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'Reel' Love

BY STEPHANIE LONGO (ABINGTON SUBURBAN EDITOR)

Published: September 12, 2013

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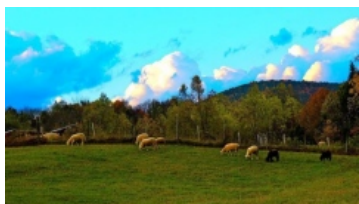
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Mo, a disabled cow who avoided death in a slaughterhouse by arriving at the sanctuary, is one of the film's featured animals.



The Indraloka Animal Sanctuary in Mehoopany provides the backdrop for Clarks Green native Johnny Braz's documentary film, "Peace, Love and Animals." The film will debut in Luxembourg this Friday, Sept. 13, as a part of the International Animal Rights Conference.

When his eyes met theirs, Clarks Green native Johnny Braz knew he had found kindred spirits. Little did he know that their story would take his work as a filmmaker to the international stage.

Braz is the director of "Peace, Love and Animals," a documentary detailing the animals housed at the Indraloka Animal Sanctuary in Mehoopany. According to the ASPCA (American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals), Indraloka is Pennsylvania's only all-species and farm animal sanctuary.

"Peace, Love and Animals" is set to debut this Friday evening, Sept. 13, at the International Animal Rights Conference in Esch, Luxembourg. The conference serves as a global platform for people active in the animal rights movement as well as for those who are interested in learning more about animal rights. It also functions as a networking tool, a place for current views on the animal rights movement to be discussed and a place for animal advocates to learn about new approaches to spreading the word about various animal rights issues.

Braz, who began his documentary filmmaking career in 1996 as a camera operator with Clint Eastwood on "The Monterrey Jazz Festival: 40 Legendary Years," explained that the documentary gives viewers a window into an animal's inner life.

"The film doesn't overtly or directly address any animal issues," he said. "My goal for this and all films is simple: let the viewers see the souls in the animals. Let them see for the first time a being in that animal. I do that by always showing positive, beautiful images of animals, never of them suffering or being mistreated. It is really all in their eyes, there are a lot of close-ups of all of their eyes."

While being a cinematic voice for those who could not speak quickly became a passion for Braz, he explained that the documentary never would have been made if it weren't for a random phone call he received from the Indraloka Animal Sanctuary's founder, Indra Lahiri.

"Had I not gotten that call out of the blue to make the film, I may have never zeroed in on the farm animal world," Braz, who now works alongside Lahiri as co-director of the sanctuary, said. "Now I do something daily that very few people on the planet do. I experience safe and peaceful farm animals interacting, observing them being their natural selves, with absolutely nothing required of them, except that they have a good time and they enjoy their freedom. Oh yeah, and to star in movies."

Braz explained that making films about the sanctuary animals has become a major component in its growth. So far, "Peace, Love and Animals" was screened locally at First Friday Scranton in June of 2011. The sanctuary uses the film for fundraising and advocacy purposes.

Braz and Lahiri will both present the film at the International Animal Rights Conference. Following the film's screening, they will lead a discussion on ways in which art can be harnessed for social change.

"We set out to save them [the animals]," Lahiri said. "But in the end, their love and remarkable ability to teach and heal have inspired growth in all of us,

too."

Set against the sanctuary's Endless Mountains backdrop, "Peace, Love and Animals" shows the animals' lives throughout all four seasons as well as through their own personal life cycles. Besides allowing the animals to tell their own stories, the film also focuses on the sanctuary's volunteers and what compels them to give of their time.

"Many people never even consider that a farm animal sanctuary exists," Braz said. "Once they do, it leads to many questions, since farm animals are our food and, so, it brings up many issues. We are never preaching veganism or telling others what to eat and not to eat. Our approach is just to focus on positive aspects."



Clarks Green Memories Submission

Clarks Green Borough will celebrate its centennial this May! We are looking for your photos, stories and memories to help tell the story of Clarks Green. You may even have your information published in the May 22 edition of The Abington Suburban. Submissions will be accepted from April 1 through April 30.

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For more information on the Indraloka Animal Sanctuary, including ways to volunteer, visit www.indraloka.org. To read Indra Lahiri's blog, filled with stories about the sanctuary animals, visit <http://indralokaanimalsanctuary.wordpress.com/>.

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