

March/April 2008

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**ADVOCACY****Pet's Best Friend**

Nathan Winograd believes animal shelters shall not kill.

BY SONJA BOLLE

**IF YOU THINK** of animal-rights activists as rabid, Nathan Winograd disappoints. A cat person in fact, he's also a cat person in personal style: unobtrusive in appearance, measured in his gestures, fastidious in his quotes. Make no mistake, however: he wants a revolution, and he wants it now.

His cause is pets—"companion animals," to give them the dignified title he feels they deserve. Winograd, JD '95, believes that if the public knew that the leading killer of healthy dogs and cats in this country is the system of shelters charged with protecting them, the public would be horrified. And he believes that if people understood that these deaths were unnecessary, he would have his revolution tomorrow.

Through his No Kill Advocacy Center and his recent book, *Redemption: The Myth of Overpopulation and the No Kill Revolution in America* (Almaden Books), Winograd works to redire animal shelters to ensure that animals are adopted, not killed. The cornerstone of approach: stop blaming the public for abandoning and mistreating animals, and make it easy for people to do the right thing.

His love of animals crystalized into activism when he entered Stanford Law School and stumbled across the Stanford Cat Network. "While my fellow students were trying to get on the Law Review, I was chasing cats on campus to get them



**THE PAWS CAUSE:** Winograd stopped working as a prosecutor to advocate for animals. But "a lawyer's laser focus" has helped him transform a shelter in upstate New York and lead the No Kill movement.

Catherine Ledner

neutered. That was the education that pushed me on the path to advocate for a No Kill nation."

After practicing law for a few years—as a prosecutor in Riverside and Marin counties—he saw a great deal that was ugly in human nature—Winograd took a job as director of operations at the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) in San Francisco, which in 1994 had become the first city to end the killing of healthy dogs and cats at shelters. There he worked for Richard Avanzino, whom Winograd calls "the father of the No Kill movement." Avanzino believed that through community outreach, homes could be found for all the healthy animals surrendered at the city shelters.

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In 2001, Winograd took the executive directorship of his own shelter, the Tompkins County SPCA in upstate New York. From his first hours on the job in Ithaca, Winograd refused routine decisions to destroy animals and demanded that the staff come up with a plan to house incoming animals. Within six months, Winograd would lose or fire more than half the staff, but he eventually succeeded in bringing the save rate of the shelter's animals up to 93 percent.

He vastly increased the shelter's reliance on volunteers, stepping up efforts to keep the dogs socialized. "I set a goal to get dogs out of their kennels four times a day. After we put out a call for volunteers, I had to *limit* them to four times a day. It was like holding the floodgates back. When the vet came, there would be notes on every cage saying the dogs were out."

He decided the most significant factor in redirecting animal-welfare policy is leadership, and he moved back home to Southern California to found a consulting business that would promote change shelter by shelter. "My father-in-law kids me that I'm the only person he knows whose goal in life is to go to smaller offices and smaller paychecks," he says. Why else would a person "spend \$70,000 for a top-flight law school education and not practice law?" Winograd makes no such calculations, asserting instead that his education at Stanford accounts for his success in the movement. "It gave me a lawyer's laser focus on what the goal is."

The most radical element in Winograd's approach is shifting focus from the public's responsibility for dumping animals to shelters' responsibility for killing them. He has even moved away from advocating laws aimed at regulating animal care and protection, having found such legislation well-meaning but hard to enforce.

Shelter directors, not surprisingly, often see Winograd's position as a personal attack on their commitment. Mickey Zeldes, for example, supervises the small municipal Rohnert Park shelter in Sonoma County, an area with six shelters and at least 10 rescue operations. The groups work together to find homes for as many animals as possible, but the system often is overwhelmed—and then they kill animals that they decide are unlikely to be adopted.

**'There is enough compassion in any community to overcome the necessity of killing healthy animals.'**

No-kill shelters, Zeldes argues, work only if they can accept animals based on adoptability; they cannot work if—as the main animal-control agency in an area—they are required to take in all abandoned animals. "I worked briefly at a no-kill shelter," she says, "and when they were full, they would turn people away. . . The public loves the sound of 'no kill,' but a shelter is a reflection of a community. When a group gets together to form a shelter, nobody chooses to be 'high kill,' but when you get flooded with animals, and reality sets in, what are you going to do? Animals that are old, sick or aggressive are not adoptable. The animals I put out there need to be a good representative of what adopting from a shelter is about. ]

your shelter has high intake, your community is dumping a large number of animals. Where is the outcry to stop that?"

Winograd remains adamant that shelter philosophy is the main problem: feeling overwhelmed doesn't wash with him. "If you look at social movements in the U.S. that are a success, it's ones that don't throw up their hands and say we've come to the end of our rope."

He cites the Nevada Humane Society in Reno, which made a commitment at the beginning of 2007 to become No Kill. The shelter was seeking a director when a board member brought Winograd's work to the attention of the group. Winograd consulted at the shelter in January 2007 and drew up plans for change.



**ADOPTION OPTION: Winograd wants shelters to concentrate on making it easy for people to take pets home. Some shelters stay open when families are likelier to visit and offer pet-care advice that helps adoptions stick.**

Catherine Ledner

Bonney Brown was hired as director to institute those changes. The 75-year-old shelter focused on customer service, offering help to pet owners who were having problems that might have led them to surrender animals, and changing its hours to facilitate evening adoptions. Changing shelter operations, however, "was a very tiny part of it," Brown says. "What happens at one shelter does not address the whole problem. The goal is to create a no-kill community. We set a goal to get a safety net in place for all homeless dogs and cats in the county." Volunteers at the shelter rose from about 25 to 1,100. "Everyone wants to feel they're making a contribution," Brown says. The goal was to get the save rate up over 90 percent for all animals. "We've already achieved that for dogs in less than a year I've been on the job." Cats are at 78 percent.

Winograd frequently hears the argument that No Kill is a boutique movement, applicable only in certain circumstances: limited

intake (shelters that accept only the cute and fuzzy will have a high adoption rate), unique communities (some of San Francisco's No Kill success was attributed to high adoption rates among its gay population) or urban settings (a large population offers more potential homes). But Winograd has seen the model work in all types of places, from Ivins City, Utah, to Philadelphia. "There is enough compassion in any community to overcome the necessity of killing healthy animals."

At home, the Winograds have a Wall of Fame, a tool in the home-schooling of the couple's two children. On it are pictures of leaders of many movements for social change: abolitionist Thomas Clarkson, suffragists Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. No Kill follows in the path of every important movement that has history on its side, Winograd says, getting evangelical:

"When I look at old documentaries of the civil rights movement, and I see kids at lunch counters, or being sprayed with fire hoses, my first reaction is always: How can anyone be so cruel? But my second is: Can't people see the writing on the wall

I don't care if it's civil rights, gay rights or animal rights: all the heroes have in common that they could clearly see the tide of humanity moving in the direction of greater compassion, and they managed to move it along quicker. What disturbs me is the body count associated with delay, but I believe this is inevitable. I'm not deluded to think I'm in a class with those leaders, but it's a comfort to know that inevitable."

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