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**Millions of “Presents” are Dumped in Shelters Every Year
Animal Sponsorship Offers a Humane Alternative to Giving Animals as Gifts**

Dalton, Penn. — When 9-year-old Ava insisted the only Christmas gift she wanted was a pet pig, her mom Kristie Martinis knew she had to get creative. With a bit of digging, Kristie uncovered an ideal solution — sponsoring an animal through the [Circle of Compassion](#) program at **Indraloka Animal Sanctuary** in Dalton, PA. There, a minipig named Wendell was just the pig for Ava. Under the tree that Christmas, Ava found a framed photo of Wendell and a plushy pig toy. Most importantly, she found a letter describing how she was now responsible for Wendell, contributing to his veterinary care, meals, shelter and everyday needs at the sanctuary where Ava could visit him for special one-on-one time. Now a teenager, Ava still sponsors Wendell, and both benefit tremendously from their special bond.

“Sponsoring an animal makes a wonderful gift for a range of people — everyone who loves animals and anyone who’s hard to buy for. You can sponsor online, so it’s a great last-minute gift. And it’s magical for children. It helps teach them responsibility while giving them the opportunity to connect with an animal they could not otherwise have a relationship with,” says Indraloka founder Indra Lahiri, PhD.

Numerous animal welfare organizations, including the Humane Society and PETA, urge people not to buy animals as presents. The holidays are absolutely the worst time to bring a new animal into the home. Also, many people underestimate the amount of care companion animals require. Every January, animal shelters are flooded with puppies and kittens purchased as gifts. By March, shelters are turning away animals and euthanizing healthy ones because there is no place for



them.

The ASPCA estimates that more than 920,000 healthy dogs and cats are euthanized each year. Thirty-four percent of the dogs that wind up in shelters were purchased from breeders.

“The statistics are tragic. We are killing nearly a million healthy, wonderful animals every year and the solution is so simple. Adopt, don’t shop. But don’t adopt until you know definitively that you are ready to care for a dog or other animal and can dedicate approximately 12 to 20 years doing so,” Dr. Lahiri says.

At Indraloka, nearly all 200 animals (except Wendell, of course) are available for sponsorship. The sanctuary hosts year-round events, including reading, art and music programs for children, giving them the opportunity to interact with the gentle, loving animals. Through the [Animal Pen Pals program](#), children from all over the world have bonded with animals at Indraloka. Summer day camps help kids of all ages connect more deeply to themselves, each other, the animals and nature. Indraloka’s Director of Education, Sarah Thornton, MM, creates collaborative projects with school districts throughout the US.

For Ava, sponsoring Wendell and visiting him regularly at Indraloka has taught her invaluable lessons about selflessness, service and how doing what is best for another is the highest form of love. Initially, Ava was upset to learn that “her” pig Wendell would not be living with her. But when she met Wendell, all of her disappointment faded.

“Wendell waddled so fast up to Ava and went nose to nose with her. He had the biggest pig smile and Ava had the biggest kid smile. Her exact words were, ‘It’s like he knows I’m his mom.’ This is when I knew doing the sponsorship was the right thing — there was no way we could care for a pig. Wendell has become a huge part of our lives. We have pictures of him in our house like he is



one of the family,” Ava’s mom Kristie says. “If you have the opportunity to help save a life, taking on a sponsorship is the easiest way. Showing a young child that you can have and care for animals with a monthly sponsorship helps the animal and the child.”

Dr. Lahiri and Wendell are available for interviews. Videos and photos available, upon request. Members of the press are invited to attend any Indraloka event and/or meet with Dr. Lahiri and the wonderful animals. For more information on Indraloka events, please visit the sanctuary [online](#).

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About Indraloka Animal Sanctuary

Indraloka, a 501(c) nonprofit, provides “heaven on earth” for farm animals that have nowhere else to turn. We hold year-round events that inform, inspire, and empower the community, and help people — especially children — heal from trauma. We advocate for a kind and compassionate lifestyle that protects animals, the earth and our own health. As educators, we offer a wide range of STEAM-based learning programs, summer camps and field trips for children, K-12. The community is invited to tour the sanctuary; reservations are required. Visit us at Indraloka.org.