

PROFILE
My Odd Job

From a farm sitter and a saw player to a TV fixer in Japan, these women have somewhat unusual occupations.

By Emily Silber

The MacGyver of Farm Sitting

While you're worried about your next deadline, **KATIE CALAULTI** is worried if the chickens froze to the fence—again.

“I’M SORRY, I’VE lost your alpacas,” is probably not a phrase you use often. But for Katie Calautti, 39, it’s just another day on the job. As a farm sitter, aggressive chickens, wily goats, mean mules and escape-artist alpacas are just a few of her typical companions.

And a normal day might involve jangling cans of cat food to lure rowdy sheep to the correct side of the barn, trying to herd 15 runaway alpacas with a giant stick while the farm dogs just sit and stare, fighting off “dinosaur-size” turkeys during feeding time—“they will run after you like you’re the Pied Piper”—and, yes, frequently checking that the chickens aren’t perched on the fence in the middle of the night, freezing to death instead of safely in their coop.

“It’s a bit of a unicorn of a job,” says Calautti, who recently moved to an 1840s-era cottage, also on a farm, in New Jersey after nearly two decades in New York City. “But it’s really taught me a lot about myself and that I am capable of doing things I never thought I could do.”

Calautti started farm sitting in 2017 with zero farm experience. A friend of a friend needed someone to watch their farm over the Thanksgiving holiday and Calautti thought, “sure, why not.” A few days later, the farm owner picked her up on the Upper West Side and drove her to a massive farmhouse in “a very rural area” of the Catskills. He gave Calautti a brief orientation and then left with his family.

“I had no idea what I was doing,” Calautti says. “I literally showed up in \$100 leggings with a notebook.”

Fast-forward a few years and Calautti regularly farm sits for the same family as well as another

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family (the one with the notorious alpacas)—she also now wears battered Carhartts, in case you were wondering. The gigs are never longer than a few weeks at a time and the days usually start at 8 a.m.—“or else the chickens start squawking, loudly”—and end at sundown.

But Calautti doesn’t really see it as work and doesn’t do it for the money. “It’s about the experience,” she says. “It’s made me feel more resilient, given me purpose and helped me realize that I can drop myself into an unknown situation and prevail.”

Farm sitter Katie Calautti at her own farm-based cottage in N.J.

