



Our Hen House Podcast: Transcript for Episode 683, Interview with Josh & Wendy Smith

Jasmin: Welcome to Our Hen House, Josh and Wendy!

Wendy: Thank you.

Josh: Thank you.

Wendy: Thanks for having us.

Jasmin: I've been really, really excited to talk with you for so many reasons, but we'll get to why as I'm going. So let me first say that I know that you have had quite a year with a lot of changes, so maybe the best place to start telling this whole story is to start at the very beginning and go from there.

How did Odd Man Inn start?

Wendy: Oh, man... Odd Man Inn started in 2016. We lived up in Washington state, and we kind of just started like backyard animal-loving vegans who wanted to help some animals that were out of options. And lo and behold, when you go looking for animals who are in desperate situations, you can find them pretty darn easily.

And it felt like we blinked our eyes, and we had 60 animals on our small property of three and a half acres.

Josh: Yeah, we didn't have any intention of really starting anything like a farmed animal sanctuary when we moved out there. We bought some land to help a dog, Roswell, that needed space and needed to be away from people.

And then, while we were out there, Wendy was like, "Well, maybe we could help some goats." And then there were goats. And, "Maybe we could help some chickens." And then there were chickens. *Josh & Wendy start laughing* And

then Wendy said, “Babe, I dunno if I wanna go through life without a pig friend.”

Jasmin: Uh oh. *Jasmin laughs*

Josh: And that was when we were like, “There seems to be a real need,” right?

We still didn't know that there was this whole group of farmed animal sanctuaries. We were just kind of doing our thing in the woods in Washington. And then when we started looking, I was like, “Wow! This is really something.”

Wendy: There's a whole community of people who are doing this. And so we came up with...I can remember we were on our way to pick up our first rescued pig, and that's when we came up with the name Odd Man Inn. And we're like, “We could kind of be like a little farm sanctuary, right?” We were so doe-eyed about the whole thing. *Jasmin laughs*

So we took in our first pig. She still lives with us today. Her name's Bailey. She's a little potbelly. And at the time, we were funding ourselves with my overtime shifts as an emergency room nurse.

Jasmin: Oh wow.

Josh: Yeah. I remember when we'd be working, and we had this Honda Element, we called it the Smell-ement, to move animals around, but also it was Wendy's work vehicle. *Wendy laughs*

And Wendy worked far enough away that she couldn't safely work overtime, get back, get the rest, and then go back to the hospital. And they didn't offer a nurses' sleeping area. So in our first couple of years, when Wendy was working overtime, she'd camp in the parking lot at the hospital in the Element.

Jasmin: Ugh!

Josh: Yeah, the Smell-ement.

Wendy: Yeah, the same vehicle that we would transport animals to and from the vet.

And as we started taking animals in, we realized that as you're taking in animals that are in bad situations, who are being given away, they typically have

medical needs. And my background as a nurse really drew me towards helping animals who had more significant medical needs.

And sometimes it's not even that it requires an expensive surgery or a specialist, it's that they just need basic care. And if they don't get basic care, they end up with problems that are not fixable. And Bailey was a great example of that. Her hooves were curled up like wizard shoes. She could bigger walk, and she was a young girl. All she needed was some hoof care.

And so as the veterinary bills...we started getting a grasp on how expensive that was and how many overtime shifts I had to work for that. That was when we started thinking, "I wonder if we could be a nonprofit. I wonder if people would actually donate to help us with this work."

And Odd Man Inn was born.

Jasmin: Amazing.

Wendy: We did that for five years, almost six years in Washington. And when you say we had a lot of changes this year, the big change was we took over a sanctuary here in Tennessee, and we moved our entire sanctuary from Washington state to middle Tennessee. And we took over a herd of 159 pretty large pigs.

Jasmin: Wow.

Wendy: And so we currently have approximately 200 animals on the property here. And we've fully moved our entire operation from Washington to Tennessee.

Josh: The day before you receive your 501 determination letter and the day after, everything changes. Because once you start taking animals, then locally, you become a place where everybody's trying to give you animals, right?

And quickly, we had to move away from owner-surrendered animals. I mean, that call is every day, right? Someone can't keep, doesn't want...sad stories. Divorce forces to give up animals, you name it, it's across the board.

But also as soon as you are known across the country for that 501(c)3 determination on whatever lists pop up. Then in the morning, you wake up to, "Calling from Sacramento, have 750 guinea pigs in a hoarding case."

“122 pigs in Massachusetts. How many can you take?”

It really escalates to things like law enforcement cases, seizures, the really, really sad stuff starts coming at you quickly.

Jasmin: Well, I mean, not to get super sad, but obviously, there is a super sad element to all of this.

So can you tell me a little bit more about where the animals are coming from, like what're some of their origin stories?

Wendy: Yeah, sure. We had a variety of cases up in Washington. We worked really closely with Animal Control up there.

It was cases where animals were being literally starved, tied up in a yard with no food and no fresh water. And thankfully, somebody would report that to Animal Control, and Animal Control would go out and say, “This is completely unacceptable. These animals are being taken into custody.”

And Animal Control is typically dogs and cats. They take farmed animals as much as they can, some counties will, but in a lot of cases, those animals are rescued quote/unquote from a bad situation and taken to auction because there is no place for them to go. There's physically no safe place for them to go.

And so we had a pretty good network in Washington just because we were there longer where we worked with Animal Control and took in some of those cases, like Magpie.

We had this beautiful goat named Magpie. She was one of those cases, tethered in the yard. Her hooves had never been trimmed. They were literally, literally Jasmin, like three to four feet.

Jasmin: Oh my God.

Wendy: It was incredible. She couldn't walk like that, and so Animal Control took her in, and they were like, “We don't even know what to do with this.”

They had to take a Sawzall to remove her excess hoof, and her legs were twisted and deformed, she needed a long-term course of rehabilitation just to even see if she was going to be able to have a good quality of life after surviving something like that. And I'm so happy to say she not only has a great quality of life, we

found her a great home where they continue to take care of her hooves, they do specialized care with her.

It's amazing. It's an amazing turnaround. In some cases, they're sad situations, yes, but we try really hard to find those cases where we can help animals retrieve their, we call it, their sanctuary babe status.

We want them to have all of the things that they need, medical care and good feed and good quality nutrition, and care for their skin and specialized care when they need it.

I'm happy to say we've had a lot of success stories with that.

Jasmin: That is so beautiful. Yeah, the sanctuary movement fascinates me because we only need a sanctuary movement because of all the exploitation and commodification, and sadness. But then it leads to all of this beauty and hope and inspiration.

Can you tell me about any animals whom you particularly have connected with?

Josh: Along with what you just said, the first thing to realize is we're hoping to all put ourselves out of business. Right? We're like a trainer at the gym. You're hoping that no one needs your services. And that's the ultimate, that a place like Odd Man Inn would have no need to exist, and instead, we'd be growing beets in pineapples, right? So that's what we hope in the short term, not the long term.

As far as some of the beautiful side of things, and sort of the strange side of things, a few months ago, I came home, and the Department of Homeland Security was in our yard.

Jasmin: Wow.

Josh: Okay. What's going on? And this gentleman gave me a card, and he said, "The sheriff's deputy in this county, in east Tennessee, wants to talk to you folks and wanted to see that you were a legitimate animal sanctuary."

And we're like, "Oh, okay..."

Wendy: Which, you know, kudos to them for doing their research.

They actually sent a representative to make sure the place looked legitimate.

Josh: Yep. And so we were like, “What is going on?” And it turns out that there was, in an eastern county, there was a potbelly pig that was running loose. It happens all the time, where people abandon them, they escape. There are potbellies everywhere, that get abandoned. And this pig Frances, she had made a route around a neighborhood.

She learned, “If I go house to house, at this place, I'll get a meal, and over here, I'll get some strawberries. And then she went next door to the cemetery, and she'd have a good scratch on the headstones over there, and she'd dig herself a nice nest in the cemetery, and that was who alerted the sheriff.

So you can imagine, rural Tennessee and free pigs running loose where Frances's fate could lie. And instead, this sheriff told the deputies to go out by the gun range, which, in this area, is out past the dog shelter, the dump, the motor pool...It's like a mile down a dirt road.

He said, “Build her a house.” It wasn't close to where they were shooting, it was just out on the gun range property, but they went out there, they built her a house, and they packed it with straw, and the sheriff's orders were, “Make sure she gets food and water every day.”

And even in the middle of February in snowstorms, at the end of your sheriff's deputy shift, you had to then take the Charger out through the dirt road and take warm water and oftentimes tacos or lasagna to Frances.

Jasmin: Oh my gosh. *Jasmin laughs*

Josh: These guys, admittedly, did not know how to care for pigs, right? Frances loves lasagna.

Wendy: However, they took care of Frances for over two years. They fed her, sheltered her, and they made sure that she was safe. They could have done any variety of really bad things with Frances, and instead, they were kind to her.

And when the sheriff didn't get reelected, the deputies all realized we have to find a home for Frances. The sheriff has been the person spearheading this whole Frances situation. And so they contacted us. They not only sent the Homeland Security people to make sure we looked legit, but then they contacted us and asked for help with Frances.

So when you ask, I think your initial question was stories where we connect, right? I think the more important thing is those beautiful stories where we see

people in the community that you wouldn't expect to connect with animals. That is so beautiful to us, and it is kind of the heart of what we are doing when we are educating and talking about our work. Trying to help, not only educate people but help them find ways to connect with animals of different species so that when they sit down to have a meal, they think about those animals.

And like that is a great story of seeing these people... They still check on her. They still text us and check in to make sure Frances is doing okay.

Josh: Yeah, I think that the micro-view, I guess, is that Frances has a great home, and she's losing weight. She was way overweight, she couldn't see anymore. And we're working on her diet, and she's doing pig stuff and has a buddy.

But in the bigger vision of what we all are trying to achieve here is we stay in contact with guys who, it's the generic macho talk and big muscular guys with crew cuts. And what we do is we keep our contact. We've already invited those guys out to come out in the spring or summer to see Frances, check in on Frances, and let us throw a cookout. So we can have a Beyond Burger cookout, and then we to take these guys for a walk and be like, "Okay, now let's talk about this. You guys absolutely love your dogs. You chose Frances to be saved for some reason. Now let's talk about why these other animals that you see out here that you're oohing and awwing over don't have those same rights or those same attitudes."

So it really gives us an opening to have dialogue.

Jasmin: I have talked to a lot of sanctuary people, I'll call them, and I get answers all across the board for how forthright are you with that kind of messaging.

There are people who tell me, "We just exist, and the animals sort of speak for themselves, and people make the connections." And then there are sanctuary people who draw the connections a little bit more clearly and say, "Okay, you love your dogs, what's the difference?"

So tell me a little bit about how you decided what your tact will be and if that tact changes depending on who you're speaking with.

Wendy: That's a great question.

Josh: Well, we could talk for an hour about what you just said because what you have to remember is very few organizations are sitting on a massive trust fund.

So, unfortunately, it is a fine balance in getting the word out and how much in your face you want to be, with the realization that we still have to feed a thousand pounds of food.

We use a thousand pounds in the cold winter every day.

Jasmin: Wow.

Josh: The costs, the vet costs, they're monumental. And so if someone is in a town in, say, eastern Washington state, and they're out there in the middle of town screaming that everyone should be vegan, which would be awesome, just up on a log, just like yelling facts and trying to get things right. But, you do need to have community support. And what we have found is community support comes from having very controlled scientific discussions about things like where does milk come from? When people say things to us like, "Well, these animals were put here for our use," our response is always the same.

"These animals weren't even put here. They're made. through the ego and greed of people trying to make money from them. There are no 900-pound pink pigs running around the Serengeti in Africa." So we have those discussions and stand our ground and then maintain the relationships, especially the business relationships, because our animals need those business relationships.

What I can't have is a feed supplier saying, "We're not gonna deliver to you." First thing in the morning, those 200 animals have to eat every day.

Wendy: And we do have to be respectful of the community that we have moved into. We moved from southern Washington, which is really close to Portland, Oregon. It's like vegan mecca there.

There are a lot of animal sanctuaries. There is a huge vegan community. It is not considered out there to be vegan or to be an animal activist. We knew that coming here to rural Tennessee, we live in a really small town that has approximately 1800 people. The community, in general, is all animal agriculture farmers. And so we knew that coming here, we were coming to an area where animals really needed advocates. They needed smart, savvy advocates who were not going to run off the few resources that they do here. We were, in fact, going to create more resources for them.

And it's challenging. It's challenging from our perspective, just as two vegans living in Tennessee, but also challenging to try and find those resources in a community that is so small and where veganism is very much a foreign concept, but it's important. Yes, we want to have open dialogue with people, and we want to make sure that we're not missing opportunities to educate people on facts around animals and agriculture. But also, we do have to be respectful of the fact that if the feed supplier gets angry with us and says, "We're not serving you anymore," our animals are in trouble. That is our primary goal, we have to take care of the animals that are relying on us for those resources.

Jasmin: Wow. There's a lot there. And I'm also fascinated by the fact that people who choose to work or, maybe, not choose to work but find themselves working in animal advocacy, especially directly, like you are, because you know, animals happen. It's like you get sort of an honorary doctorate in psychology or something because you have to work with the person in front of you.

Is that person a possible donor? Is that person a possible rabble-rouser? Is that person a possible ally? Is this anything that your former lives as a nurse, as a military person, prepared you for?

Wendy: I think as a nurse, absolutely. I've been a nurse for almost 25 years, and I still work, and I work as an emergency and trauma room nurse, and that is a really interesting lesson in psychology, every single shift that I work.

And I think the biggest thing that I take away from nursing, that I apply to animal advocacy, is you have to read your audience. You have to understand pretty quickly what their education level is, what their interest level is, find out what makes them tick, and then, as a nurse, I would just alter my education point based on what is going to stick with that person the best.

And it's the same concept, right? It's just like teaching 101, but for me, I usually do it in a hospital, not in a classroom. So, yeah, I think that working as a nurse definitely helps me with reading the audience, because there are some people who, as you start talking to them, you realize like, "This conversation is going to escalate and get inflammatory quickly, and that is not where I want it to go." That is not helpful. That is not beneficial. People shut down on you when they start to feel defensive and angry about what you're educating them on.

So, I think that my tactic, just based on my background, my tactic is much more...I'll circumvent the problems in communication to try and figure out how

can I get my message in there without shutting down this person who is maybe not super receptive to the message.

Josh is a little bit more direct than I am, and that's not bad. We just sort of use each other as differing tools based on the audience that we have. This is a better one for you. This is a better one for me. Our personalities are just very different and suited to different styles of visitors and guests.

Josh: Yeah, I think that what you have to have first before you start any discussion with anyone is your absolutes. And we are not flexible on our absolutes. And I'll give you an example. Just this morning, I had to run down to the hardware store, and so I'm waiting at the counter, and a gentleman next me is waiting at the counter, and he says, "Looks like the communists are really taking over in Washington." *Jasmin laughs*

No good morning. Not a...don't know your name, right? Like, just looks like the communists are taking over. And, he goes, "I don't know what we're gonna do about it." And I said, "Well, sir, you don't know me but," I said, "I'm not a citizen who's for sale, and I believe that your healthcare is more important to me as an American than a corporate dollar. And I don't know how that fits into communism."

Wendy: This is all before eight o'clock in the morning. *Wendy laughs*

Jasmin: Unbelievable. Wow. No wonder when I asked you during our sound test, I said, "What did you have for breakfast?" You kind of started laughing, and now I understand why because that conversation is what you had for breakfast.

Josh: Yes, yes! And I am a political, and probably moral, polar opposite to this human. But what we do have to do is find ways to have discussions that can show some parallel interest. and then we start with, "Okay, then why do you believe this?"

"This is why I believe this." And that doesn't mean that you have to cater to someone else's beliefs, especially in cases where I think it does harm to our brothers and sisters, be that animals or human.

I don't have to accept that opinion. But my job is to find a way, if someone says to me, like here in this town, it's a very religious town, and if someone says to me, "Well, God put these animals here for you."

My discussion is always the same, I like to counter that with, “If, one day, you believe your God is going to judge you before you get through the gates of heaven, and you say you chose not to exploit, consume, or abuse your God's perfect creations, and we both agree that these creations are perfect, isn't that true?”

And the people are always like, “Yes.”

“Then you will not be cast out of heaven for not destroying God's creatures, right?”

And over, I hear the same thing, which is, “No one's ever said anything like that.”

Jasmin: Oh my gosh.

Josh: In this town, right? Now, realize, it's a very closed community. It's generations and generations, and so we've gotta be prepared for those discussions and not back down from those discussions. But as soon as we put someone on the defense, just like you, just like me, we dig our heels in, and then it goes nowhere.

Wendy: It goes nowhere, and we potentially lose the resources that we need to take care of the animals here.

Josh: I can tell you a case where there was a sanctuary that needed hay. They weren't buying their hay from the gentleman who had a hay farm across the street. Across the street, right? Throw a baseball to the pile of hay. They needed a few tons of hay to get by. The guy refused, “I'm not gonna sell you my hay. You've got all those animals over there that you're wasting.”

Jasmin: Oh my God!

Josh: And so if you live amongst that...It's very fortunate for activists who have chosen to live in cities and have a large population of like-minded people. It is very challenging to be in a rural place where a veterinarian says, “We do not share the same philosophical beliefs about animals; therefore, I'm not going to treat your animals as my patients.”

Jasmin: Right, right. Wow. Ugh. There's a lot there.

I have a few follow-up questions that occurred to me while you were talking. First of all, Wendy, just going back to you for a second. So, being a nurse... one of my best friends who's vegan and is also an emergency room nurse, and she draws a lot of parallels between being a nurse, especially an emergency room nurse, and being a vegan and an animal advocate.

But you have this added layer where you're running a sanctuary, and you're caring for these animals, and I guess I'm just wondering where you put it all, and like what you do to also take care of yourself in the midst of this, because both of these things by themselves would warrant my asking this, but these two things together, it just wanna kind of hug you.

Wendy: *Wendy laughs* Don't hug! I'm not a hugger. I'm not really a hugger. *laughs*

Jasmin: Okay, I wanna high-five you, Wendy! *Wendy laughs*

Josh: Lemme give a short answer real quick, and then you answer!

Wendy: Okay. All right.

Josh: Because I think this is important. Even though Wendy's a great nurse, and I've had that firsthand. There are plenty of times where I'm not taking time to go to an ER cuz Wendy can fix most things.

But being a nurse is her job, whereas what she does out here, she's said to me before, just between the two of us, that it is her dream. And so, like the caring, sure, there's sadness, there's a lot of hard work. Last week, windchill 27 below zero, was awful. But I see Wendy go up and kneel down in front of Jolene and be like, "Good morning, beautiful Jolene, how are you?"

Jasmin: Aww.

Josh: Those are two completely different attitudes and jobs that share similarities.

Wendy: Yeah, I mean, I agree. Being a nurse comes as a second nature to me now. It does not drain me emotionally. Yes, it's a high-energy, high-adrenaline job to work as a trauma nurse, but when you've done it for so long, it's like riding a bike.

When I leave work, and I punch the clock, that's it, I'm done. I give my job my all, and when I punch out, that's it, I'm finished.

When I work here with the animals, even though a good degree of it is nursing care and tending and caregiving, again, it does not drain me. I don't feel like this job takes from me.

I feel like when we can take in an animal, rehabilitate them, get them physically well, watch them thrive, all that does is...people use that phrase, "does it take from your cup or add to your cup?" And to me, it just adds to my cup. It does not make me feel exhausted.

I mean, I'm an introvert by nature, and so when you ask how do I take care of myself...I'm just quiet, I watch something ridiculous on Netflix before bed at night. I turn my brain off, I heat up my little buckwheat pillow, and crawl in the bed with the cat, and that's it, I feel good. That is enough for me.

Now, would I one day like to see Africa? Yes, I would. I would really like to.

I would really like to be able to, at some point in our life, still be able to do some other things outside of the sanctuary, but we have made these choices together with eyes wide open. Maybe in the first couple of years, we didn't quite know what we were getting into. We did not intend for it to really take over our entire lives. But once we realized how big the need was, we realized how much good we could do, not only for animals but also as educators and animal rights advocates.

I was like, I don't think we can say no to this. I don't think that we can walk away from this and feel good about leaving that opportunity on the table where we can build something and create something that causes so much good. So in terms of taking care of myself, people ask me that a lot, and I feel like I'm good.

I don't feel drained by this work. Do I feel tired? Yes. I'm almost 46 years old, and I mean, the bales of hay seem to get heavier every year. I'm not even gonna lie.

But we fully realize that there is a limit to how much we are going to be able to do in our lifetime. And so, the majority of our planning for the last year and a half, and a big focus of our planning is succession planning for the organization. Realizing that we have to put that in place before we are either too old or too injured or too broke-down to be able to do this work anymore.

We wear a lot of hats for Odd Man Inn, and I'd venture to say we are, between the two of us, we are holding probably eight different job descriptions per person.

Josh: Which is what everyone else does, right? I mean, everyone who has an animal sanctuary.

Wendy: Absolutely. But we realize that as we build our succession plan, we have to put people in place that are appropriate for those different roles.

Jasmin: Well, about the succession plan, I did wanna ask you about that, especially given the fact that you took over a sanctuary, which I'm a little fuzzy on that, we don't have to get into it.

But I am curious if you could speak a little bit more about the importance, for sanctuaries specifically, or really anyone who cares for animals, how important is it to plan for leadership transitions? Is this a common problem?

Josh: It's a very common problem.

Wendy: Very common, and it's so vitally important.

It is almost like before you even take in your first animal, you better know where that animal is gonna go if something happens to you. Because I mean, even like working as a trauma nurse, I'm like, yeah, I mean, you blink your eyes, and you are suddenly immobilized. So you have to have plans in place for that, and people who are trained, and funding in the bank for the animals, and a safe home for them, and make sure that you know exactly who is going to take over the checkbook if you disappear tomorrow.

The way I usually phrase it is, if I vaporize tomorrow, this is going here, this is going there. This person is in charge of this, this person is in charge of that. And our plan is not perfect. But we have worked really hard and diligently to make sure there are people involved in the organization who will know how to manage those things if something were to happen to the two of us.

Josh: Yeah, along the lines with that is even the land itself, right? So when we were in Washington, we were the landholders, Wendy and Joshua Smith. But at this property, our house is at the end of the road. We live a few thousand feet away, and Odd Man Inn purchased this property, and that's very important for anybody listening, right?

Because if Odd Man Inn can work hard over the term of this mortgage and pay its mortgage, then these animals cannot be evicted. And then in part of our succession planning was- how do we make sure that they're never without water? And we worked on that last week in the emergency, when our entire county didn't have water service, we had to pump water out of our ponds. And that was part of our emergency plan in taking over this property, if the animals can pay for their property, they can't be evicted. If you have the means to get water out of the ponds, just an RV pump, they will never die of dehydration. And the worst case scenario is you walk throughout your town asking people to empty their refrigerators of scraps in a very dire situation.

And that's part of our succession also was laying down the property to be ready for whoever takes over next.

Jasmin: Well, it is good to know, especially given all that you have gone through in building out your sanctuary now, and honestly, I'm still kind of thinking about the Washington to Tennessee move.

Just logistically, how did you manage that? Just tell us a little bit about what that move itself was like.

Wendy: Unfortunately, there's no blueprint for that, as we even considered moving down here to Tennessee. It's not like you can Google that. You know, how do I move an animal sanctuary from one state to another, and they're 2,700 miles apart?

And so we knew that the move was gonna be difficult. We knew that it was gonna take time. Probably the most difficult part of that is that we technically had to run two sanctuaries at the same time while we moved the animals from Washington to Tennessee. And the Tennessee animals really needed a lot of care.

It wasn't like it was a turnkey operation. They needed vaccinations. We had 68 female pigs that needed to be spayed. We had quite a few injuries and illnesses that we had to take care of. And so our initial plan was we're gonna divide and conquer. One of us will stay in Washington, and one of us will go to Tennessee.

Josh: Probably over about a year and a half, is what we first thought. This'll probably take about a year and a half until expenses start showing themselves.

Wendy: Yeah, yeah. And we knew that we wanted to expand out of Washington. Our property, as we said, it was our own private property.

It was only three and a half acres. And at the time, we had too many animals on three and a half acres. We knew that we were gonna have to have bigger property.

Josh: Let me correct that a little bit because you said expand out of Washington.

Wendy: Not necessarily, yeah.

Josh: We didn't necessarily want to leave Washington.

We just like, for the health of the land. and for the animals and not being in a position where we would've had to create enrichment, like give the goats a Buick to crawl on. We were like, we need to have a bigger facility. And with that bigger facility, it opens up much more advocacy for tourism education.

Walking two and a half minutes across our entire property in a tour doesn't really accomplish what we are trying to do in education.

Wendy: Right. And in Washington, we had a volunteer crew that worked with us, and it had 60 volunteers working with us seven days a week on just three and a half acres of property.

This is a lot of people. Like we had a regular volunteer crew that was there every day.

Josh: Not all 60 were there every day.

Wendy: No, not all 60. No, but my point is we knew that we wanted to purchase larger property for the sanctuary. What we didn't want to do is go to a place where we're in like New Mexico, and there is a water issue there.

We looked at some properties in the Southwest, and we're like, "I don't know. This feels dangerous. Right?" And the whole west coast, every year, they're talking about the fire risk and having to evacuate entire sanctuaries. So we knew that we wanted to get away from the fire risk, and when this opportunity came up in Tennessee, I was like, we should maybe consider this.

Tennessee is a difficult area to move an animal sanctuary into. And we already talked about resources in the community and the different mindset here, but in terms of water and fire risk, we were like, it's pretty good. Those are actually in the pro column for doing this.

Josh: We put those into our discussion, right? What we now have to call, I guess, legacy disasters. Fire, hurricane, tornado, earthquake, blizzard, we're pretty low on that stuff. Now it's a whole new realm that we're talking about, how we have to fight local climate change. Deluges and erosion and such like that...

Wendy: Or once in a generation storms that pop up.

Josh: But in coming to Tennessee, when we're talking about the potential for that and bringing our organization here, we're like, "Okay, it does have those benefits even though the property certainly is not ideal..."

It's so vertical. There are cliffs here. I really worry about- would an animal ever slip on ice and fall down a cliff? We've gotta figure out fencing into rocks, stuff like that. It's really gonna be challenging over the next five years. But coming to Tennessee did eliminate some natural disaster issues that we're seeing.

I mean, we spent summers and summers either helping people evacuate, being on our own roof, hosing it down as burning embers are falling on our roof. The house that we sold in Washington had to be evacuated last year for fire. So that was a big deal in coming to Tennessee was- can we manage natural disasters?

Jasmin: You're talking to a climate refugee, so I totally get it. When I was moving out of LA, the fires were blazing in the background. So I feel you.

Wendy: Yeah. You understand the surreal nature of waking up and the sky looks strange and the clouds...

Jasmin: And the air quality is terrible.

Josh: Well, there's all that, Jasmin, but just imagine this.

I can't put my mind there, really...that you wake up and there's a fire five miles away, and you're looking at 200 animals out in the field, and you can't get them away. We needed to remove ourselves from that because imagine the guilt if tragedy did strike.

Jasmin: Unreal. And we had two chihuahuas and a cat, and we're like, "How are we gonna get them out?!" *all laugh*

And also, as someone in the same age group as you, I have to say, you're like, "Oh, lifting the hay gets harder and harder." And I'm like, "Lifting my chihuahua is getting really hard!" *all laugh*

So I get it, man! I feel like we're very similar. *all laughing*

Wendy: Yeah. So there wasn't a recipe for how we were going to move from one place to the other.

The best we could do is sort of structure this loose framework of, "Okay, this is how we think it's gonna go down. This is the algorithm of things that can go wrong..." And then... *laughs*

Josh: And then they did. They all went wrong. *Wendy & Josh laugh*

Wendy: They did. Every one of them, right? Every one of them, whether it was broken vehicles, or we hired a transport company just for one of our transports, and that went terribly.

So then we moved all of the animals ourselves because we simply did not trust for someone else to move the animals.

Josh: We ended up in St. Joseph, Missouri, at 2:00 AM. Broken wheel, Roswell, the completely dangerous dog with us in the cab, and the trailer connected with our bigs.

Wendy: With six big pigs! *Wendy laughs*

Josh: 500 pounds plus.

Jasmin: Oh my God.

Wendy: We had to get towed off of the side of the road. A huge diesel duely, and a trailer full of pigs. I mean, can you imagine? I'm like, "I'm not leaving this truck. I'm not leaving."

Jasmin: Yeah, no kidding.

Josh: We had this cart of fruits and veggies delivered to the repair garage for breakfast. The guy is like, "Are you really gonna feed 800-pound pigs breakfast? Can I watch?" And it started a conversation, you know what I mean?

But, I wanna throw in, even though is kind of a tangent, before we go any further and I get a chance to forget. Our support crew and what we called our animal care crew is the key to us moving quickly and successfully.

Whether that was Dana, our friend, who picked up her entire life and towed her tiny home here so she could work seven days a week. Because remember, a trip for me was- race back to the Northwest in three days, catch a nap, and then buddy drive straight down to come back. So the turnaround was six to seven days, no matter what.

And so Wendy still had to work because we needed way more money than we ever thought we needed. Right? I mean, we had broken trailers, tractors were broken here.

Wendy: Which then also meant that our crew in Washington, the 60 people that I talked about, they were running the sanctuary in Washington while we were doing the move.

I was working, and I was the mom of the farm, and I kept the wheels on the cart as far as logistics of moving, keeping vet appointments, moving CVIs for animals, blood draws done on time, helping Josh with his transport back and forth, helping him with finding repairs for broken things on the side of the road as he was traveling.

It was a lot to manage. It was a lot. And I look back now, and I'm like, I don't really know how we...

Josh: We wouldn't do that again!

Wendy: I'd never, never... *Wendy laughs*

Josh: No way. And so it's really important to, to recognize that our, our family, right? I mean, Wendy and I don't have kids, our animal care crew is what made that possible.

Jasmin: Yeah, that is a really beautiful reminder that it takes a community in so many ways. And I just have a couple more questions for you. I guess first, I am curious, if you were to go back to yourself sort of at the beginning of this process and offer one bit of advice, what would it be?

Wendy: At the beginning of starting Odd Man Inn, is that what you mean? Our biggest mistake, I think, was that we did not volunteer at sanctuaries. We just

didn't have that visual mindset of what it was to run an animal sanctuary. And honestly, we always say this to people- you think you wanna run an animal sanctuary, volunteer at one very regularly, and learn all the ins and outs.

Not just the names of the animals, but learn about the fundraising, learn about marketing, about dealing with social media, dealing with the Secretary of State, bookkeeping, and all of that really unsexy stuff that goes into running a legitimate organization. And that alone maybe would've scared us into having two Chihuahuas and a cat. *all laugh*

Jasmin: It can be a lot of work. I'm just saying! Kidding.

Wendy: That was sort of our biggest mistake from the very start. We just didn't do enough research. We fell into running an animal sanctuary just because we loved animals, right? And when we were in a little over our heads in terms of like, "Wow, we got a lot of animals. We're gonna have to figure out a plan."

We went down the route of running an animal sanctuary without thinking that more would come and more would come, and more would come and that it would continue building on itself. And now it has grown into this organization that has a life all of her own. And I think that we could have controlled some of that if we had educated ourselves from the beginning, instead of educating ourselves as we are going.

Josh: Yeah. The phrase that we use is, especially down here, we're building a plane as we're flying a plane as we're still designing the plane. And one thing that really helped us after we had become Odd Man Inn and we were learning, right? The learning curve is very steep.

I had given and followed Best Friend's Animal Society in Kanab, Utah, for years. And we were like, "Oh, they put on a how to start an animal sanctuary conference." And we didn't really have any money because we were putting it all into our animals at home. They do it in the summer, so things are kind of cheap and slower.

So I went down there in this Toyota Previa van that didn't have air conditioning, and camped out in the desert and went to the conference. But not only was the conference helpful, the support from Best Friends after, being able to email their founders with things like- this is going on, have you had this happen before?

Or even good things. Like the first time we got a \$10,000 donation, we're like, "How do we say thank you? Call best friends! What's the right way to say thank you?"

Wendy: And they were so generous with their knowledge with their, "Here, we'll share these documents with you so you can see an example of how this works. Oh, you need to talk to an attorney for a little bit of advice. Like, let us connect you with somebody. Let us help you with that." They were really, really gracious to us and set the bar pretty high for how we want to be as an organization, as we grow. We want to share what knowledge we have, share the experience we have with people. Not hoard that knowledge and watch other people flounder. Like, John, hang on there, you don't have to reinvent the wheel. We can show you what has worked for us.

Jasmin: Yeah, that is so cool.

Josh: Number one, if you're considering starting this, we talk about for someone personally to go volunteer at one place so you can get deep enough into the business to learn that.

But the other side of that is your infrastructure. If you are going to try to help an 800-pound pig, then you need to have the equipment to get an 800-pound pig to the hospital. It isn't always gonna work with farm vets. They don't have the diagnostics that you necessarily need.

And so one thing that we have caught up on, but we didn't necessarily start with, was our infrastructure for equipment and things. We've had a case where a pig that's well over 700 pounds can't get up, but we can get them on the slide, get them loaded in the trailer, and on the road within 15 minutes. We've done it. And we've worked hard on our infrastructure to make sure that we could do that from any place on our land. Even with the verticality, right? And so I think with huge hearts and the best of intentions, oftentimes people get into, "Okay, well, I'm gonna take this one in. I'm gonna take this one in, I'm gonna take this one in." And then it's a real pinch when it comes to- how are you going to be able to haul 1200-pound hay bales? How will you get that huge animal to the hospital? What are you gonna do to truck water to those animals when it's below freezing?

Jasmin: Yeah. Wow.

That's great advice for anybody who's thinking about starting a sanctuary, and I know a lot of our listeners mention it from time to time, and I love...

Josh: Well, put the word out there, have them call us!

Jasmin: Well, that's so nice. I mean, you're paying it forward. I love to hear how Best Friends supported you in that way.

Again, to the power of community, we really need each other in this community in particular. So I have one more question for you before we get into our bonus content. And you know, with everything you've seen and everything, you continue to see what gives you hope? And I will offer this disclaimer that I asked someone that question recently, and she basically was like, "Why are you assuming anything gives me hope?" So I will say if something gives you hope, what gives you hope? *Wendy & Josh laugh*

Josh: Let me take my Robert Smith Cure shirt off. Get out of sad mode and...
all laugh

Wendy: I think what gives me hope is seeing how enthusiastically people, even meat eaters, are willing to connect with animals.

And they're there, right? They are people on our social media, they're people that are donors here, long-term, regular donors here, who know our animals by name, they know their personalities, they know their stories. They ask about them frequently. They are still in touch with that part of their inner psyche, whatever you wanna call it.

They have not lost that ability to have some degree of empathy with animals of different species, and that is what gives me hope literally on a daily basis. When I feel frustrated by a million different things here if I really watch the connections that are capable between total strangers and animals, whom I have just shared their story online. I'm not embellishing. I don't need to make it dramatic. I don't need to add a lot of fancy filters and gifs and all that stuff online.

If I just share the pureness of their story and the pureness of their life, people are still able to connect with them, and that is what I really try to capitalize on when I am talking about the animals here at Odd Man Inn.

Jasmin: Hmm. Beautiful answer. Josh, do you wanna weigh in?

Josh: It's kind of twofold, but I'll keep it as short as I can. Walmart.

Wendy: Walmart gives you hope?!

Jasmin: Okay. This was not an answer I have ever, in 13 years of doing this and probably a thousand times of asking this question, I have not heard Walmart! But do tell.

Josh: I'll challenge you, wherever your local Walmart is, to take stock of what they are selling currently for vegan and plant-based items, and then go back in a few months and see what they're stocking. And they are recognizing that there is a market. Our town has 1800 people, and every week there are more products at Walmart.

And sometimes I go in there, and I said to one woman, I was like, "You're not gonna take that last package of Gardein chicken strips, are you?"

"I was gonna..."

I'm like, "uuuhhhh!"

You know what I mean? The stuff is selling. It isn't just like Josh and Wendy are supporting Walmart's plant-based initiative. We're seeing that. We're seeing it on the labels, right!?

So when I was a kid, Country Crock came around, and it was like the alternative to butter. But now they call themselves the first plant-based spread, right? V8 has started calling themselves the first fully plant-based drink, or the original plant-based drink.

And I tie that in with the fact that a couple of years ago, a friend of mine, years and years ago, had married into a four-generation dairy, back where I'm from. And she never liked it, but it was the family that she had, and it supported her kids in going to college. And we talked for years, and it wasn't my discussions with her that necessarily changed this into happening, but recently they closed the dairy, and they started selling organic pumpkins and hemp and collecting solar power. And they're making more money than they've ever made.

Now our discussions with things like that can't just be, "Shut down your dairy." Our discussions have to be, "I, as your citizen brother, want you to succeed, and I want you to do better than you're doing now, not on the backs of animals." And the fact that when we left Washington, people were giving up their grazing leases to sell leases for solar and wind collection. And those landowners are admitting that they're making more money.

Jasmin: That's so cool. Walmart. *laughs*

That is so cool. I love your spin on that, and I see how you're able to do this work in a way because you both have very good attitudes.

Wendy: And we balance each other, right? We're very different personalities. We have really different perspectives on the world and on life. We're from different areas of the country. But we really balance each other.

Jasmin: Amazing.

Wendy: And we keep each other sane as well. Josh is my husband, and he's my best friend. Well, sort of sane.

Josh: Yeah. I think it's important, Jasmin. I really wanna try to get this in there if we can.

We all have our days where we wake up, and want to swing a crowbar at the world and be like, "Listen! This makes sense!"

Like everybody has those angry days where you're like, "This should be so easy!"

You're like, "Come on, this is so easy!" But what we cannot do is give the world that side. If our only view of ourselves as a movement, as an organization, and a community is anger and finger-pointing, then what happens is people say, "I never want to be like those guys. They seem miserable."

We have to balance our intensity and our passion for this, right? I mean, this is our moral basis in what we believe in, but we also have to bring to the world the fact that we're fun, we're adjusted people, we're fun people, we're tofu eaters that you want to hang out with, right?

Because if the entire world views us as people they'd never want to be around, we're gonna have a lot harder time convincing people to make those changes.

Jasmin: Well, that is a beautiful and powerful way to end, but tell me how our listeners can find you online and support your efforts.

Wendy: Well, we're pretty easy to find. It's Odd Man Inn on everything. So Instagram, it's @OddManInn. If you want to join us on Patreon, it's just patreon.com/oddmaninn, and our website is oddmaninn.org.

Jasmin: Very cool. Well, please stay on with me for the bonus content because I want to dig a little deeper. But thank you both so much for all that you do to change the world for animals and for caring so deeply, and for situating yourself in such an accessible way.

I think that's really inspiring, and I really enjoyed chatting with you today, so thank you.

Wendy: Thank you. We're really grateful for the opportunity to share our story with your listeners. Thank you so much.

Josh: Yeah, thanks for being a kind interviewer.