Retrospective

Twenty Years of Caring

Patricia Forkan Looks at the Humane Movement

When the first Earth Day was celebrated in April of 1970, HSUS Senior Vice President Patricia Forkan was a recent graduate of Pennsylvania State University beginning her career as an activist involved in a variety of social causes, the had had first-hand exposure to a myriad of animal protection issues. Her mother ran a local animal shelter in rural Pennsylvania, so working within the animal-welfare movement was a natural outgrowth of Ms. Forkan’s interest in improving conditions for people and animals.

After working for the Fund for Animals in New York and Florida, Ms. Forkan came to The HSUS as program coordinator in Pennsylvania, so working within the animal-welfare movement was a natural outgrowth of Ms. Forkan’s interest in improving conditions for people and animals.

In this interview, Ms. Forkan reflects on the results of this new-found awareness and how long does that last when it comes to the importance of the environment. Young people had just come through a period of public outcry and public demonstration against the Vietnam war, civil rights issues, the women’s movement, and others. It was a time in our history when there was a lot of energy available to utilize and influence other major social issues. Both the environmental movement and humane movement benefited from this new wave of activism.

What happened in the ’80s?

During that time, there were some pretty exciting hearings held by Congress on issues that had never been considered before. There was a circus-like atmosphere at the first hearing at the federal level on leg-hold traps. A protrapping Congressman put his hand in a trap used to catch squirrels. (He refused a challenge from an animal activist to be trapped in one meant for bears.) And there were hearings on things like transportation of farm animals and puppy mills and intense scrutiny of the laboratory-animal issue, as well as all the emerging wildlife bills. There were highly publicized hearings about dogfighting, including the testimony of one undercover humane agent whose life and family had been threatened. All of this caused the public and the media to be more conscious of animal issues.

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In the humane movement, what were the results of this new-found awareness and activism?

Forkan: During this time there were even more groups forming to protect animals, with a greater focus on enforcement of national legislation and issues beyond the traditional sheltering work. The late ’60s and early ’70s were exhilarating, as we worked with Congress to enact the Endangered Species Act, the Federal Laboratory Animal Act which was re­named the Animal Welfare Act in 1965, when it was expanded, the Humane Slaughter Act amendments, which, in 1978, finally brought protection to food animals (although chickens are still unprotected), the Wild Free-ranging Horse and Burro Act, the Marine Mammal Protection Act (in 1972), and the Horse Protection Act to prevent using. Also, Congress passed resolutions to place moratoriums on whaling and to stop a cruel predator-control program on federal land.

The fervor died quickly as the reality of the federal bureaucracy sank in. Getting laws passed is only the beginning. It is incredibly difficult to make sure the government then actually enforces and funds them. Congress, however, there were countless years spent trying to change pathetically weak regulations, and, if that failed, court cases became necessary to enforce these newly enacted laws. But, at least in the ’60s and ’70s, laws were passed to help protect animals. Instead of the “greening” of America, you’d call the ’70s the “politicalizing” of the animal-welfare protection organizations.

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Did The HSUS change its strategy?

Forkan: Yes. We worked even harder to bring scientists, lawyers, and other professionals to our staff so we could better argue before congressional committees and agencies. The battle was getting more technical.

Due to Reagan's budget cuts, we shifted our lobbying efforts to the appropriations committees. They held the purse strings. Even hired one excellent lobbyist because she was a southerner and the appropriations committee is dominated by southerners. We spent massive portions of our lobbying budget each year to come in congress to get to the appropriations committee.

News: Did the HSUS change its strategy?

Forkan: The conservation movement is as old as time. Conservationists don't differ from us because they are not primarily concerned with the question of suffering; their focus is primarily one of preservation. The conservation and humane communities are at odds, not over whether we should save the animals, but what we should do with them once we've saved them. Conservation in the classic sense of the word really means that you can utilize resources as long as there are enough of them. This difference in the intrinsic value of the life for the individual animal pits us against each other all the time. News: How does the humane movement support environmental goals?

Forkan: There are many environmental issues that The HSUS, over the years, has supported in principle but has not had the staff, time, or expertise to work on directly. Instead, we join environmental coalitions at least to add our voice to such issues—such as saving the rain forests, working to prevent oil spills, and creating a national parks and lands kind of network. These issues all benefit animals, which, of course, is our goal.

News: How has the movement changed methods and tactics over the last twenty years?

Forkan: To me, there has been a shifting away from local groups focusing solely on sheltering. Don't get me wrong, this work is still vitally important to the humane movement. However, there are hundreds of groups working at the local level on so-called national issues. They are picking fires to set, getting appointed to animal-care committees in research facilities, challenging hunters at wildlife refuges, getting local schools to stop the use of animals, and attending national meetings to learn how to lobby effectively.

It may sound strange, but improved technology has made some of this more possible. For example, the computer has had an enormous effect on animal-protection issues, such as those involving laboratory animals. Some environmentalists blame the increased use of animal testing. They have no idea what's involved in exploratory research. We are doing all mailings by hand. If someone suggested that we get the mailing out quickly, it wasn't even possible. When I came to The HSUS, there was a computer system that enabled me, for the first time, to target districts with Congress members who could pin point which of our members lived in that district. The Action Alert system. Computers have made a huge difference in our ability to talk to our members quickly and, in turn, we know they are doing something with that information as long as there are enough of them. This difference in the intrinsic value of the life for the individual animal pits us against each other all the time. News: What's going to be happening in Congress over the next twenty years as opposed to the last twenty? Are they going to be pay more or less attention to us?

Forkan: Members of Congress are starting to pay more attention to animal issues because their constituents are demanding it. Our issues generate an enormous amount of their constituent mail. They now have special staff assigned to handle animal issues. When I started twenty years ago, it was hard to find someone in the office to talk about animal issues except the exceptionists. There are two caucuses that have been formed in the Congress; one of them headed by members of Congress that we believe are sympathetic to the humane movement, the other one (though it's called the Animal Welfare Caucus) seeks to protect the farm community and the laboratory community against us. This shows how seriously they're taking us.

News: What advice would you give to those new to the movement?

Forkan: What I've seen over the years is a pattern that's both good and bad. Individuals will hear about the issues affecting animals and become outraged. They become active and infuse wonderful new energy and ideas into the movement. Unfortunately, their expectations are much too high in many instances. Much can be accomplished in a short amount of time. They become discouraged and feel hopeless—or worse, bit ter. But there are always encouraging new energy, excitement, and desire for change in our work. We must also make these new converts understand that immediate change is not that we're up against enormous odds. This is a long, long-term process, and some people lose the sense of history of success.

In PHS, Patricia Forkan (right), PHS Pres­ident John A. Hart, and model Yolanda Boat took part in a New York anti-raccoon complish more.

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Forkan: Definitely, yes. In several areas our battle cry of the environmental community, the furriers, many of the cosmetic companies, and many agricultural interests are uniting against us. We have a public that is responding to the message that animals need and deserve protection. Our opposition is not to be easily silenced. We have made a difference in their home and community. That is where it has to start. The HSUS will continue to work with conservation and environmental groups. We are working hand-in-glove with the World Society for the Protection of Animals, Global 2000, Earth Day 1990, the United Nations Environment Programme, and many others to bring our humane message to front and center.

I'm optimistic about the future. Old ways of thinking are breaking up worldwide, and I think our message has a chance to be heard.

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Large-scale agricultural systems... are wasteful of natural resources.

Garbage-strewed water in Hong Kong water pollution contributes to Earth's malaise.

mental harm to the environment, the future is one of severe consequences. In this age of environmentalism, the basis of our economy is now being questioned: is it a sustainable economy? A sustainable society?

Large-scale agricultural systems are wasteful of natural resources. They are designed to produce meat and milk, using vast amounts of water, energy, and land. This is because the industrial agricultural system is designed to produce food for the mass market, not for individual consumers. It is therefore wasteful of natural resources and leads to environmental degradation.

Large-scale agricultural systems also contribute to pollution. The use of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides can lead to runoff into nearby rivers and lakes, contaminating the water supply. The use of synthetic fertilizers can also lead to eutrophication, a process by which nutrients are washed into lakes and rivers, causing algal blooms and other environmental problems.

Large-scale agricultural systems also contribute to global warming. The production of meat and milk requires a great deal of energy, which is often produced from non-renewable sources such as coal and oil. This energy production releases greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide, which contribute to global warming.

As a result of these problems, many people are beginning to look for alternatives to large-scale agricultural systems. Some are turning to small-scale, organic farming practices, which are designed to be more sustainable and less damaging to the environment. Others are turning to vegetarianism or veganism, which eliminates the need for meat and milk production.

References:
2. ibid.

5. Designated areas of nature and wildlife reserves where intervention is not required. These areas are often managed for conservation purposes, such as preserving endangered species or protecting natural habitats.