

MONADNOCK PROFILE:

Troy woman is proud to nurture an animal house

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By Joan Geary Contributing Writer

AT A GLANCE

- > Name: Lily Plasse
- > Age: 43.
- > Born in: Springfield, Mass.
- > Residence: Troy, for the past 11 years.
- > Family: Husband, Ron Boardman; son, Edward, 8; daughter, Ingrid, 6; and three adult children.
- > Education: AA, Liberal Arts, Springfield Technical Community College, 2000.
- > Employment: Owner, Barnyards & Backyards Farm & Pet Sitting, Troy.
- > Pets: Three dogs, Rex, Ruby and Dexter; two cats, Cider and Punkin; three horses, Sky, Gypsy and Blackfoot.
- > Hobbies: Breeding and showing rare heritage poultry, reading, writing nonfiction.
- > Volunteer activities: N.H. Poultry Youth Leader, APA-ABA Poultry Youth Club.

> Question:

How did you end up in Troy?

Answer: "I worked for a construction company. My boss lived in Harrisville. Ron and I investigated the Monadnock Region, and found and bought the Troy property before we married."

> Question:

Is there anything about your business that you don't like?

Answer: "If someone's pet passes away that you've cared for a long time, that's tough. I get sad when a client's elderly pet passes away."

> Question:

What kind of chickens and turkeys do you breed?

Answer: "We breed and show Dominique chickens, bantam Dominique chickens, Silkies and Narragansett turkeys."



MICHAEL MOORE / Sentinel Staff

Lily Plasse of Troy hangs out with her mustang, Gypsy. An animal lover all her life, Plasse operates Barnyards & Backyards Farm and Pet Sitting.



Lily Plasse can't recall a time in her life without pets. From her earliest childhood memory, there were cats and dogs, a rabbit called "Poopsie" (named for his favorite activity), and by age 7 or 8, even a mouse. A self-described tomboy, she loved hamsters, snakes, lizards and turtles, raised chicks and ducks in middle school, and acquired her first horse as a gift in her teens.

And today, at age 43, she remains just as passionate about pets — not only her own but others'.

Plasse, who lives in Troy, owns and operates Barnyards & Backyards Farm and Pet Sitting, which she launched two years ago. A highly experienced horse, livestock and poultry owner, she provides pet care services for all kinds of animals — domestic, farm and exotic — in Troy and surrounding towns.

"I've always loved animals, and I also like to meet new people," she said. "I work with everything from fish, dogs, cats, rodents, horses, cows, and sheep to poultry, exotic birds and snakes and lizards."

Dog walking, home care, grooming, stall mucking, and pet transportation are a few of the tasks she does, plus worming, shearing and assisting with animal births.

"I do pretty much everything as long as it's legal, and as long as it's not going to kill me," she said.

Plasse grew up in Springfield, Mass., in a two-family house shared by her grandfather with her family. It sat on a 2-acre lot and backed up to the woods, a small country oasis in the midst of the city, she says.

Enamored with animals, she planned to be a veterinarian, and right out of high school found work in a local science museum. She cared for live exhibits of turtles, fish and snakes, doing everything from feeding and nurturing the animals to draining and scrubbing their huge tanks.

Her role model, she says, was Joan Embery, well-known animal advocate and goodwill ambassador of the San Diego Zoo, who was a popular television personality of the day. Besides having her own PBS animal series, she frequently brought exotic animals for TV appearances on such programs as "The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson" and "Good Morning America."

"Joan Embery was my hero. I wanted to be her," she said.

Instead, at 19, she became a single parent, and made her living as a secretary and administrative assistant.

A decade later, in the late '90s, she also started a part-time pet-sitting business, working mostly with small animals, primarily cats and dogs.

At about the same time, friends introduced her to Ron Boardman. The couple dated for several years, relocated to Troy, and married on Halloween 2002.

Their blended family includes three children, now adults, and they subsequently had two children together, both born at home in Troy.

Plasse worked initially for a construction company, briefly at the Monadnock Humane Society, and, until recently, was employed for five years as library assistant at the Gay-Kimball Library in Troy.

In 2010, she launched her business part-time, finally going full-time in April.

"In the beginning, I built the business slowly. I advertised in the Troy newsletter, but most was word of mouth," she said.

Business is good year-round, particularly in the summer, but peak season is Thanksgiving through the Christmas holiday season.

"I love it," she said. "The hardest part is that if I'm sick, the animals still need to get out and be cared for. I've got to do it. If there's a snowstorm, they still need to be cared for.

"People use a pet sitter for peace of mind, for reliability, for being insured," she said. "I've had no problems yet, hopefully never. But, animals can be unpredictable. You have to be on your toes and know that things can happen." Among her longtime clients is Darline Harris of Troy, who's known Plasse for seven years. Harris owns a large number of animals, including a dozen parrots, as well as chickens, ducks, dogs and cats.

"Lily is conscientious. She does what she says she's going to do," Harris said. "I don't have to worry about (the animals) when I'm gone.

"Nobody can just come here and take care of parrots. You have to know what you're doing," she said. "She's really good. I can go away and have peace of mind. If I didn't have Lily, I don't know who I could find."

In fact, Plasse sends clients text messages with updates and even pictures to reassure absent pet owners about their animal's well-being.

"Lily's incredibly loyal to her clients and really builds good relationships with them as well as with their pets," Boardman said.

As for her own menagerie, Plasse owns several dogs, cats and horses, and breeds rare heritage chickens, turkeys and rabbits on her hobby farm in Troy. She also shows the animals.

Now she has about 50 birds, even more during breeding season, which she sells privately and at shows. Among those local events are the N.H. Poultry Fanciers in Deerfield in October; the Boston Poultry Expo, held last weekend in Oxford, Mass., and the Northeastern Poultry Congress in West Springfield, Mass., in January.

Over the years, she's won numerous ribbons and trophies for chickens and turkeys.

"They're really entertaining, a lot of fun," she said. "The whole genetics thing, trying to meet the standards for shows. The biggest thing is to try to keep the breeds going."

Plasse has raised chickens for more than a decade, and is considered to be a local poultry expert. She's given presentations on the ins and outs of introductory backyard chicken farming to children at a Troy summer program, and frequently to adults at several area libraries including Fitzwilliam, Hancock, Marlborough and Troy.

She's also a member of several poultry clubs, and serves as the N.H. youth leader for the APA-ABA Youth Poultry Club.

In the near future, she wants to expand her farm and pet-sitting business, hiring employees to be able to enlarge her coverage area. She also plans to start an informal network of area industry professionals, including vets, groomers, trainers and pet sitters, to meet monthly to share information and exchange ideas and referrals.

"I'll always be around animals," she said. "I absolutely love it. I'll be involved with animals somehow in some way — even if it's just a goldfish in a bowl — for the rest of my life."