


Redemption:

The Myth of Pet Overpopulation & the No Kill Revolution in America
by Nathan J. Winograd
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The very title of Nathan Winograd’s book *Redemption: The Myth of Pet Overpopulation & the No Kill Revolution in America* offers a challenge to conventional thinking.

Winograd introduces *Redemption* as, “The story of animal sheltering in the United States, a movement that was born of compassion and then lost its way...The story of the No Kill movement, which says we can and must stop the killing...most of all, a story about believing in the community and trusting in the power of compassion.”

The opening portion is a succinct history of how humane societies came to be doing the work of animal control agencies, despite decades of warnings from American SPCA founder Henry Bergh that this would be a tactical misstep for the humane movement. Winograd explores in depth the origins of the prevailing belief among animal control and humane workers that population control killing is necessary, and responds with a rebuttal from his own experience in humane work. Since Winograd is still short of 40, this goes back surprisingly far.

Winograd introduced himself to me by telephone one afternoon in 1988, soon after I received a PETA press release which hinted but did not actually state that then-PETA board member Jeanne Roush had released into the wild several beavers who had been abandoned to starve by a failed fur farm in the northern Rocky Mountains.

Since beavers have never been farmed for fur successfully, despite many attempts, the failure of the farm and the investors’ abandonment of the beavers did not surprise me. However, beavers spend all summer building or repairing a winter-proof lodge and stockpiling the food they need to survive the winter. Knowing that these beavers had little more chance of survival in the wild than at the fur farm, I called PETA to ask what had actually been done with them.

PETA founder Ingrid Newkirk herself took my call. Without admitting in so many words that the beavers had been killed, Newkirk recited an extended and colorized version of the 1968 Phyllis Wright essay “Why we must euthanize,” then seen on the wall of almost every animal shelter.

“Why we must euthanize” has always reminded me of the elderly sisters in the 1939 Joseph Kesselring play *Arsenic & Old Lace*, who poison old men for their alleged own good. Those who internalize “Why we must euthanize” frequently exhibit what even then I called “The *Arsenic & Old Lace* syndrome,” continuing to kill animals even when there are alternatives, because to stop would be to contradict a quasi-religious faith which has become integral to self-image.

Winograd, then a Stanford University undergraduate, called to tell me about the success of a feral cat neuter/return project he helped to coordinate on the Stanford campus. He spoke with absolute poise and self-confidence, quoting statistics about the cats in and around each campus building, and refuting Newkirk point by point when I threw her arguments at him to see if he could respond.

Our conversation 20 years ago was similar in gist to the comparison-and-contrast offered by Newsweek.com on April 28, 2008. Author Jeneen Interlandi juxtaposed Winograd’s positions with those of PETA vice president Daphna Nachminovitch.

Since *Redemption* appeared, Winograd has become perhaps the third most-quoted animal advocate in the U.S., according to **ANIMAL PEOPLE** searches of News-

Library.com. Without the help of a multi-million dollar organization or any public relations staff, Winograd appears to trail in news media adjudged quote-worthiness only Newkirk and HSUS president Wayne Pacelle.

Often Winograd is quoted in response to comments from Pacelle and other HSUS spokespersons, but he most often rebuts PETA. This was not initially by choice. Between our conversation in 1988 and December 1994, Winograd tried repeatedly to win PETA endorsement of neuter/return feral cat control, at least in qualified situations.

“We do not support ‘right-to-life’ for animals,” Newkirk wrote at last.

Winograd, a vegan since his early teens, does support right-to-life for animals, including feral cats, pit bull terriers, neo-natal kittens, hard-to-adopt large black dogs, indeed every animal whose suffering can be relieved by treatment and who is not an imminent threat to the lives and well-being of other animals and humans.

San Francisco

A longtime volunteer for the San Francisco SPCA, Winograd had already personally rescued, rehabilitated, and placed for adoption practically every sort of “impossible to place” animal, and had recruited other volunteers to help. After graduating from the Stanford University law school, Winograd worked as a criminal prosecutor, but left that job to start the Department of Law & Advocacy at the San Francisco SPCA. The department under Winograd worked to further animal rights legislation, promote neuter/return, and educate the public about not eating meat.

Winograd was integrally involved in making a success of the Adoption Pact, which in April 1994 made San Francisco in effect a no-kill city. The pact requires the SF/SPCA to find a home or provide lifetime care to any healthy or recoverable animal who is not rehomed by the San Francisco Department of Animal Care & Control.

After then-SF/SPCA president Richard Avanzino crossed the bay to head Maddie’s Fund at the end of 1998, Winograd served for a time as the SF/SPCA operations director, then took the Tompkins County SPCA to no-kill status while providing animal control sheltering for Tompkins County and the city of Ithaca, New York.

A frequent speaker at the No More Homeless Pets conferences formerly held twice annually by the Best Friends Animal Society, Winograd in 2004 founded the No Kill Advocacy Center. His blog, at <www.nathanwinograd.com>, is read by more than 40,000 people.

Winograd’s once bluntly outspoken mentor Avanzino now promotes let’s-all-get-along projects such as the Asilomar Accords in hopes of gently persuading the conventional sheltering community to “buy into” life-affirming policies. Rejecting the Asilomar approach, Winograd indicts by name many of the most prominent and best-respected leaders in sheltering and animal advocacy for pursuing policies that Winograd believes are contributing to the shelter death toll.

Repeatedly Winograd challenges animal advocacy leaders to rethink animal sheltering policies, especially in terms of what kind of example they set while trying to extend humane consideration to livestock, wildlife, work animals, and animals in parts of the world where organized, well-funded animal advocacy is still just a rumor.

Winograd has little patience with no-kill critics who persist in conflating the multi-dimensional package of services he insists a no-kill city must have with “warehousing” animals, a practice he regards as emblematic of failure and of

“Activist vegetarian” elected to head Canadian SPCA

MONTREAL—The Canadian SPCA board of directors on April 9, 2008 affirmed the promotion of former vice president Nancy Breitman to acting president, following the ouster of Pierre Barnoti, president since 1995. The CSPCA board also elected six new members to fill eight vacancies.

Breitman told Max Harrold of the *Montreal Gazette* that under Barnoti she was ostracized as “a radical, tree-hugging, activist vegetarian.”

Breitman pledged to reduce the numbers of animals killed at the two CSPCA shelters, in Montreal and Laval, by “as

much as possible.”

The CSPCA in recent years has killed about 6,000 dogs and cats per year, about 40% of the total for the Montreal municipal region. The toll has dropped by about two-thirds during the past 20 years.

Formerly providing animal control sheltering to the Montreal Urban Community, the CSPCA lost the contract to a private firm called Berger Blanc shortly before the beginning of Barnoti’s tenure.

Barnoti continues to head the U.S.-based charity SPCA International, incorporated in Delaware in 2006.

mental illness. Winograd does not hesitate to denounce those who practice “slow-kill” sheltering through overcrowding and lack of disease control, yet is equally contemptuous of shelter directors who object to using the term “no kill” because of the challenge it implies to population control killing.

Winograd may be most condemnatory of those who claim to practice “no kill” by killing only “unadoptable” animals.

King County

Winograd’s most prominent recent public conflict is with Ron Sims, a longtime politician in King County, Washington, now county executive, who was widely lauded in the early 1990s for winning passage of a “mandatory” pet sterilization ordinance.

Like most and perhaps all other such ordinances, the King County version is actually just differential licensing with an unusually high fee for licensing an unsterilized dog or cat. Like other such ordinances, the King County version is no more enforced than any other licensing requirement, and has not demonstrably reduced shelter killing. In fact, the King County rate of shelter killing per 1,000 human residents, low when the “mandatory” sterilization ordinance passed, has barely declined at all since then.

Yet except for one 1994 statistical critique by the late Robert Lewis Plumb, published by **ANIMAL PEOPLE**, the King County ordinance and aftermath for more than 16 years received barely a glance from animal advocates. A 1997 King County audit found that the King County animal control department was chronically underfunded. Little was done about that. A veterinarian in October 1998 complained in writing to the King County council about almost exactly the same kinds of neglect of animal health and well-being that Winograd noted and detailed in March 2008, in a 147-page inspection report.

Winograd became involved as a consultant after a 10-member King County Animal Care & Control Citizens Advisory Committee in September 2007 informed the council that conditions at the two King County shelters are “deplorable,” and rejected Sims’ claim that King County remains a “recognized leader” and “model” for animal control agencies nationwide.

The county responded by ordering King County animal control to achieve a “save” rate of 80%, but did little about providing ways and means.

Winograd in *Redemption* had expressed skepticism of the value of the King County licensing ordinance, based on a data analysis similar to Plumb’s. Once Winograd actually spent time in the King County shelters, he found much more wrong than just an inflated sense of achievement. Winograd was visibly shocked and upset when he described his findings to **ANIMAL PEOPLE**—and so was the community when the key findings of his report were amplified by both the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* and the *Seattle Times*.

Sims and the union representing King County animal control workers accused Winograd of merely grinding an ax for no-kill. Nonetheless, Sims and King County announced a \$965,000 improvement package, to include “hiring a director of operations, writing a new animal-care protocol, hiring a shelter medical staff, and starting a population management plan,” summarized *Seattle Times* staff reporter Sharon Pian Chan.

Sims had already invited an independent evaluation by a five-member panel from the Koret Shelter Medicine Program at the University of California at Davis. The U.C. Davis panel in April affirmed Winograd’s findings in a 151-page report.

The U.C. Davis team identified in particular “a breakdown in care leading to animal suffering, illness and likely unnecessarily high levels of euthanasia and death.”

The *Post-Intelligencer* and *Seattle Times* published slightly conflicting accounts,

as they often do, about what happened next.

According to *P.I.* reporter Gregory Roberts, the King County council “approved a motion arranging for private veterinarians to volunteer their services and calling for a stepped-up pet-adoption campaign among county employees, businesses, and animal-rescue groups. County Executive Ron Sims issued a declaration of emergency at the shelters to streamline the measures.

According to *Seattle Times* staff reporter Keith Ervin, the council itself declared the “health crisis.”

Other cities

Winograd’s No Kill Advocacy Center is meanwhile pursuing a lawsuit against the Los Angeles County Department of Animal Care & Control, alleging multiple violations of the 1998 Hayden Act, which requires California animal control shelters to make healthy animals available to rescue groups, regardless of whether the animals are deemed “adoptable.”

On the first weekend in May, Winograd presented a “No Kill Solution Conference” in Indianapolis, hosted by the local group Move to Act.

Indianapolis, like King County, has long enjoyed a progressive reputation, and until recent financial reversals, the Indianapolis Humane Society was among the wealthiest in the nation. However, the Indianapolis Humane Society and animal control department have resisted most of the approaches that Winograd recommends to reduce shelter killing. The major provider of low-cost sterilization service to the community is the Foundation Against Companion Animal Euthanasia, begun by emergency room physician Scott Robinson. Since the FACE clinic opened in 1998, the Indianapolis rate of shelter killing per 1,000 human residents has fallen from 28.8 to 16.7.

Winograd is also advising efforts to lower the shelter killing rate in Philadelphia, which just over 130 years ago became the first U.S. city to delegate animal control to a humane society. The Pennsylvania SPCA returned the animal control contract to the city in 2002, as Winograd recommends humane societies should do, based on the San Francisco model—but the volume of dog and cat sterilization done in Philadelphia was nowhere near enough to put the city within easy range of going no-kill.

Redemption contains a few statistical hiccups, among them rounding off U.S. shelter killing to five million when the current figure is below four million; repeating the oft repeated false claim that no one really knows the size of the feral cat population, which can be estimated in exactly the same manner as deer populations and is now under 12.5 million at summer peak; and frequently citing “euthanasia rates” and “save rates,” which can vary up or down without in the least reflecting actual community success in reducing surplus dog and cat births and shelter killing.

Winograd also repeats the false claim of pit bull terrier enthusiasts that German shepherds, Dobermans, and Rottweilers were all once feared fighting dogs. None have ever been used in professional dog-fighting, as Rick Crownover has established through exhaustive historical research. Neither have either German shepherds or Dobermans ever figured more often in dog attack fatalities and maimings than they do right now—but they were much more feared for decades, because pit bulls and Rottweilers were a fraction as numerous as now, and dog attack fatalities and maimings were almost unheard of in the U.S. for most of the first 80 years of the 20th century.

The loose ends barely matter. Winograd’s arguments would be only strengthened by using better data—and as it stands, *Redemption* is probably the most provocative and best-informed overview of animal sheltering ever written.

—Merritt Clifton

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