

farmgirl SPUNK

by Susan Edwards, New Jersey



My first book was published after being rejected by 445 publishers in the English-speaking world. The 446th publisher accepted the book, which eventually appeared in both hardcover and paperback, as well as in 10 languages (English, French, Chinese, Portuguese, Hebrew, Spanish, German, Swedish, Slovenian, and Turkish). Entitled *When Men Believe in Love*, the book was nonfiction psychology.

I LEARNED AS A GIRL NOT TO GIVE UP ...

to persist if something mattered to me. My mother would encourage me to “persevere,” and Dad would advise, “work hard,” but perhaps the greatest teacher in persisting was my pet bunny, a white rabbit named Penny Black Ears.

I was 9 years old and we lived in a small Pennsylvania town. We had a dog named Trixie, who, along with Penny, I loved with a true heart. They made me happy, giving me the emotional riches uniquely offered by pets. While Trixie could run and play with me, Penny would snuggle. He liked to be stroked behind his ears and would wiggle his bunny nose to show he liked being petted. Dad built a little wooden house for him with two levels—a first floor and an open basement so that he could be comfortable in any kind of weather. He had a large, fenced-in pen and was a sweet, beautiful animal who was all white with black ears. I loved him very much.

ONE WINTER DAY, I came home from school, and after doing my homework at the dining-room table, I went outside to see Penny. It was dusk. Dad was on his way home from work, and it was very cold. The sun was going

down; it was getting darker and snow was falling. I went down to Penny’s pen and looked in. He wasn’t there. I looked inside his house, underneath it in his open basement, and all around the enclosure. It was empty.

I BECAME AFRAID. WHAT IF SOMETHING HAD HAPPENED TO HIM?

I ran up to the house and burst inside, where Mother was getting ready to serve dinner. Dad had just come home and was tired after a long day. I was crying and went over to him, sobbing through my tears, “Penny has gotten out of his pen and we have to go find him.” Dad said we could do that tomorrow—that it was cold, dark, and snowing. “A white rabbit will be pretty hard to find in the snow at night,” he said.

I couldn’t hold on any longer. “He could die, Daddy. We have to go look for him,” I begged. And so we did. My father put his coat and boots back on, and armed with a flashlight, we went out searching for a lost white rabbit in the night snow. Because the wind was blowing, there were no footprints to follow, but eventually, we found him—huddled under a bush in the neighbor’s yard. I picked Penny up, we took him back to his pen, and Dad repaired the hole he found there. We had dinner about nine o’clock that evening, but the lesson I learned would last a lifetime and strengthen my own farmgirl spunk.

WHEN YOU ARE MOTIVATED BY LOVE, YOU DON’T GIVE UP.

My life has changed much since I was 9. I have faced severe challenges and overcome many obstacles. One of the most difficult, I am facing now. Over the last eight years, I started a charity and have been working to establish a permanent horse-therapy farm for traumatized children ages 5–12. Our 501(c)3 organization (TeamVelvet.com) provides holistic, non-mounted horse therapy for children who have experienced terrible accidents, losses, and deaths. My helping-horse herd is amazing, and my love for this work is powerful. Each time we are rejected for a grant, approach a potential benefactor, or ask someone to donate a farm, I am reminded that when I was 9, I faced harder odds. And once again, I am reminded that I still have farmgirl spunk, motivated by love.

Susan Edwards, Ph.D. is a psychologist/author and graduate of Annie’s Project, a farm management for women program at NJ Rutgers University. Horse-farm manager and author of four books and 100+ articles, she welcomes all funding ideas: TeamVelvet.com, 609-924-4330, or sedwardsnj@earthlink.net