

Woman finds animals are her 'angels'

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

SCOTTSVILLE — Nancy B.B. Meyer's pet German Shepherd, Rin Tin Tin, stretched out at her feet as she told the story of how the dog saved her life.

Several years ago, Meyer was engaged to an abusive fiance who once broke into her house on Scottsville Road while the couple was estranged. It wasn't the first time the man wanted to harm Meyer, but this time, he wanted more than to just hit her — he was bent on killing her, she said.

Cornering her in the kitchen of the house, the man began to strangle Meyer, who said she usually was able to get away from her fiance because he was so drunk. Fortunately, Rin Tin Tin lived up to her namesake and came to Meyer's rescue.

"I remember her going for him," Meyer said of her dog. "She went for his neck." By that time Meyer had collapsed unconscious on the floor, but when she woke up, her fiance was gone, and her rescuer was covered with the man's blood.

"She saved my life — that's why she has her own room," Meyer said.

Indeed Rin Tin Tin does occupy her own living space in the 43-year-old woman's home, but that doesn't mean the house isn't open to other animal friends. A goat named St. Elizabeth, a handful of horses, and several dogs, cats and birds share the grounds and house with Meyer, who has dedicated much of her life to helping animals.

Meyer, who was raised in the neighborhood around St. Boniface Church on the city's southside, attributed her love of animals to Father Walter J. Kohl, a late pastor of the parish.

"He was the most influential man in my life," she said, noting that Father Kohl encouraged her natural affection for animals. "Basically, everybody just told me that animals were just animals and they just die and that's it," she said. "(But) he said 'No, animals have souls and they go to heaven.'"

Meyer has always believed humans have no right to kill animals. "I don't believe that humans have a right to take life like they think they do," she said, adding that such a stance explains her vegetarian diet: "I refuse to make my stomach a graveyard



Nancy B.B. Meyer shares a special moment with one of her dogs, Tippy Tin, whom she calls her soul.

Babette G. Augustin/Staff photographer

for animals."

Her home in the country is certainly no graveyard for animals — in fact it's a veritable haven for unwanted creatures. Meyer estimates that since the mid-1970s, she has helped more than 17,000 animals by taking them in herself or placing them with owners.

She often helps place animals through contacts developed through responses to her classified advertisements in local newspapers. The ads often end with Meyer's motto — "God is Love — Animals are Angels."

Meyer doesn't draw the line at giving of herself to just animals, however. Each Thanksgiving and Christmas, she opens her home to the homeless, lonely and curious who enjoy a bountiful feast she prepares with the help of volunteers. She also plays her accordion at parties and benefits for various veterans' groups, for whom she has worked since she was 8-years-old.

Sitting in her living room, a visitor will undoubtedly hear Meyer's phone ring off the hook at all hours of the day and night with pleas from people who need a reference to a suicide counselor, minister, or Alcoholics Anonymous chapter. And sometimes, the callers just need a bended ear.

Meyer is currently studying to use her listening talents as an alcoholism counselor at Park Ridge Chemical Dependency

Center. She is also completing a book to be published next spring on battered woman's syndrome entitled "Diaries of 1,000 Battered Women." The book consists of interviews with middle- and upper-class women caught in abusive relationships with men throughout the world.

Meyer pointed out that her own nightmarish life in the grip of an abusive boyfriend compelled her to look for answers to the question — Why do women who should know better stay with abusive mates?

It was a question Meyer had to answer for herself since she spent several years with the man who tried to kill her and who beat her dozens of times. Meyer met her ex-boyfriend in the mid-70s when she was raising two children alone. She had been abandoned by her first husband on Christmas Eve in 1969.

Her former boyfriend appeared to be a savior for Meyer, who at that time was managing the Barrel of Fun — a bar her father owned and later turned over to Meyer when his health deteriorated. Meyer remarked that her former boyfriend was a patron of the bar who convinced her that she should let him help her run it.

She recalled that "Bill" — his name has been changed to protect his identity — did not beat her for the first two years of their relationship. But Bill's alcoholism began to take its toll on his temper, and when he lost control, he took it out on Meyer.

"The guy who was going to be the

knight in shining armor ... wound up beating me," she said, adding that she often wanted to leave him, but he was alternately apologetic or threatening — a seductive and intimidating combination that convinced Meyer to keep giving him one more chance.

Bill also persuaded Meyer to hire strippers to attract more customers. The added money would help her get closer to her dream of opening an animal shelter, she remembered him saying. For what she now confesses were "selfish" reasons, Meyer took her former boyfriend up on his offer, and began hiring young women to dance topless at her bar on Friday nights.

Despite her foray into the seedier side of the entertainment world, Meyer's Catholic background compelled her to tell each girl that she hired to attend weekly church services, and that they couldn't get drunk, do drugs or engage in prostitution at her bar.

Meyer joked that when undercover police questioned her employees about whether she was involved with neighborhood drug dealers, the employees scoffed at the authorities' inquiries. "Are you kidding," she said the strippers told the cops, "(Nancy's) the biggest drag."

Meyer displayed an open Bible and Catholic icons on her bar, and a picture of Christ was put up behind the stage where the dancers worked. When asked why she had such items in such a setting, Meyer responded: "To be real honest with you,

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