

Examining Puppy Mills and Abusive Animal Welfarists: Do We Really Need Another Law? by Loretta Baughan

Each time a case of alleged animal neglect, abuse, abandonment or hoarding comes to light, the opportunistic, self-righteously proclaimed "animal rights", "animal protection" or "new welfarists" organizations come rushing into the spotlight, right on cue, shrieking "puppy mills"... just like the little boy who cried "wolf". Salivating, these media anointed experts pervert the unfortunate situation into a battle cry that "*something* must be done"... "*a law* must be passed"... and by the way, "send us your *donations*". Time and time again, they collect these donations without spending a dime of it directly on the mistreated animals. These parasitic Svengalis are so adept at exploiting the emotions of the public, that there really ought to be an academy award for their performances.

A recent example in Wisconsin has included unsubstantiated claims by Eileen Ribbens Rohde, the director of a group called the No Wisconsin Puppy Mill Project who, as reported in the *Wisconsin Daily Herald*, "estimates there are more than 2,000 puppy mill facilities in Wisconsin based on observations of dog sales, (and) said the industry is growing." (1)

Really? I say *prove it*.

Present factual evidence that there are indeed "more than 2,000 puppy mill facilities in Wisconsin" and, if true, I will be the first in line to help shut them down. But, if this number is simply based on a tally of people advertising puppies for sale in various newspapers or on the internet, - as she says: "based on observations of dog sales" - I say that Ms Rohde's over-blown claim is, at best, dubious. Because the average reader will focus on the sensationalized claim of "more than 2,000 puppy mill(s)", the damage is done. People will *believe* there is an epidemic of "puppy mills", when, in fact, there isn't.

Let's examine the facts.

"It's unknown how many dog breeders operate in the state."

-- Donna Gilson, Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection spokeswoman,
LaCrosse Tribune, September 2007 (2)

So, if the State doesn't know how many people breed dogs in Wisconsin, how can Ms. Rhode presume to suggest any number at all - and to claim "more than 2,000 puppy mills" is simply outrageous. It is not uncommon for groups and individuals professing animal rights beliefs to put forth pie-in-the-sky "statistics" that the facts simply do not support. Unfortunately, if something is repeated often enough, it will eventually take on a life of it's own and soon be thought of as being fact. I suppose in their minds, the ends justifies the means.

To my knowledge, this number first cropped up last year at a round table meeting facilitated by Ms Rohdes and a small steering committee seeking to write yet another pet facilities licensing bill. Whether to further stir up and inflame the public's emotions, soliciting their pressure on legislators to "do something" or to create an illusion that the "problem" is of a far greater magnitude than it truly is - for the benefit of convincing legislators to get involved in the project - I cannot say. Either way, it amounts to nothing short of manipulation.

Aside from newspapers around the state repeating Ms Rohde's "more than 2,000 puppy mill(s)" guesstimate, the only other source on the internet attempting to attach any number of 'puppy mills' to Wisconsin is found in a People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) "fact sheet" - a term I use loosely. "There are an estimated 1,300 puppy mills in Wisconsin..." claims PETA staff writer, Heather Moore, citing an article published in 2003 in the *Wisconsin State Journal*. (3)

Really? I say *prove it*.

Where did they get that number? Exactly *what* qualifies as a supposed "puppy mill"? *Who* made that "estimate"? Was it just another uneducated guess attempting to mislead the public?

I'd really like to know why media reporters don't ask these questions. Why don't they demand factual proof before publishing these fairy tale statistics the animal rights liberally sprinkle in their comments? Instead, the media becomes part of the problem, lending credence to these claims and becoming an accomplice in creating public hysteria over "puppy mills".

According to a comment attributed to Ms Rohde published in the *Leader-Telegram* last year, she believes: "We need to license, regulate and inspect people who sell pets to families, to individuals." (4) In other words, it is her goal to license, regulate and inspect *everyone* who breeds pets. In response to a question from another reporter on a "puppy lemon law" being considered, her distorted view of people who breed dogs was disturbingly evident: "Typically, the animals end up being victims once again," Rohde said. "If the dog goes back to the breeder, a knock over the head with a hammer will solve the problem." (5)

Rohde has been trying, unsuccessfully, to impose a law on Wisconsin citizens who breed pets for the past decade. Her vendetta began after purchasing a sickly dalmation from a pet store. With absolutely no hands-on animal husbandry experience, she has

attempted to ram-rod her agenda into law, seemingly obsessed with stopping what she perceives to be “puppy mills”.

And so, year after year, we are battered with one misguided animal bill after another. *When* is enough... Enough?

It is neither right nor ethical to enact any law based strictly on emotion - rather than logical and truthful facts. But that is exactly what fanatical groups such as the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), Alliance for Animals (AFA), Rohde's No Wisconsin Puppy Mill Project, some county humane societies and others are attempting to achieve. And not only in Wisconsin as this has become an epidemic from coast to coast. They use this method of operating - play the *emotion card* - because they know they wouldn't have a snowball's chance in hell of achieving their radical agenda if the facts were closely examined.

I'm not suggesting that animal abuse or neglect does not exist, simply that it is a very tiny minority of people who mistreat animals - and that existing animal abuse or neglect laws governing these crimes only need to be enforced in order to deal with these rare instances.

A dose of reality.

Looking back over the past five years, of 58 incidents reported in various Wisconsin newspapers involving dogs, six allegedly involved people who were actually breeding dogs - with just four identified as "puppy mills". The remainder were cases of neglect, abuse, abandonment or hoarding. Two reported cases involved abusive animal welfarists - either animal shelter employees or the operators of county humane societies. (6) However, by virtue of the fact that these cases *have* surfaced, is proof that existing laws are working.

On a national scale, between 2003 and 2007, newspapers exposed 251 so-called "puppy mills". During this same five year period, newspapers across the country revealed at least 306 cases of animal abuse committed by humane societies, animal sanctuaries, animal shelters, rescues, animal control officers and other animal welfare industry officials or employees... abusive animal welfarists. Some of these horrific charges included: "inhumane euthanasia", "poisoning dogs", "dog fighting", "dog theft", "failure to provide veterinary care", "feeding newborn puppies to a snake" and even "bestiality". The majority of these cases involved hoarding, animal cruelty and keeping animals in filth. (6) Again, the system *is working*, thanks to existing laws.

Society has learned, the hard way, that many professions which involve interaction between adults and children attract pedophiles, physical or emotional abusers and other deviants. Likewise, we need to heighten awareness that a similar situation exists within animal welfare organizations. Some of the very organizations responsible for the care and well being of homeless pets are attracting animal abusers and - knowingly or unknowingly - are employing them or allowing them to volunteer.

PETA has long been glorified in the media for their wacky publicity campaigns - from parading in outlandish costumes... to demonizing Kentucky Fried Chicken's founder, Col Sanders... to nude models protesting fur... to their controversial and Biblically inaccurate "Jesus was a vegetarian" parody. (7) They are very much the disturbed child deliberately acting out in order to get attention. Even within animal rights circles, PETA is often viewed as a caricature because of their ridiculous antics. PETA's founder and fearless leader, Ingrid Newkirk, has shamelessly proclaimed over the years, "We are complete press sluts." (8)

At PETA's headquarters, situated among shipyards along the waterfront at Norfolk, Virginia, "there is a quotation from Leonardo da Vinci chiseled into the lintel above the reception area: *"The day will come when men such as I will look upon the murder of animals the way they now look upon the murder of men."* (8)

If only they practiced what they preached.

In 2005, two of PETA's employees were caught dumping trash bags full of freshly killed puppies, kittens, dogs and cats into a garbage dumpster behind a Piggly Wiggly grocery store in North Carolina. These were all healthy animals they had just collected from an animal shelter and a vet clinic, promising to find them all good homes.

An excerpt from the PETA Kills Animals website report on the trial:

District Attorney Valerie Asbell opened the trial with a 16-minute opening statement, walking the jury through an outline of her case. We learned that June 15, 2005 wasn't the first time dead animals were found in a trash dumpster behind an Ahoskie, NC Piggly Wiggly store. The same thing happened on the mornings of May 19, June 2, and June 9. On those three Thursdays, police found trash bags containing the bodies of 58 dogs and 3 cats. The final 31 dead animals were recovered on June 15 after Hinkle and Cook were taken into custody.

So when the next week rolled around, Detective Jeremy Roberts testified today, police were ready. They staked out the dumpster on Wednesday afternoon. They followed Hinkle and Cook as they drove to a veterinary clinic, to an animal shelter, and to the Piggly Wiggly. And they asked an animal-control officer to take photographs of all the shelter's animals for comparison with anything they might recover from the dumpster. (Not surprisingly, they matched.)

The most heart-wrenching detail in the prosecution's case so far involves a cat and two kittens Hinkle and Cook allegedly took from the Ahoskie Animal Hospital on the false promise that PETA would find them adoptive homes. ...

Those cats ended up in a trash dumpster less than an hour later. (9)

"The trial has forced PETA to admit that it does not rescue animals, it kills them. And it has exposed PETA for what it is: People Executing Tame Animals. Still want to send them a check?"

-- PETA case exposes group's fraud by Marc Folco, SouthCoastToday.com, February 11, 2007 (10)

I agree. And tragically, this isn't an isolated incident. According to reports the state of Virginia requires PETA to file detailing the numbers of animals they take in and what becomes of them, the numbers of pets that PETA kills is staggering. Excluding pets that owners brought to PETA's headquarters to be spayed and neutered then "reclaimed" following surgery, in 2006 *PETA killed 97% of the dogs and cats that walked through their doors.* (11) After pointing their finger of condemnation at those of us who choose to eat meat, wear fur or leather, hunt, take our children to see a circus or rodeo, buy or breed purebred dogs or cats - the high and mighty PETA kills animals by the thousands. How hypocritical PETA is.

Every pet owner - everyone who truly *cares* about animals - ought to be outraged over abusive animal welfarists. So I ask, *why* aren't these organizations and individuals who consider themselves to be concerned with animal protection, but fail miserably, becoming the focus of organized protests or cited as proof that "*something* needs to be done"... and "*a law* must be passed"? Because perhaps these radical groups realize that existing laws *are working*. Perhaps all that's needed is for animal welfare groups and organizations to take responsibility and admit there is a problem. Then examine where they've failed, establish policies to identify and screen out abusers and flush these rats out from their ranks. Or could it be that these animal rights organizations are just more interested in fulfilling their agenda of ending all ownership and use of animals? So year after year, they continue to shriek "puppy mill", seek out elected officials to push their scheme into law... And rake in the donations.

Do we really need another law? I don't think so - because existing laws *are working*.

Sources:

- (1) - *Dog auction legitimate, despite protests, scandal, supporters say* by Adam Rodewell, *Wausau Daily Herald*, March 13, 2008
- (2) - *Lawmakers prepare puppy mill bill* by Todd Richmond, *The Associated Press*, published in the *LaCrosse Tribune*, September 28, 2007
- (3) - *Born to Die* by Heather Moore, IMPACT Press
- (4) - *Lawmakers Smith, Kreitlow hear complaints about puppy sales* by Christena T O'Brien, *Leader-Telegram*, June 5, 2007
- (5) - *Puppy lemon law protects consumers from sick animals* by Ben Jones, *Manitowoc Herald Times Reporter*, November 28, 2007
- (6) - Pet-Abuse.com
- (7) - *Jesus a vegetarian in PETA campaign: Beatle Paul McCartney, other figures join as 'disciples' in 'Last Supper' portrayal* by Bob Unruh, *WorldNet Daily*, March 24, 2007
- (8) - *The Extremist: The woman behind the most successful radical group in America* by Michael Specter, *The New Yorker*, April 14, 2003
- (9) - *PETA Trial, Day 3: Opening Statements, Legal Maneuvers, and 92 Dead Animals* PETAkillsAnimals.com, January 24, 2007
- (10) - *PETA case exposes group's fraud* by Marc Folco, *SouthCoastToday.com*, February 11, 2007
- (11) - Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, *People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals 2006 animal report*

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