



love is for the birds

Zander family life on the farm | BY AMANDA BERGEN

PHOTOGRAPHS BY CLARA AND PETER ZANDER

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HEN CLARA ZANDER WAS EIGHT years old, she asked her parents for chickens. Not soft, stuffed chickens, mind you. Real, squawking, feathered chickens. It was a request that changed the Zander family's life. "I'll never forget that day she asked me," says her father, Peter Zander. "There was that glint in her eye."

Peter grew up with chickens running around outside his house in Pound Ridge, and wife Nancy, also a Pound Ridge native, says she and her four siblings "spent 23 hours a day outdoors," so their youngest daughter's poultry petition was not entirely out of left field. They quickly acquiesced.

Even though their first fowl were pets, the addition of the chickens—followed by ducks, then geese, then turkeys—to the Zanders' Katonah household was the start of a massive shift in how the family lived and continues to live today. Once again, Clara was the driving force. She soon decided to eat meat only when she knew its origins: the farmer, his farming practices, and the animal's quality of life. In short, Clara needed to know that the farmers felt the same way about their animals as she felt about hers. The whole family, including older sister Ella, soon followed suit.

"It's hard to live that way," says Nancy. "But once you start, it is easy. I don't have to go to the supermarket. I open the freezer and I have venison, beef, pork, lamb, tomatoes, whatever I want."

Nancy is also an avid gardener but keeps her vegetable plantings limited to herbs, tomatoes, and lettuce. She figures other people grow the other stuff better, so she buys most of her fruits and vegetables at farmers' markets or from people she knows. It also makes it easier to co-exist with the animals. "It's nice knowing that I can garden, the birds are free range, and we live together happily."

As Nancy talks, she is standing on top of the compost heap in the chicken coop. It's made up of chicken droppings and wood shavings from the hen house, but the family also tosses in all garden and kitchen scraps as well as leaves from the yard. The chickens not only eat the scraps but turn the heap constantly with their scratching. The resulting fertilizer is a gardener's dream.

Peter and Nancy feel that they've gotten a lot more than healthy living out of their lifestyle. They've raised two daughters who caught on to the importance of sustainability at a very young age and are now "walking the walk." Twenty-year-old Ella, a rising junior at Emerson College, will spend this summer working at Morning Glory Farm on Martha's Vineyard. Sixteen-year-old Clara gets up at 5:30 every morning—by choice—before high school to do farm chores and is a force to be reckoned with on the Poultry Show circuit. With a thorough understanding of genetic crosses and how to get them, she breeds and shows Indian Runner ducks. "Duck shows are not the sort of thing you're aware of unless you're doing it," says Nancy. "But Clara wins Best in Show and Best in Breed all the time."

The Zanders feel that supporting small farmers is the key to a sustainable world. "Through that support, if enough people can do it, we can actually change the face of agriculture," says Peter. "The price will come down if demand increases. It needs to be affordable to people who can't afford to spend a lot of money."

If an eight-year-old child can change lives, then surely, believe the Zanders, so can we all. ■

ZANDERVILLE Clockwise from top: Nancy Zander and Lucy under the white wisteria tree. Orpington and Belgian Bearded D'Anvers near the main barn. The main barn, built from a barn in Margaretville, NY. Dopey, a favorite Polish chicken. Indian Runner Ducks head to the pond. Royal Palm turkey at the front door.

