

Feel-Good Friday: Orazie Cook's Praline's Backyard Foundation Offers an Unexpected Helping Hand to Domestic Violence Survivors

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By [Jennifer Oliver O'Connell](#) | 7:30 PM on April 21, 2023

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I love Orazie Cook, and I don't even know her personally. Why? Because she is a super cool human who is doing tremendous work for two things I care deeply about: domestic abuse survivors and fur babies. This week's Feel-Good Friday is focused on Orazie's work through [Praline's Backyard Foundation](#).

Listen in as Puppet and I introduce her.

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With a tagline of "No Dog Left Behind," you know I'm all over it. Orazie Cook lives a life of service, and one of the ways she has served is volunteering at domestic violence shelters.

"Well, my family is from Tuskegee, Alabama, home of Tuskegee University, and which has the largest graduates of people of color in veterinary medicine. And so, I have a number of vets in my family, and I was always around animals growing up. So, part of me even having the idea of interacting with animals is because of my family history," Orazie said.

"I saw some recurring stories when I worked as a volunteer at the Humane Society and at the domestic violence shelter. And that is that a lot of persons when they come into the shelter, would really long for their pets back at their former environment, their former home, and oftentimes they would go back. Not necessarily to be with the abuser, but to be with their pet. And that was such a sad story to me, because it really impacted the person's ability to heal and to recover from the trauma they experienced, because they left their pet with this person who caused so much trauma in their own lives. So, they fear that [the same] trauma will be inflicted upon their animal as well. So, that's one side of it."

These are some more painful truths that Orazie educated me on. Eighty percent of domestic violence shelters do not take pets with the survivors. It is not even something I would have considered before last week, when I spoke with Orazie. And every year, about 10 million domestic violence survivors are reported in the U.S. alone, and more than half of that number (5 million) have pets. This is a HUGE, often overlooked barrier for survivors. Orazie then explained the other side of the story.

“Then I worked at the Humane Society, and I would see another part of that story where survivors would come and relinquish their pets, because that is a responsible thing to do when you are unable to provide for your pet: Let me take it to the Humane Society who can find someone to take care of that pet for the long term. And so, that’s the other side of the story, because someone’s giving up that pet who really does not want to. But they just have conditions that are not friendly to having a pet.”

What happens? They are forced to choose between staying with their abuser and leaving their pet(s) behind. Domestic abuse victims are already in a fractured state of mind and body, so the thought of losing the love and comfort of that pet may be too much for them. So, millions remain in uncomfortable and often dangerous conditions because they do not want to lose their pet, or leave that pet behind in those dangerous circumstances where they would be victimized or killed.

According to the Animal Welfare Institute (AWI), “Multiple studies have found that from 49% to 71% of battered women reported that their pets had been threatened, harmed and or killed by their partners.”

Naturally, this type of control assures the abuser that their victim will stay right where they want them — and often, they do. “Across various surveys, between 18% and 48% of battered women delay leaving a dangerous situation out of concern for their pets’ safety,” warns the AWI.

Pets become no more than weapons and are often harmed themselves in a domestic violence situation. Some have tragically even been killed by an abuser.

Sadly, this happens far too often, so during the pandemic, Orazie had an epiphany: why not be that middle element between the domestic violence survivor leaving their abusive situation, and having a safe space for them to house their pets? Praline’s Backyard Foundation was formed to house the pets of domestic violence survivors for as long as they need it, and then to reunite those survivors with their animals when they have acquired a safe and sound living situation.

“What the foundation does is provide housing for the survivor’s pet for seven days via pet boarding facilities throughout the country. And during that seven days, we work to find a foster to keep that pet for longer term, recognizing that not every survivor goes into a shelter environment. Some people just go to a friend’s house, and that friend can’t necessarily house a pet or whatever situation that is. But we want to make sure to give that relief to that survivor to know that they can leave their situation and when they’re better and ready to take their pet back, we are there.”

WATCH:

There is very little that I can say blows my mind, but consider it blown. What a creative, innovative, and much needed resource to women (and some men) trying to escape a horrible situation. I consider myself a person who is pretty well informed about many things, but I had no idea that such a need existed. So, imagine how much work needs to be done to raise awareness of not only these facts, but the unique and special work that Orazie Cook is doing through Praline’s Backyard Foundation.

This is why Orazie has mounted a huge fundraising and awareness event on May 7 at the Westside Park in Atlanta, Georgia. The Paws for Domestic Violence Survivors 1K/5K Race is an opportunity to not only make a difference in the lives of domestic violence survivors and their beloved pets, but to spend some quality time with your own pet. Just like Pastor Jay Stewart and the Life Ride, you can participate virtually! Isn’t technology wonderful sometimes?

“Definitely we have a virtual spaces, and I’m also doing virtual prizes online. So, you can sign up on our website at PralineBackyardFoundation.org and say, please sign me up to run virtually. Post us on social media and then you’ll be put in for prizes and stuff for your pet as well for you! We’ll mail that out to you.”

By participating in any way, you can help provide safe housing for pets and offer crucial support to survivors seeking shelter and protection from their abusers. I’m 2,500 miles across the country, and I signed up with my three fur babies. It’s a worthy cause.

Another way you can support Praline’s Backyard Foundation is by sharing their posts and videos on social media, and purchasing merchandise! I’m all over the merch, too.

WATCH:

Whether you share the great videos Orazie creates, donate money to Praline’s Backyard Foundation, or participate in the fun Paws for Domestic Violence Survivors 1K/5K Race in person or virtually, you are raising awareness about the plight of domestic violence survivors and meeting their need, as well as the need of their pets—that’s something to feel good about any day of the week!

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