

UNTIL THERE ARE NONE, ADOPT ONE

There is no cruelty to animals more terrible than the cruelty which results from the promiscuous breeding of dogs and cats. There is no cruelty so widespread. . . .

This is no new problem. To our everlasting shame, humane leaders have been aware of it for many years, but we have done little about it. We have built hundreds of shelters for small animals at a cost running into the millions of dollars. We have seen these shelters almost immediately become overcrowded, and we have had to expand them. We operate hundreds of animal "ambulances" costing hundreds of thousands of dollars to purchase and many hundreds of thousands of dollars yearly to operate. Only a fraction of the animals they transport are sick or injured; millions are stray and unwanted animals. Fully 90 percent of these are destined for the death chambers. . . .

Killing animals has become the principal function of too many "shelters." Yet killing is necessary so long as the breeding of surplus animals continues. . . . We try to be kind—but most of our kindness is killing.

So reads the statement of "the Problem" in the *Campaign Handbook for Prevention of Surplus Animals*, published by The National Humane Society (the original name of The HSUS) more than thirty-five years ago.

"We try to be kind—but most of our kindness is killing." One cannot hear those words today and not feel a great sadness, and perhaps even guilt, that the problem of too many unwanted animals is still the number-one challenge facing the animal-protection movement. Too many animals are being bred, too many animals are being sold, too many animals are being neglected and rejected, and too many animals are being killed. "We try to be kind—but most of our kindness is killing."

Not everyone, of course, tries to be kind. Many persons who acquire animals do so on impulse, for immediate personal gratification, or out of need and fail to consider the responsibility and consequence of such an acquisition. Others breed animals for pleasure and profit, little concerned that their new litter will add to an already-unconscionable surplus of intended companion animals.

For many, animals are a mere commodity, a "brand," if you please, that will bring more or fewer dollars on the basis of its popularity, rarity, or "quality of perfection"—a misnomer, to say the least.

The same problem that confronted The HSUS in the mid-1950s confronts us still

today and may indeed be of greater proportions than ever before in history.

No one really knows precisely how many animals are considered "surplus" in today's society. Nor do we know for sure how many are being killed, accidentally through neglect or by those who perform the ritual of euthanasia in thousands of animal shelters daily across the face of our nation.

But whether we kill one million or ten million or fifteen million is not finally the issue. It is rather that we are obliged to kill any—even one. "We try to be kind—but most of our kindness is killing."

It is a travesty that any healthy dog or cat should have to be killed in a society that regards itself as being civilized and humane. It is a disgrace that we continue to permit such killing when it is both possible and feasible that it no longer be done. And it is just short of criminal that some are obliged to serve as the executioners while others continue to fill the shelters of this country, which have been turned into depositories of our callousness and insensitivity toward animals.

It is not that this problem, which for decades has plagued the animal-welfare/protection community, has not been addressed previously. No issue has been more persistently or more frequently at the forefront of the work of The HSUS—and hundreds of other organizations—than the issue of the abundance, or surplus, as we sometimes call

This address was delivered by John A. Hoyt, president of The HSUS, at a Mid-Atlantic Regional Office/New England Regional Office conference held on April 26, 1991, at the Headquarters Plaza Hotel in Morristown, New Jersey.

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WILLIAM RUMPP

it, of unwanted animals.

Beginning in 1954 and continuing through this very moment, The HSUS has conducted workshop after workshop, conference after conference, and campaign after campaign in an attempt to enlist the involvement of others in helping to solve this persistent concern.

We have pleaded with city councils and county commissions to establish ordinances requiring the control of animals and have shown them how to provide for effective enforcement. We have promoted legislation that would establish economic incentives for the spaying and neutering of animals and have vigorously advocated and supported the establishment of spay/neuter clinics, both public and private.

We have fought with and worked with veterinarians, seeking their cooperation and participation in providing reduced-cost spaying and neutering services and programs. And though we have yet to persuade them to become actively and aggressively involved in this effort, there are a few programs supported by veterinarians that are addressing the problem in a serious and helpful way.

One of the most significant of those is the animal-population-control program established in New Jersey in May 1983, which provides for economically disadvantaged pet owners to have their cats and dogs spayed or neutered for a \$10 fee. And in January 1987 New Jersey again took the lead, in providing for *anyone* adopting a dog or cat from a licensed nonprofit animal shelter or a municipal, county, or regional animal-control center to pay a reduced spaying or neutering fee of \$20. Nowhere else in this country has there been a program of this magnitude, supported in concert by government agencies, veterinarians, and animal-protection societies. It is a prototype that if embraced throughout the nation would undoubtedly significantly reduce the numbers of animals still being killed by the millions annually.

No organization has been more engaged in seeking to educate and sensitize the public to the enormity of the pet-overpopulation problem than The HSUS. From the year of its founding until the present, The HSUS has produced millions of pieces of literature as well as numerous films and public-service announcements and engaged literally hundreds of persons in carrying forth the message of the tragic consequences of so many unwanted animals.

From our film *The Animals Are Crying* to our current "Be a P.A.L." campaign, we have been at the forefront in bringing to the attention of this nation the untold suffering

and waste resulting from irresponsible pet ownership.

We have done battle with animal breeders and sellers alike. No other organization has spent more time, energy, or money in seeking to eradicate from the face of this land those horrendous breeding establishments called puppy mills—factories churning out animal after animal, the majority of which are destined for a future that is filled with fear, neglect, and abuse and, all too often, includes a premature death as well. We have urged those wanting to purchase a purebred animal to seek out a reputable local breeder rather than buy an animal whose breeding and rearing were in all likelihood substandard. In so doing, we believed that we were helping to ensure the buyer a more healthy puppy and the puppy a more responsible owner. But we were also continuing to add to the numbers of animals being born—and, as a consequence, being destroyed—by the millions.

Whatever The HSUS has done up until now to address the terrible tragedy of too many animals, it has not been enough. Whatever The HSUS has provided in educating the American people to become more responsible owners of pets, it has not yet made a significant difference. Whatever The HSUS has done in seeking the involvement and participation of others in finding solutions to this never-ending litany of too many births, too many deaths, it has been woefully inadequate.

The time has come, I am convinced, for a new approach, a new call to action, and a renewed commitment and resolve to end the suffering and death resulting from too many unwanted animals. "We try to be kind—but most of our kindness is killing."

During the past few years this country has witnessed the power of the consumer in bringing about change. In numerous areas it has been the force of public opinion, and especially the resolve of massive numbers of individual buyers, that has produced profound results one would not have dreamed possible.

It has been the power of the consumer that has put the fur industry in America, Canada, and Europe on the skids. The buyer has become the protester, subtracting his/her dollars from an industry literally built on an ordeal of agony, suffering, and death. Whatever semblance of concern for animals this industry feigned, it was little more than mirrors flashing at mirrors. A massive campaign undertaken by literally hundreds of organizations throughout the world has brought the fur-garment industry to its knees and, in so doing, spared millions of animals an ordeal of

suffering they were destined to experience.

Likewise, we have this past year seen the results of the power of consumers sensitized about the deaths of thousands of dolphins, victims of a fishing industry that refused to reform itself. It is now virtually impossible to purchase tuna that is not "dolphin safe"—tuna caught by methods sparing these magnificent mammals a cruel and agonizing death.

And finally, we are witnessing the power of the consumer in choosing beauty products not tested on animals. Our own "Beautiful Choice" campaign has prompted tens of thousands of women to enhance beauty with compassion.

The time has now come, and I am confident the time is right, to enlist the consumer in helping to put an end to the needless and senseless killing of millions of dogs and cats across the face of our nation. No longer are we content to urge the American people to become responsible pet owners. We are from this day forward calling upon the American people to make a commitment to acquire pets from only those sources now having to put them to death—the humane society shelters and animal-control facilities throughout the country. We are asking consumers, the purchasers of pets, to adopt rather than buy, to join us in seeking to reduce the numbers of animals being produced en masse. We are pleading with the American people to care enough to seek out that abandoned animal whose death will be inevitably hastened by the birth of another and provide it an alternative to confinement and death.

We have coined a slogan that we hope will become not just a household phrase but a personal pledge: "Until there are none, adopt one." Don't breed, don't buy, don't even accept giveaways. Adopt, and only adopt, until there is not one more animal languishing in the shelters and pounds across the face of this country.

This call to action and commitment is not a pet-store boycott. We are asking not that you parade in front of any store but rather that you commit yourself, and encourage others, to adopt an animal from a local sheltering facility.

The so-called bad pet stores we shall continue to protest and, when appropriate, seek to have prosecuted. The "good" pet stores we shall encourage to become even better, which ultimately might mean selling no dogs or cats. But the campaign we now undertake is not a pet-store-bashing campaign. In fact, it has nothing whatsoever to do with pet stores. It is neither for nor against pet stores. Rather, it is for animal shelters, for the animals that call a shelter home until a better one is found, for the animals that shall never leave those facilities except they become a

part of your home. Until there are none, adopt one, or perhaps even two.

This is also not a humane-society-bashing campaign. We salute the humane societies of this country and their personnel, who have more than anyone else endured the pain and sorrow of having to receive and destroy so many animals. Undoubtedly, many of them might have done a better job in educating the public or persuading government officials or veterinarians to lend them a hand. But in my book those who operate the local animal shelters of this country are the saints of this movement, rarely heralded, frequently maligned, but always and in all ways accepting the responsibility and the failure of us all to have altered this ritual of death called euthanasia we have brought to their door.

Until there are none, adopt one! I can think of no better way to begin to turn destruction into reduction, defeat into victory, and death into life. Until there are none, adopt one!

We shall, of course, continue to do battle against puppy mills; we shall continue to remind pet stores and registration agencies of their complicity in and responsibility for solving this problem; we shall tell breeders, one and all, that we can no longer advocate the purchase of their animals in preference to others' so long as there are animals without homes waiting to be adopted.

This is a campaign to save lives, not to promote businesses or institutions. It is a campaign to reverse our failures and assuage our guilt. It is a campaign that if successful will make possible once again the adoption of all of the animals that pass through the doors of our shelters, not just 15, 20, or even 30 percent.

This is a campaign to promote pet companionship, a companionship that can enrich the lives of both the animal and those providing it a place to live. And should the day ever come when there are no more animals to adopt, we shall actively encourage that they be procured elsewhere.

In announcing this campaign today, I am pleased to announce also that Phyllis Wright has agreed to lead the campaign during the next year. She was hoping to retire on July 1, after more than twenty-two years' service to The HSUS and many more to the animals. But Phyllis, the rest of the HSUS staff, and I are committed to giving this program our very best effort. And so we have importuned Phyllis to lead the campaign hereby announced, which we shall launch more formally and completely this fall.

Until there are none, adopt one! We can make a difference; we must make a difference; we shall make a difference because we must! ■

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