

Is No Kill our nation's only truly bipartisan issue?

Or, The Adventures of Steven Phipps and Me.

By Nathan J. Winograd for
www.facebook.com/NOKILLNATION



This is the first installment in an ongoing series of contributions I will be doing for No Kill Nation. Since its founding in November 2009, NKN has experienced tremendous growth to over 22,000 fans. It is a testament to the wide appeal the No Kill message holds and how social networking has made it possible for people to band together to make positive change. Together, not only will we save lives; but we will also create a future where every animal will be respected and cherished, and where every individual life will be protected and revered.



My favorite television show, in fact the only show I watch, is *30 Rock*. It is unique, funny, sometimes razor sharp, has great characters, and is set in my favorite city, New York. In fact, I am a little embarrassed to admit how much of our family slang is based on the show.

But one part of the show always bums me out. And it bums me out not only because it makes fun of animal abuse, but because it always comes out of left field. Alec Baldwin plays NBC Vice-President Jack Donaghy, a conservative executive who insists on all the rights and perks of being part of “the haves.”

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What makes Donaghy's character so appealing is that his insights are often brilliant. His one-liners, hilarious. The views he expresses are so over-the-top you can't help but laugh (such as calling Hurricane Katrina, "Rainfall Katrina" or blaming the Great Recession, brought on by the reckless policies of the prior administration, on Nancy Pelosi). And the man who is reciting them—actor Alec Baldwin—is an avowed liberal. It makes for great television.

But in every episode, his character makes really mean jokes about animals being harmed. It's a reason to employ the mute button at least once in every episode. Why is Jack Donaghy's character always joking about animal abuse—about electrocuting dogs, shooting cats, or torturing monkeys? It's especially disheartening coming out of Baldwin, given that he is purported to be an animal lover, too. While most of Donaghy's views and jokes are meant to cast him as a Republican, the jokes about gratuitously abusing animals do not develop the character's politically conservative character for the simple reason, quite frankly, that even Republicans love animals. It's not really a partisan issue, and given the heart the Donaghy character is often shown to have, it comes off as gratuitous, ugly, and forced. In fact, to be authentic, he should have a dog running around his office who is the center of his universe.

In my work promoting and assisting communities with their No Kill initiatives, I've traveled all over the country. I've worked in or with decidedly liberal or "blue" communities such as San Francisco, Philadelphia, and even Ithaca, New York. But I've also worked with some of the "reddest" communities in the country's most conservative states: in Southern Utah, rural Georgia, and Kentucky. And I've found both deeply committed to saving the lives of animals in shelters.

That is why then-Senator Tom Hayden, one of California's most liberal politicians, and then Assembly Member Tom McClintock, the state's most conservative legislator, came together to sponsor the 1998 Animal Shelter Law, known as the "Hayden Act" which gave rescue groups power to save animals and forced killing shelters to improve their operations. That is why former Senator Bob Dole (R-KS) was a champion of expanding the federal Animal Welfare Act. That is why Shelby County, Kentucky is a No Kill community as is Tompkins County, New York. That is why San Francisco in the 1990s—which had a mayoral runoff election between an openly gay man and an African-American man, both arguing that each was more liberal than the other—shares a sheltering philosophy with Ivins City, Utah—one of the most Republican areas of the country dominated as it is by the Mormon church—which saved 97% of all animals in its animal control shelter. And that is why Steven Phipps and I could stay up until almost 2:30 am in Shelbyville, Kentucky and agree on almost every single thing we talked about: because all we talked about were animals.

I just returned from Shelby County, Kentucky, a rural conservative community, in the heart of the South. They recently celebrated one year as a No Kill community. I went down there as part of my book tour for *Irreconcilable Differences*. A local mega-evangelical Church (*capacity 600*) donated the space and the local pastor was on hand to assist with the audio and sound system because he loved animals. Hundreds of animal lovers from eight Southern, mostly conservative, states came to hear the message of hope and promise of the No Kill philosophy and I received a standing ovation. One of the people in attendance was Steven Phipps of the Blount County Humane Society in East Tennessee.

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It turned out we were staying in the same hotel and after he did a brief interview of me for No Kill Nation, a Facebook page of which he is one of the co-founders (over 22,000 “friends” and counting), we got to talking. Steve and I have long corresponded by e-mail and telephone but I had never met the man until then. We both share a deep love for animals. He is a passionate No Kill advocate and I’ve dedicated my life to it. His home is home to animals of all kinds, as is mine. Since neither of our wives could make it, it was he and I and our mutually favorite topic: the conquest of a No Kill nation. At 2:30 am, I staggered to my room and fell asleep since I had to wake up at 6 am for a flight home. I went back to the liberal Bay Area. He went back to conservative Blount County. We never fought, we never pointed fingers, but aside from our mutual love of animals, we couldn’t be more different in our views.

Steve voted for Mike Huckabee in the primaries and considers himself an “Independent Conservative.” He voted for George W. Bush both times while holding his nose because he considers Bush “progressive,” which is contrary to his views on social and economic issues. During the last election he voted for “Palin/McCain,” not the other way around.

I voted for Dennis Kucinich in the primary even though he had already dropped out of the race, voted for Ralph Nader in both Bush elections, but this time around, held my nose while casting a ballot for Barack Obama because I did not expect him to dust off the glorious but dormant philosophy of FDR.

On almost every social issue, with some exceptions, we disagree. But on the issue of saving the lives of animals in shelters, we are two peas in a pod. And we are not alone. The gentleman checking me in to my hotel room gave me a free room and tried to upgrade it to a suite (but they were sold out). Why? He’s an animal lover. In overhearing a political conversation he was having with someone else, it was pretty evident that had he known of my own views on the topics he was opining about, he would have ridiculed me, in one of Jack Donaghy’s famous quips, as “a Godless, glassy-eyed Clinton-ista.” But he proudly told me he was an animal lover and thanked me for my work.

Shelby County, Kentucky is not unique. No Kill communities now exist in all parts of the country, in communities of every demographic. Some are urban. Some are rural. Some are politically liberal. Some are politically conservative. And that is what makes the prognosis for a No Kill nation so good. Despite all those things that separate us as Americans, people of all walks of life want to build a better world for animals.

Nathan J. Winograd is the director of the No Kill Advocacy Center. He is a graduate of Stanford Law School, a former criminal prosecutor and attorney, held a variety of leadership positions including director of operations for the San Francisco SPCA and executive director of the Tompkins County SPCA, two of the most successful shelters in the nation. Nathan is the author of two books, Redemption and Irreconcilable Differences. Redemption won five national book awards and redefined the animal protection movement in the United States.