



Inspiring Peace

By Carole Audet

Photo by Matt Lazzarotto

Sarien (pronounced Serene) and Hugo Slabbert founded People Ensuring Animal Care Exists (P.E.A.C.E.) in January 2019. They helped rescue some animals in late 2018, and this led to them realizing that some of the logistics involved in rescuing animals were missing. At the time, they had no intention of filling this need themselves, but it turns out this was their destiny to fulfill.

P.E.A.C.E. Canada focuses on three main program areas: rescue, humane education, and farm sanctuary currently providing a home for five lovable roosters. With their two children and several pets, they make their home on a nearly 50-acre rural property in Mission, B.C.

Sarien and Hugo are both from South Africa—the former arriving here with her family when she was 16. When they met in Canada, their shared experiences led them to become high school sweethearts. Sarien describes the difficulties of growing up in South Africa—the restrictions imposed for safety reasons—and she's happy to be raising her own family in Canada where they feel safe.

“When you grow up in that kind of environment, you think that's normal until you come to Canada and you're like, What? I can walk at nighttime outside. I grew up behind big electrical fencing. You have to be home before dark. For a teenager wanting to go watch a movie, parents would drop you off and you were not allowed to leave the space until they came to get you. There weren't many

opportunities for us as children. My parents also wanted a better life for themselves,” shares Sarien.

By the time she and Hugo got married, they were transitioning to veganism after being vegetarian since 2002. Naturally, they are raising their children vegan and doing it with honesty. Sarien saw a YouTube video of a young vegan woman who was asked why she

remained vegan in adulthood. Her answer was her parents' honesty, so the Slabberts applied the same principle. They understand that kids love animals like friends or family, so it was a matter of connecting the dots to simply mention that we don't eat our friends.

This hasn't been an issue for the kids with their schoolmates, for example, when they're invited to a birthday party. "I have amazing friends who bake a vegan option for the kids. This also provides an opportunity for others to realize how easy it is," says Sarien.

The love and commitment of this lifestyle are now firmly embedded in the Slabbert children. They educate their schoolmates and love to share about the vegan meals they've eaten in Mission, which surprisingly has a number of options for a small city. "They are proud of it, I think because they're growing up in a more accepting environment than older vegans did; it's nice to see more inclusivity."

In March of this year, the family made the move to Mission. When they aren't busy working on the many projects P.E.A.C.E. Canada undertakes—the reason they



Photo by Matt Lazzarotto

moved in the first place—they love to enjoy this property they now call home. "I think the impact of sitting on a deck looking at a mountain with our coffee is an emotionally rewarding experience. We didn't move here for us, but it's this added beautiful thing that we as a family are able to enjoy. What family doesn't want their kids to be able to play outside in the dirt and climb trees?"

At the same time, the children are getting an education; they are learning about the work of pollinators as they watch bees in action at the sunflowers, how to

pick lavender, and how to take care of animals, which Sarien feels helps to strengthen their commitment to the vegan lifestyle—something that has been demonstrated with people who visit farm sanctuaries.

It was Sarien and Hugo's son who inspired the activism that eventually led to the launching of P.E.A.C.E. Canada. He felt it was important to bring awareness to the suffering of animals which led Sarien to be boots-on-the-ground with Anonymous for the Voiceless and the Save Movement. "Through those connections, it's a natural



Photo courtesy: Sarien Slabbert



Photo by Suzanne Goodwin, The Opened Eye Project



Photo courtesy: Sarien Slabbert



transition to learn about sanctuaries, because a lot of those folks support them." With a background in event planning and organization, Sarien's skills kicked in when a friend asked her for help to find a home for a pig named Grace, who is now living her best life at Little OinkBank Pig Sanctuary.

"There was no organization that specializes in farmed animal rescue who had the truck ready, who had the trailer ready, who had the connections with all the farm sanctuaries to know who has space for whom, who knew all the legalities with regards to surrender forms and everything else." Sarien knew these vital logistics were missing from rescue efforts. After dealing with the same issues with two more rescues, her friend Carrie, of Little OinkBank, convinced her to be the one to put those pieces together. Hugo was on board and came up with the name People Ensuring Animal Care

Exists the day after Sarien proposed the idea.

Since launching, they have helped rescue hundreds of farmed animals who are now living their best lives at loving sanctuaries.

P.E.A.C.E. Canada. offers free resources for those looking to start a farm sanctuary, such as how to apply for grants, how to obtain charitable status, how to get accreditation through the Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries and information about the care and feeding of farmed animals—including those who have physical challenges. Additionally, they have resources for the public, for example, if you're looking for a volunteer opportunity at a sanctuary in your area.

"For each individual who starts their own sanctuary, it's their responsibility to make sure they follow the right procedures. That's the support that we want to make

easily accessible to everybody, and it's freely available on our website."

They are setting an example for doing everything right. They started P.E.A.C.E. Canada in January 2019 and applied for charitable status soon after. It came through in October of that year, but it was back-dated to March so they were able to provide receipts to their donors.

Another branch of their organization is humane education because, as a mom, Sarien realized that there was a need to "promote more compassionate alternatives for schools. One of the things that we want to help change is egg-hatching projects in classrooms. I was so confused why that was still a thing. We have an app called Chick It Out™, a humane alternative to the in-classroom use of chicks. And we have resources for teachers and parents."





Photo by Matt Lazzarotto

In the future, they want to be a classroom themselves, in a sense, by offering tours showing the work they are doing. "We want to demonstrate that the individuals we offer homes to are not here for people's entertainment. This is their home, and we want to teach children that this is not a petting zoo; instead, they're coming here to learn about the animals." This educational component would also include in-person and virtual presentations.

When Sarien and Hugo bought the acreage in Mission and were planning for the future of P.E.A.C.E. Canada, they knew they had to create an income stream so they don't have to rely solely on hosting events and donations to their charity. "For a non-profit to be sustainable, you need to look at multiple avenues of revenue. It's always been part of our five- to ten-year plan to have different business models attached to the charity. The lavender farm is

something that I wanted because, like anything in work, you need to have something separate from the everyday work that you can enjoy as a creative outlet. The lavender farm came about because we live on agricultural land, so we need to be able to get farm status. And we need to bring in income that's separate from the charity."

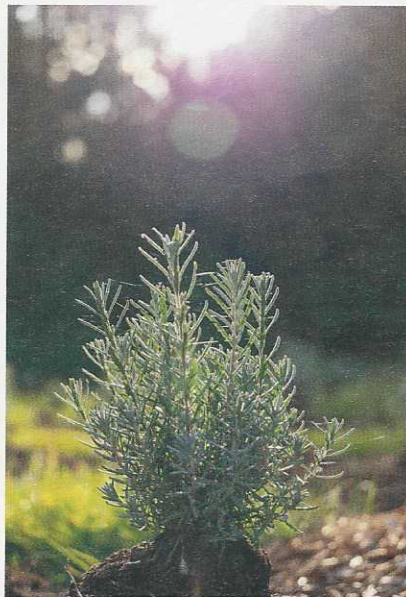


Photo by Matt Lazzarotto

The bonus for this venture is that lavender is not an edible plant therefore it won't attract deer who in turn attract predators, which is important for the safety of their family and the animals they share their lives with. They also know there are many uses for lavender. In about two to three years when the lavender is mature, one such use is to offer their property for events, such as weddings. The lavender would make a colourful backdrop for photos, not to mention enveloping the guests in its captivating fragrance.

Another use for the lavender is essential oils, and Sarien will be learning how to extract the oils from their veganically grown crop. The lavender project falls under the Slabbert Family Farm branch—separate from P.E.A.C.E. Canada. "Our long-term plan is to have this property go to the charity in the future and then have that business model already attached to it to be able to bring in income for all the



Photo by Sarien Slabbert

programs that the charity would run," explains Sarien.

Approximately 25 acres of their property is a mountain, and they are leaving it for wildlife. They are connecting with conservation groups to partner with them to help make the mountain a refuge for animals by growing native plants and acquiring the knowledge necessary to ensure the mountain is preserved for future generations.

Sarien and Hugo want to offer quarantine space and foster support for sanctuaries. But to do this, they will need to build the infrastructure. They hope to expand their sanctuary so they can rescue more animals themselves. Of course, with that comes planning how best to use the property, what sections have good drainage, what area can be converted to a natural swimming pond or what portions would be ideal for rotational grazing.

For the time being, they are rescuing roosters because there is a high demand for rehoming them when people discover their chicken is not a hen. While some city bylaws allow backyard hens, the same does not apply to roosters. Starting

this small sanctuary is also a good way for them to demonstrate and promote microsantuaries because they realize that while someone may not have acreage, they can still rescue small animals, particularly chickens—if their city's bylaws allow it. "It's extremely helpful because you're saving those individuals that wouldn't have been able to find a home otherwise. Make sure you are allowed in your bylaws to have hens on your property, and how many so that you don't get into a situation where you have to frantically call around to rehome them."

For vegans rescuing hens who still lay eggs, Sarien recommends feeding the egg back to the hen, either cooked without the shell. This is a known practice which helps them replenish nutrients their bodies lose from unnaturally laying eggs on a continual cycle.

Part of their long-term plan is establishing a veganic farm with crops that would supplement their events, such as pumpkins. Sarien shares, "Part of the veganic farming motto is that you leave a certain percentage of your crop for the wildlife in your space." But unlike lavender, the wildlife that accepts their generosity will attract predators, which means a lot of prep work needs to be done in terms of safety for all the animals on the land—rescues and wildlife.

"This property, in a sense, we don't own. We feel we're stewards and that this is a community space. I start something and then others take over and grow it. We are going to establish the garden and we want to look at it as another form of income for the charity, be it something where we end up growing a bunch of vegetables and



Photo by Sarien Slabbert

somebody takes on going to farmers' markets and selling them, or partnering with a local vegan store and selling our produce through there."

When asked who inspires her, Sarien responds, "Everyone. Every day we all have the opportunity to inspire somebody to do better. There are so many people in my life I cherish and love. I can't pick one."

Sarien and Hugo are committed to this important mission. If you're inspired by what they are doing and you want to help them continue to grow, provide more assistance to sanctuaries in need and be in a position to rescue more animals themselves, consider donating. For many charities, regular monthly donors are what help them carry out their big ideas and continue to do the hard work to launch their projects. If you have knowledge to share, they would love to hear from you, and if you're prepared to roll up your sleeves, you are welcome. "This is a community space and the only way it's going to continue to grow is with community support," concludes Sarien. ●