

## Jerri Carel And The Ferret Haven Ferret Rescue And Sanctuary

**It's all about helping ferrets for Jerri Carel and her rescue, The Ferret Haven Ferret Rescue And Sanctuary near Louisville, Kentucky.**

*By Troy Lynn Eckart*

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© Courtesy of Jerri Carel

Rory the ferret lived with a foster family after coming through the rescue, and he enjoyed lots of time outside, his favorite place.

Jerri Carel was first introduced to ferrets when her junior high-age son wanted a ferret. After much research, they adopted a pair from their local ferret shelter in northwest Chicago. Six months later, the ferrets became Carel's when her son lost interest in them. One ferret died rather quickly from lymphosarcoma. This loss prompted Carel to learn as much as she could about ferrets, so she volunteered at the shelter where they had adopted the ferrets. Carel lovingly worked 20 hours a week at the shelter. In 1996, she established her own ferret shelter, The Ferret Haven, and later relocated to Kentucky. Today, she looks back on it all with wonder. "I never imagined I'd be sheltering 12 years later, let alone have over 800 ferrets under our belt and 45 fuzzy residents at one time!"

### Memories To Cherish

Many of Carel's rescues stay with her for years. Since opening The Ferret Haven, 836 ferrets have passed through its doors. Carel feels comfortable accommodating 35 ferrets at one time, however, she's currently housing 45 because the state of the economy is causing people to lose their jobs and their homes.

One heartwarming situation for Carel occurred when she reunited some Hurricane Katrina ferrets with their family.

"The family was supposed to be relocated to Louisville but ended up in Houston," Carel said. "Unfortunately, the family had gone to great lengths to get their ferrets transported to Louisville. After many weeks, we were able to meet in Tennessee for a tearful reunion of the human and fuzzy family."

One of Carel's most memorable rescues occurred when a Hispanic man called her for help because he and his painting crew found ferrets abandoned in an apartment they were working on. At first they thought the animals in the cage were dead, but then they realized one was breathing.

"This man who spoke very little English took the time to find a shelter on the Internet, call us, bring the ferrets to us and even gave money to help with expenses," Carel said. "There was one live ferret who was as close to death as possible, lying in this cage with his cagemates who had passed. He was in the worst condition I had ever seen a live ferret." The ferret pulled through after many injections of fluids and feedings of special food.

"It was truly a miracle and never would have been possible had that man not taken the time to act on behalf of that poor little ferret. [It] still makes me teary-eyed," Carel said. "There are those who will dump ferrets in a cardboard box outside your door in the dead of a winter night, and then there are people like this who have never owned a ferret but go to great lengths to save a little fuzzy life."

Unfortunately, all rescues don't have a happy ending.

Rory was surrendered by a family because the daughter, his owner, went to college and they couldn't care for him. He hadn't been out of his cage for a year except during cage cleanings.

"He was still and had poor muscle tone, which we initially thought was from being caged," Carel said. "Later, we put his many abnormalities together and discovered that he was a rare case of dwarfism in ferrets. He had a sweet rounded and short nose, short front legs, and a still gait with poor balance, which caused him to tip over frequently when he walked."

Rory lived happily for a few months in the care of a loving foster family. He became ill and in only 10 days and two visits to the veterinarian, he died from an enlarged heart and a monster-sized liver.

"He passed just as he had lived his last few months — in his foster mommy's arms, with much love, outside, which was

his favorite place," Carel said.

#### Life At The Ferret Haven

Carel has a job, so she can't spend her whole day at the shelter, much as she wishes she could. She joked that if she could figure out how to make something out of ferret poo, she might be able to make a living sheltering ferrets.

A typical day at the shelter begins with morning medications. Then Carel lets out the first two play groups to play.

"Their cages get cleaned immediately when they're let out, including fresh water and replenished food," Carel said. "I get a couple shifts out before leaving for the office. Sometimes I come home at lunch to change play groups. If not, I'll continue with them once I get home, which is the real beginning of my ferret day."

Carel cleans cages, tickles tummies and returns calls to people regarding ferrets until it's time for her own dinner. She then does a couple loads of ferret laundry and gives nighttime medications. During the evening, a volunteer might arrive to help or someone might drop by looking to adopt a ferret.

"We end each day in the rocking chair with a couple of special ferrets like our 10-year-old, half-bald, mostly blind Blossom, whose greatest joy is snuggling in a blanket and being rocked while I rub her little ears. I don't think I could have a shelter without my rocking chair!" Carel said.

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