter is the best medicine.*
9. **Take care of yourself.**



*Opal and cats. Image credit: Allison Hess*

We live in a complicated world. Systemic oppression, desperation, and fear abound. We are inundated with ideas that are not our own, insidiously and strategically.

## Animal care is activism

I learned early that chickens are individuals with inherent worth. Sharing that knowledge is important. Seeing the bonds form between the girls is beautiful; they have helped to heal my heart just as I've done my best to help heal them.

*Seemingly small acts matter.*

## Great Resources

[Microsanctuary Resource Center](#)

[Open Sanctuary Project](#)

[Vegans with Chickens](#)



*Photo credit: Allison Hess*

**Allison Hess** holds a Bachelor of Science in Animal Behavior from the University of Michigan, a Master's degree in Education from Indiana University, and certification in plant-based nutrition from the T. Colin Campbell Center for Nutrition Studies. As a 2018 graduate of [Main Street Vegan Academy](#), she offers support for folks transitioning to vegan living. Allison is the Executive Director of [Pets Alive](#), South Central Indiana's nonprofit spay/neuter clinic. She has lived in Bloomington, Indiana for 20 years following geographical sabbaticals to Portland, Oregon and her hometown of Cincinnati, Ohio. Allison cares for a number of animals, including five hens rescued from animal agriculture named Opal, Rosie, Beatrice, Hattie and Edith Lillian.

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