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Dedicated to educating the public and to fostering and adoption of companion rabbits. 781-431-1211 or www.rabbitnetwork.org.

RABBIT TRACKS

Spring-Summer 2003

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Why Spay Your Rabbit?

By Astrid Kruse. Why is your vet pushing you to spay your bunny? After all, the bunny seems fine, perhaps a little sexually overexcited and at times belligerent. Is it worth the money and the anesthetic risk? Once you accept that a rabbit is not a disposable commodity, and that rabbits are not interchangeable, you become committed to providing your rabbit with the same level of veterinary care a dog or cat would receive. Dogs and cats are routinely spayed, not only for overpopulation control and for affecting positive behavioral changes, but for significant health reasons. The following are the health risks for not having your bunny altered:

Uterine Cancer. Up to 85% of female rabbits develop uterine cancer by the age of four if they have not been spayed. I have seen a number of these heart-breaking cases, all either occurring because the owner did not know the rabbit's gender or had been uninformed about the vital importance of spaying a rabbit. In nature, rabbits are designed to reproduce as quickly and frequently as possible, and die of predation before reaching an age at which cancer becomes a risk. With such active uterine tissue, in which cells are constantly dividing, mutations that can give rise to tumors take place frequently.



The first signs of uterine cancer are often bleeding from the vagina, which may be interpreted as bloody urine. The rate of blood loss can be quite rapid, with the rabbit bleeding out in days. By the time there are any signs of a problem, chances are that the tumor has metastasized (spread), often to the lungs. This means that even if the bleeding carcinoma is removed, the rabbit will likely die within some months because of cancer that has spread throughout the body. Decreased appetite and weight loss are common signs that the body is breaking down as the tumors grow. Losing a young bunny to a preventable cancer is pitiful!

Uterine Infection (Pyometra). In this condition, pus builds up inside the infected uterus and either leaks out or is trapped by the closed cervix. The condition is often life-threatening, as bacterial toxins

leak into the bloodstream or the distended, pus-filled uterus ruptures into the abdominal cavity.

Aneurysm. Some rabbits can develop enlarged, weakened blood vessels in the endometrium, which is the lining of the uterus. When these


rupture, rapid blood loss ensues.

The treatment for all of these conditions is an emergency spay. Emergency surgery is not only financially costly but risky to the rabbit, since anesthetizing an ill animal is dangerous. Please head off any life-threatening emergency by spaying your bunny! She will be not only healthier, but less aggressive and easier to litterbox train. In addition, you will be helping to reduce the number of unwanted pets in shelters, many of which are euthanized because there are not enough homes for them.

The health risks for not neutering a male rabbit have not yet been adequately identified. It is possible that, as pet rabbits live longer due to better care and improved diets, diseases related to the constant hormonal stimulation of male tissues will begin to emerge. Testicular cancers and prostate diseases such as cancer, abscesses, or benign

hypertrophy (enlargement) impeding urination or defecation, are the likely problems that older intact male rabbits may contend with. The behavioral benefits of neutering, though, cannot be overstated.

Most sexually mature male rabbits will spray urine and unmercifully mount anything that strikes their fancy. By neutering your bunny, you will help him discover life beyond sexual frenzy as well as

encourage him to become a neater, more well-behaved member of the family! 

He who helps in the saving of others, saves himself as well.

— *Hartmann Von Aue*

Loss, Grief and Survival

By Kathy Smith



Love

In the past 20 years, I have shared my home with 16 “family” rabbits and a number of fosters, and I have given each a safe and loving home. When I first became involved in the “rabbit world” almost 10 years ago, I got the idea that it was “wrong” to find oneself drawn to one rabbit more than another. I honestly believed I was a terrible person when I realized that I did have a “favorite.” A couple of years ago I was talking to a rescuer, and risked admitting that I had a deeper bond with His Royal Highness King Murray than I had with the other rabbits in my home.

Instead of lashing out at me as I had expected, she said, “That just means you’re human.”

There are many reasons we develop an especially deep bond with a particular rabbit. It is very common to form an intensely deep bond with a rabbit that has medical problems

requiring a lot of handling and attention. You may develop a deep bond with a rabbit who comes into your life during an extremely difficult or stressful time. For those of us willing to listen and learn, rabbits can be great teachers, and we may be drawn to an individual rabbit because we have something important to learn from him or her. I met Murray less than a month after losing my beloved Smokey to a cancer and was immediately drawn to him. When I adopted him and his companions, I was not aware of his many health problems or the fact that he was a wise soul who had much to teach me. I only knew in my heart

that he belonged with me, and so our journey began.

Not everyone will experience a relationship like mine with Murray. To experience this, you have to be able to listen to your heart instead of your head. If, one day, you are lucky enough to feel especially drawn to a certain rabbit, I urge you to listen to your heart!

Loss

On Wednesday, April 9, 2003, Murray's heart stopped, and when he died he took a piece of my heart with him. We knew he was ill, had been treating him for heart disease (in addition to his other chronic ailments) for 10 months, and knew it was progressing. However, he had had a decent check-up with his vet on Monday. He was definitely “off” Tuesday evening, turning his nose up at his beloved cranberries (but nibbling on greens). But ups and downs were not unusual with him at this point. I consulted his vet, we agreed to just keep an eye on him, and Wednesday morning he seemed to feel a bit better when I left for work. I came home and found him stretched

out peacefully on the special rug that I gave him for Christmas ... not breathing.



This was my first experience with finding one of my bunnies dead. His body was still warm, and I immediately called Dr. Allan. I told her how bad I felt that I had not been there with him. She said, "Kathy, he wanted it this way." I had watched both Frankie and Stormy die, gasping for breath with me unable to do anything to help them. I would have hated to witness that with Murray. In my heart, I honestly believe he simply fell asleep and never woke up — otherwise I don't think he would have looked as peaceful and content when I found him. I realized his choice to go just before I got home was his final gift to me.

Grief

I knew I had to hold myself together. I laid Murray's body in the front seat of my car on the Brave Bunny Blanket that always went with him to the vet. Dr. Allan met us at the clinic and sat and cried with me as we said goodbye. When I got home I called a few friends ... those I knew would help pass the word at my office and to my friends in the bunny world. I received several phone calls that evening and the following

day. Everyone remarked at how well I was holding up. Yes, I was crying, but I was able to see the positives: he went quickly, he didn't suffer, he had a good life with me, he knew he was loved, I had no regrets about anything. I'm sure I was in shock at that point. Looking back, I'd say I was in shock until the point that I started feeling *worse* than the day before. That was when I believe the grieving process actually started.

I knew the "firsts" would be the hardest for me: the first morning I woke up at 4:30 and had no Murray to give meds to; the first time I made salads without making his; the first time I came home and he wasn't there to greet me; the first trip for "greens" when I didn't buy the special things that only Murray ate. It helps if you can anticipate the times that will be hardest for you and brace yourself for them. It also helps to have a circle of friends that you know you can call if you need to ... even at 4:30 AM!



Survival

Everyone deals with grief in her own way. Here are some

things that may help you work through your grief:

- Give yourself permission to cry. If you are comfortable with tears, they can be quite healing.
- Take your time going through your rabbit's things. Decide carefully what to toss, what to leave where it is, what to pack away, and what to use for other rabbits or donate to a rescue. For now, a corner of my kitchen has Murray's personalized bowl, the rug he died on and one of his King Murray towels. The shirt I last held him in is packed away with special toys and dishes. If in doubt about something, keep it for now — you can always toss it later!
- When you're feeling really down, phone a friend who will let you express all your emotions. Don't try to go through this alone!
- Write down your memories or go through your pictures. You may cry while you are doing it, but it will help you remember the good times. Down the road, you will be glad you did.
- Do something special for yourself in memory of your rabbit: buy a special picture frame, have a portrait or laser charm made, plant a tree — whatever works for you.
- Do something special for others as a tribute to your rabbit: write an article or story; draw or paint a picture; volunteer with a rescue group, shelter, or other organization; offer

your love to another rabbit when you are ready.

Things you can do to help a grieving friend:

- Keep in touch. You don't need to call the first day; calls made on day three and beyond are often most appreciated. The rest of the world probably thinks she should be over it by then.
- If your lifestyle permits, be one of the people she can call whenever she needs to — even in the middle of the night!
- Send a card. If you have a special memory of the rabbit, take time to write about it — this will mean a lot to your friend. If you happen to be artistic, a sketch or drawing of her rabbit will be a cherished keepsake.
- If you can afford to, make a donation to her favorite charity in memory of her rabbit. Ask the organization to send her a card, acknowledging the donation in her rabbit's memory.



The Magic Bunny Poo

A Composting Tale

By Christine Bennett. Hey, did you hear the one about the boy and the magic beans? Well, this tale is about the rabbit and the magic poo. It goes like this ...

Once upon a time, there was a home where a few rabbits lived, along with their humans. The humans would diligently change the litterpans to keep them clean and fresh. They would dump the litterpan contents into the trash, and away it all went, come trash day. Time passed, and more rabbits came to live with the humans, and more litterpans were cleaned, and more poo was thrown out. One day, the Composting Fairy visited the humans and said, "What are you doing, wasting all that magic poo?" The fairy explained that with a slight change in habits and a little expense and effort, the humans could turn rabbit poo into black gold. Black gold?! "Yes, the best composted, nutrient-rich material your gardens will ever get!" exclaimed the fairy. Intrigued by the prospects of decreasing their weekly trash,



increasing recycling efforts, and getting something for nearly nothing, the humans listened with rapt attention ...

First Things First

To start this whole magical transformation from poo to gold, you need the right raw materials in the litterpan. For the litter we use (and highly praise) "stove chow—pellets of compressed wood fiber. Though intended as fuel for pellet-burning wood stoves,

stove chow is an excellent litter as it effectively absorbs urine and suppresses odor. (An alternative is the recycled newspaper pellets.) On top of the litter is a fluffy bed of timothy hay, which the rabbit eats with relish, leaving the soiled pieces of hay to mix with the litter layer below. Topping it off is the magic poo as produced by the rabbit(s). Rabbit poo is ideal, as it is basically chow, hay, veggies, etc.—all vegetarian.

Tools for Success

Before, when the litterpans needed changing, the entire contents were thrown out (i.e., saturated litter, rejected hay, poo, and pee). Now, instead, the whole lot of it is dumped into a wheeled trash barrel in the garage. When



the barrel is full enough, it is wheeled out to the composting bins area, dumped out, and the material forked and shoveled onto the compost pile. As we have eight rabbits, we need a few bins to age the material, and an open area for end product (the black gold!) When a bin gets full of raw material, we turn it with the pitchfork, put it into the bin next to it for aeration and, to ensure the urine ammonia has dissipated, a five-inch diameter PVC tube with holes in it stands upright in the center of each bin to increase air circulation into the raw material. We fill three of the four bins over the fall/winter; by late spring, so much decomposition has occurred that we can consolidate the "in progress" material down to one bin and reap a huge pile of readied compost. You will

know it is ready when a shovelful of material has become a dark, raw mix of organic bits and probably a few worms too!

If visions of becoming Farmer Brown are flitting through your mind, and you think, "This is not going to work for me." — don't give up trying — this is just one technique. There are many others that are even simpler. Some folks throw out the soiled hay of the litterpan (to lessen the likelihood of weed seed germination from the hay) but still compost the litter and poo. This definitely takes less space and time. Others make it even simpler by just broadcasting the litterpan contents over their lawn, letting the material age *in situ* where it lands.

Going for the Gold

Initially, I thought composting poo would be too expensive, too stinky, too unsightly, too hard, etc. Rubbish (or the lack thereof)! I've found my




composting area to be no more unsightly than a neighbor's

woodpile, not stinky, and surprisingly not hard at all considering the reward at the end. There are great local and on-line resources for composting techniques and supplies (e.g., wire bins, compost tumblers, tools). They can help keep expenses down and keep it simple. Just check out www.gardeners.com and search on "composting" to get started.

Not so Grimm a Tale

So how does the tale end? Well, the Composting Fairy told the humans to erect the bins, gather the litterpan material, and age it over the winter. She promised that by the next gardening season, a mound of black gold would be ready to amend the soil of new and existing flower beds. And sure enough, there it was!

The humans rejoiced and used their bounty wisely, working the rich humus into the tired soil, feeding the growing plants. Lest we forget the true heroes of the tale, the rabbits continued to be fed their favorite foods and hay, and thus they continued to make their magic rabbit poo.

And everyone lived happily ever after. 

Give the world the best you have, and it may never be enough ...

For you see, in the end, it is between you and God.

It never was between you and them anyway.

— Mother Teresa

July Bun of the Month: Spice



Spice is a beautiful gray rabbit. She came into our foster care during the winter of 2002 when we took in a litter of babies. All of her siblings have since been adopted. But Spice.... well, can you see the look in her eyes? She is one tough bun! She will grunt and groan, letting you know if she doesn't like something. She will let you pet her, but only on her terms! She loves to sit resting her front paws on her litter box. Her litter box habits are absolutely perfect. She really enjoys her treats, but she prefers not to eat them in front of you. Isn't it amazing how such a beautiful bunny can have such attitude!

Successful Fundraising Events

Winchester Starbucks Rabbit Happening

On March 19th, HRN took over the terrace in front of

Winchester Starbucks to raise funds and awareness of the plight of live rabbits at Easter. We drew a large crowd of interested people, many of whom had rabbits of their own and were happy to know such an organization as ours is active. Suzanne offered a nail-clipping clinic, Kathie, Carol and David helped spread the word, and Ambassador Eddie, Dutch rabbit extraordinaire, was a big hit with everyone. So was the donated hot coffee on such a cold day!

Many thanks to Starbucks for donating coffee and space for this event!

Yard Sale

Despite the threat of rain, HRN held its fundraising yard sale on Saturday, May 31st, at a volunteer's Boxboro home. Intrepid yard sale fans braved the tenuous weather and snatched up great bargains (many thanks to the generous donors). HRN netted \$575, which will be used for various expenses.

Highlighting the day was an 11-year-old neighbor who baked homemade dog treats and sold them at the yard sale. She then gave HRN half of her proceeds and donated the other half to a dog rescue group.

Huge thank-you's go out to everyone who contributed to this fundraiser!

Upcoming Fall Fundraiser: Yankee Candle Sale



Here is an opportunity to finish your holiday gift shopping early and raise money for HRN! Our volunteer Jessica has worked with Yankee Candle Company so that we can take part in their fall fundraising campaign. Candle and accessory sales made through our volunteers (this could be you!) will net HRN 30–40% profit per sale. WOW! The sale window is August 1st–15th, so if you are interested in selling Yankee Candles as an HRN fundraiser, please contact Jessica directly via email for a catalog and further details: tletcould@hotmail.com.

Volunteer Opportunities

HRN is an all-volunteer organization. We need volunteers to assist with the functions of our organization. Can you help out? We are actively recruiting people who will help our cause. Training and assistance will be provided. Here are a few examples of our needs:

Fund Raising

Can you run a fund-raising activity?

Yard Sale

Can you host and organize a yard sale for us?

Foster Homes

Do you have space to take in foster rabbits until they are adopted?

Computer Services

Are you comfortable with a computer? Can you help us update rabbits for adoption on sites such as PetFinder?

Web Services

Do you know HTML? Can you help us maintain our web site?

Education Events

Can you help man a booth at an adoption day?

These are just a few examples of needed activities. If you can assist with any of these, please contact us! Let us know how you can help. Get in touch with us online at info@rabbitnetwork.org or call us at 781-431-1211.

Author! Author!

Do you have a great story to tell about your rabbit? Please send it in! We can include pictures and stories in the Family Album on our website. And we're always looking for fresh articles for our newsletter. So if you have a special story or a rabbit-related point of view, please submit your article to info@rabbitnetwork.org for consideration!

Adoptable Rabbits

HRN has over 50 rabbits currently in foster care, waiting for loving indoor homes. All have been spayed or neutered, socialized and litter-box trained. Visit our website at www.rabbitnetwork.org to see their photos!

July's Bun of the Month is Spice!

Some HRN fosters who found wonderful new homes:



Babs



Benjamin



Gatsby



Henry and Eliza



Honey Bunch



Jack and Sara



Manley



Millie



Nellie



Regular Joe

Memorials

Those of us who choose to love such delicate creatures as rabbits take the risk of having to say goodbye before we are ready. When this happens, the following brief poem may help us remember to treasure what we had, loved, and must let go:

*He who binds for himself a joy
Must the winged life destroy.
He who kisses the joy as it flies
Lives in Eternity's sunrise.*

— *William Blake*

You might also find comfort at www.petloss.com.

Magic



Life doesn't always seem fair to those who leave us too soon. Oh, sweet, soft, Magic, you will never be forgotten even though your time here with us was short. Your soulful eyes, vocalness and sweet disposition will spend eternity in our hearts. You've touched so many lives along the way, we are all grateful for having known, cared for and loved you. We can only hope you found your forever home before you left this Earth. Friends will be reunited, and we all will embrace that day.

Joanne, Ian, Sydney,
Suzanne and Cheryl



Murray

The tables are now turned. I know you are whole now. Happy, healthy, free of pain. Looking down from above. Watching over me. Taking care of me. Protecting me. I know I will be OK, despite the huge hole you have left in my heart, because you will always be a part of me, just like those who came before you and those who will follow. Thank you for being a part of my life, for allowing me to care for you, rewarding me with bunny kisses. Thank you for teaching me, helping me to grow, to understand who I am.

In loving memory, Kathy



Roscoe

Rescued from abuse, you found security and love with your mate Chrysler. Together you would happily eat your papaya and banana. We miss you, dear soul.

Suzanne, Carol, David
and Chrysler



Holbrook

Thank you for 10 wonderful years of your unique and exquisitely naughty self. It is not the same without you here to pilfer, rummage, destroy, torment, and create general chaos. Coco and I miss snuggling with you and getting covered in big wet Brookie-kisses. Good-bye my speckled friend—Kisses on the face!

Love HolbrookieMom Linda
& Coco



Patch

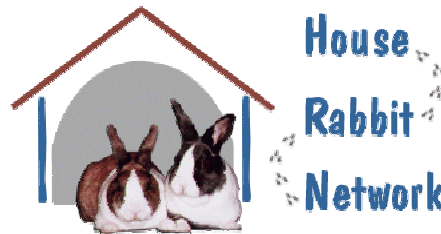
Your little spirit is now without pain. Your teeth and mouth will no longer fail you. Little one may you enjoy lots of snuggles on laps.

Join HRN ...

If you are not presently a member of the House Rabbit Network, you're missing a great opportunity to help save bunny lives, spread the word about rabbits as wonderful companion animals, and become part of a great group of friends with a common passion for rabbits, and brag about your own rabbit(s) with people who *really get it!* Don't delay—join HRN today!

... or Please Renew Your Membership

HRN memberships run from April 1 to March 31. If you haven't done so already, please renew your membership. You will continue to receive copies of our newsletter, *Rabbit Tracks*, and will help support our rabbits. HRN relies on donations from rabbit lovers to pay our bills. (If you have made a donation since January 1, we have credited you for the next year.) Thank you for your support!



House Rabbit Network Membership and Ordering Form

Your membership donation is tax deductible and will be used for medical costs (spays/neuters, vet bills) and education expenses. All members will receive a copy of our newsletter, *Rabbit Tracks*, when it is published. Currently, we are publishing three issues per year.

Memberships run from April 1 to March 31 (donations received in Jan.–March will be credited for the following year). To join, fill out this page and mail it with your check (payable to the House Rabbit Network) to:

House Rabbit Network
P.O. Box 2602
Woburn, MA 01888-1102

Choose your membership level:

- Dwarf \$ 15.00
- Mini Lop \$ 25.00
- New Zealand \$ 50.00
- Flemish Giant \$100.00
- Mix (other) \$ _____

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