A Tale of Two Eddies

How two tough guys saved the animals—and themselves

towing a small child, glanced at him with a
diu of hostility as she
started to sweep past. Lama
stepped up and
gently asked her to take his
pamphlet. He
marked that if she was
going to wear fur, she
should really read about
where it came from. The
woman snapped the
Friends of Animals leaf-
let from his outstretched
hand and rushed away.

Eddie Lama didn’t really
believe that she would
read it. Probably, he
thought, it would be
dropped on the street a
block away, becoming
just one more piece of
litter. But a little later,
the woman returned, on
the verge of tears. “I’m
so sorry, I just didn’t
know. I’m so sorry,” she
murmured repetitively,
perhaps seeking forgive-
ness for her oblivious-
ness from the animals’
representative. Not only
did the woman vow to
stop wearing fur, she
signed up to be a mem-
er of Friends of Ani-
mals that day.

Change usually
comes hard. Eddie Lama
knows a lot about
change. In the animal
welfare field there are
probably not many
people who have altered their lives to the degree that Lama and
his buddy Eddie Rizzo have.

The two Eddies, as they’re sometimes dubbed, met in prison,
both heroin junkies who were serving time for armed robbery.
Before his arrest, Lama had suffered from a drug-fueled
life, ending up lying in the street, beaten to a pulp with the help of
a baseball bat. He said later that he would never forget the silence

“Somewhere along the way,” says Lama, “I saw that we are
all on the same road, no matter how many legs we have.”

that met his cries of pain and would do everything he could to make
sure that no animal suffered that way with nobody there to care.

Animals didn’t play much of a part in either man’s life. That is
until Lama, out of prison and running a construction business,
ended up custisitng for a tabby. At the time, he recollects, he was
hoping it might lead to a date. But when he accidentally stepped
on the cat’s tail and heard her howl, he was stunned. He began
watching her leaping playfully, tossing a ball, yawning and stretch-
ing, and just being a loving, happy animal with a “whole array of
emotions I never knew existed,” he says. Suddenly, she seemed
to make a little more sense—become just a little more joyful. When
he revealed his discovery to Rizzo, whom he’d helped get clean
from drugs after time spent in prison, Rizzo thought Lama had
gone a little loopy. But soon the two men were not only fast
friends but also fast animal allies.

It’s not just that their shared epiphany led to a common appro-
ciation and respect for animals. Their revelation has gone way
beyond a simple transformation into being affirmed “animal
people.” The duo has become serious movers and shakers in the
animal welfare world.

With the construction business a success, Lama and Rizzo be-
gan working together to share their story through public educu-
tion. They tour schools, where teachers and pupils warmly wel-
come them, awed and inspired. And they’re not just sharing a
message—they’re living it.

Adapted from stories by Steve Israel and
Elizabeth Sembower in the Times Herald Record

He calls it the “Miracle on 59th Street.” It was a magical mo-
moment—the kind of unexpected triumph that makes you realize one
person really can make a difference.

Standing outside New York’s ritzy St. Moritz Hotel, Eddie Lama
was distributing anti-fur literature. A woman, draped in sable and

Together, they reconstructed a rundown old dairy, the Oasis,
into a state-of-the-art animal sanctuary in the mountains of North
Branch, New York, for dogs, cats, and any other creatures in need of
a home, including ducks, turkeys, sheep, pigs, rabbits, and chickens.
The property is outfitted with observation decks for potential
adopters, extensive outdoor areas, doggie washing stations, and
other goodies for the animals. Lama, who spends thousands of
dollars every year feeding and caring for animals, dreams that
they’ll soon be able to add a medical clinic, staff offices, and an
adoption center. Rizzo heads up the live-in staff that includes sev-
eler former drug addicts. It’s a metamorphosis that TV evange-
lists dream of. And the pair is gaining national recognition with
an award-winning documentary, The Witness, chronicling Lama’s life.

But it isn’t about praise, or Horatio Alger stories for either man.
It’s all about the animals.

“It was always the animal person, a dog trainer and such,” says
Rizzo. “When I first knew him, Eddie Lama was the last person to
care about animals. He’s done a complete turn-around.”

Lama admits the truth of that and describes his newfound in-
sight. “Somewhere along the way,” says Lama, “I saw that we are
all on the same road, no matter how many legs we have.”

The two Eddies hope to make that journey just a little easier
for all the creatures lucky enough to cross their particular path.

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