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Redemption: The Myth of Pet Overpopulation and the No Kill Revolution by Nathan J. Winograd / Beth Flor

Before I read this book, I understood the plight. I volunteered with rescues. I donated money. I adopted my dogs. I got it. But making my way through *Redemption*, Nathan J. Winograd made me realize just how in the dark I was about animal welfare in this country. This is the book that the ASPCA, PETA and the Humane Society don't want you to read. And it is this distinction that makes it one of the most important books you'll read this year, assuming that you even remotely feel the warm-fuzzies when looking at the face of a puppy or kitten.

Redemption begins as a history of the ASPCA, when Henry Bergh founded the society in New York City in 1866 after witnessing a peasant beating a donkey in Russia. For the rest of his life, Bergh remained a champion of animals in NYC, demanding progress and spurning corrupt city funding. Bergh's lifetime was both the inception and golden age of the ASPCA; after his death, the society took a turn for the worse and never quite made its way back. Winograd documents this decline by detailing the many ways "animal welfare" organizations in this country have failed over the years, including high rates of killing, callousness and implementation of the same policies and procedures that have failed in the past and will continue to fail as long as they are used. This criticism, however, is only as good as the offered alternative, which Winograd presents in a chapter on the rise of the San Francisco SPCA.

In 1994, San Francisco, a bustling city and unlikely setting for low-kill success, became the first city in the U.S. to end the killing of healthy homeless dogs and cats in shelters, thanks to the work of an innovative and dedicated shelter director. The backlash, however, was immediate: The success of the shelter infuriated the ASPCA and other organizations that had long ago resigned themselves to the fact that nothing could be done to help the shelter situation and pet overpopulation in this country. Instead of helping spread word of the No Kill revolution, the most powerful and vocal animal organizations vilified and discredited the movement. Winograd suggests many reasons for the anger toward the movement, such as a perceived threat to the credibility of the heads of these organizations, guilt for having needlessly killed legions of dogs and cats in the past, or, most disturbing, the possibility that they simply didn't care enough about the animals.

Perhaps the biggest offender Winograd mentions is PETA, not for quantity of animals killed, but for sheer hypocrisy. PETA, the most vocal dissenter of animal

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slaughter, killed nearly 2,000 dogs and cats in its few shelters in 2005, over 90% of those that it "rescued." Winograd suggests that a shelter doing all it can to spare lives can save 90%-95% of animals it sees (the 5%-10% loss accounts for irretrievably suffering or hopelessly ill animals, or vicious dogs with a poor prognosis for rehabilitation). The organization responsible for dressing women in only underwear, earmuffs and paint in frigid Times Square to protest M&Ms was saving the inverse percentage. While 2,000 animals pales in comparison to the kill rates of most shelters in this country, it obviously raises the question: How exactly does PETA determine which animals deserve to die and which don't?

One of Winograd's most interesting points lays in the determination of accountability. Individual shelters and animal organizations have long criticized the irresponsible pet owner and careless public as the primary force behind pet overpopulation and subsequent shelter killing. Winograd asserts that these accusations must stop. While it's true that there are irresponsible people out there, shelters need to be more introspective about shortcomings. By adopting the No Kill paradigm and simply refusing to kill the animals in their care, shelters can — and should — eliminate the "need" for killing.

Winograd, who in 2004 started the No Kill Advocacy Center, and tours the country helping agencies and municipalities reduce rates of shelter killing, gives a very clear No Kill blueprint in *Redemption* (and for those slower in picking up the message, Appendix II is handily titled "A No Kill Blueprint for Shelters"). This blueprint involves the implementation of a compassionate and capable shelter director, high volume/low cost spay and neuter services, a close relationship with rescue groups, a volunteer and foster care program, comprehensive adoption programs, feral cat TNR (Trap-Neuter-Return), medical and behavior rehabilitation and strong community involvement and public relations. While this sounds like a tall order, he shows through example how implementation can drastically reduce deaths in under a year, and in time, achieve No Kill success.

In writing this review, I realize that I'm at great risk of sounding preachy, which is one of my major criticisms to Winograd's text. However, as an animal lover, I know that it is impossible to separate from one's anger and enthusiasm when writing about such a topic. As far as criticisms go, it seems fickle to mention editing issues or the fact that, while it was lambasted throughout the text, the ASPCA is given slight reprieve in the form of a footnote in the afterword. These criticisms make Winograd's message no less important. He is a visionary intent on creating a No Kill nation, and he doesn't care what powerful organizations he crosses in the process. You have to respect a man like that.

Beth Flor lives in a house near Philly where dogs outnumber people by one. She often signs off, "Help control the pet population. Have your pet spayed or neutered."

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