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ANIMAL PEOPLE

by

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B.A., English, University of Nevada Reno, 2004

DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing

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ANIMAL PEOPLE

by

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MASTER OF FINE ARTS, CREATIVE WRITING

ABSTRACT

Billions of animals are killed every year based on this ethical premise: Animals are lower than humans on some abstract moral scale, and they can therefore be considered property. However, a growing percentage of compassionate and educated animal lovers and advocates reject that premise. It's now possible to live comfortably and happily without subjecting animals to fear, pain, and stress for non-essential products. Whether it be food, clothing, scientific experiment, or entertainment, alternatives now exist to take their place. A broad range of investigative journalism and scholarship have exposed the detrimental effects of the use of animals for industry. An increasingly large number of compassionate, attentive people are beginning to understand that animals, too, deserve to their life as they choose, and many of us are determined to spread the word.

Animal People tells the stories of individuals who are engaging in advocacy in new ways and building a better future for animals and humans alike. Though their fields of interest and expertise may be very different – they have backgrounds in science, social media, animal

husbandry, and philosophy— their stories illuminate the progress we’re making in thinking about animals and interacting with them in a more positive, less-exploitative manner.

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Preface

Animal People combines memoir, profiles of people who work with animals, and overviews of recent scientific research to explore current issues in anthrozoology (the study of human-animal interaction). The four chapters here are meant to give a complete overview of major sectors of the animal welfare argument. This preface will explain the projected/current content. It begins with how my work is situated in the Creative Nonfiction canon.

In the introduction to Lee Gutkind's *You Can't Make This Stuff Up* (2012), Gutkind argues that

Composers are informed and motivated by music, artists by the work of the masters, Da Vinci, Van Gogh, Picasso. They may have been painting or composing before actually becoming grounded in their artistry, but they did not do their best work, were not recognized, and did not achieve greatness or professional credibility until they were thoroughly steeped in the background of their profession.¹

In that same sense, my dissertation seeks to be literary and artistic, while prioritizing animals and bringing contemporary animal welfare issues to the fore using the tools of a literary journalist. The material presents the argument that, as a compassionate society, we must begin to view other animals not just

¹ Gutkind, Lee, *You Can't Make This Stuff Up: The Complete Guide to Writing Creative Nonfiction--from Memoir to Literary Journalism and Everything in Between* (Boston, MA: Da Capo/Lifelong, 2012), 15.

as property but as sentient beings that deserve our respect. The project adds to the growing body of animal literature which suggests and reinforces the concept that a paradigm shift in the way we view animals is taking place. The subject is timely, yet as a writer I have been living with it for years. I have written numerous articles for publication, attended rallies and events, and became familiar with the overall movement through immersion, a central technique in literary journalism.

The art of presenting research in a narrative form to persuade and educate readers is not new; nor is literary nonfiction about animals new. Charles Darwin wrote *The Expression of Emotion in Man and Animals* in 1862; some more recent examples that have proven both popular and important additions to the animal literature canon include Jeffrey Moussaif Mason's many books about the emotional lives of animals like *A Pig Who Sang to the Moon*, *When Elephants Weep*, *Dogs Never Lie About Love*, and *The Nine Emotional Lives of Cat*; Wayne Pacelle's *The Bond*; Jonathan Balcombe's *Pleasurable Kingdom*; Frans De Waal's *The Ape and the Sushi Master* and *The Age Of Empathy*, and countless other books found on the "Animal" shelves at bookstores. In fact, even a recent issue of *Creative Nonfiction* is themed around essays about animals, written by authors like Philip Lopate and Susan Cheever. It seems that everyone is jumping on the train.

In *The Literary Journalists* (1984), Norman Simms writes:

Literary journalism wasn't defined by critics. The writers themselves have recognized that their craft requires immersion, structure, voice, and accuracy. Along with these terms, a sense of responsibility to their subjects and a search for the underlying meaning in the act of writing characterize contemporary literary journalism.²

Here Simms identifies indispensable tools of the trade that are as much as guidelines for literary nonfiction, regardless of the subject matter. It can be said that the best literary nonfiction tells real stories that have value to society; what that value is should be evident to readers to evaluate the information for themselves. In writing literary journalism, we gather information and use it to tell a story; we weave multiple storylines into one; we distill many different meanings into one message or controlling metaphor or theme.

Literary Journalism

In 1997, "literary journalism" was not yet a mainstream term. In the preface to *The Art of Fact: A Historical Anthology of Literary Journalism*, Ben Yagoda argues that literary journalism was then still a "profoundly fuzzy term."³

Most people are not acquainted with it; those who are tend to use it to signify different things. It sometimes seems to refer to nothing more

² Sims, Norman, *The Literary Journalists* (New York: Ballantine, 1984), 5.

³ Kerrane, Kevin, and Ben Yagoda, (*The Art of Fact: A Historical Anthology of Literary Journalism*. New York, NY: Scribner, 1997), 13.

specific than laudable nonfiction. For us, definition begins with the second half of the formulation, that is, with “Journalism”... But what kind of journalism is “literary”? Our five word answer would be: thoughtfully, artfully, and valuably innovative.⁴

The term literary journalism is now comfortably situated under the umbrella of the term “Creative Nonfiction,” made “official” during a 1983 National Endowment for the Arts meeting. According to Gutkind, editor of the journal *Creative Nonfiction* and author of several books on the subject,

Many categories in nonfiction storytelling –creative nonfiction—relate to specific subjects, such as baseball, business, science, and law. If your work belongs to a particular subject matter, you have a built-in audience that can be pinpointed or categorized...The challenge is to target your niche audience by concentrating on subject while, at the same time, enticing the general reader by making the subject seem secondary and the characters and the narrative primary and irresistibly compelling.⁵

Animal People fits into the literary journalism category because it adheres to Simms’s criteria; furthermore it fits into a more specific sub-genre of “animal literature,” though it could be more accurately described as “literary journalism about animals.” This differs from Creative Nonfiction about animals which typically falls under memoir or the natural sciences categories (take *Marley & Me*, for example, the author’s memoir about his life with his golden

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Gutkind, Lee. *You Can't Make This Stuff Up*, 16.

retriever; or *Born Free* by Joy Adams, a memoir about Adams's life among African lions). In fact, there is a long history of such books. Now, literary journalism about animals is emerging as a genre of nonfiction written by journalists and non-specialists who have not spent time in jungles and who do not have a Ph.D. in Zoology. A writer's ethos in the genre can be based solely on his or her desire to learn about the subject and to communicate important truths which have value to society or to the individual; as well as their ability to be a gatherer of facts and the teller of a good story. Writers are finding that the intersection of man and animal is a fascinating and worthwhile subject to pursue, as it can illuminate important issues related to politics, philosophy, science, spirituality, and even aesthetics.

An example of popular literary journalism about animals written by a non-specialist is Jonathan Safran Foer's *Eating Animals* (2009). Safran Foer, a novelist who turned his pen toward the issues of factory farming, begins the book like a novelist. He introduces the reader to his grandmother, a scrappy Holocaust survivor who hoards pounds of flour in her basement and makes "the best chicken and carrots in the world." His strategy as a literary journalist is clear and effective in three ways: The section immediately draws readers in and acknowledges their need for story; it establishes the author's authority as a storyteller (the introduction is even called "Storytelling"); and it acknowledges the main premise: 'I am fundamentally like you - yet I have made better choices. Here's why.'

Scholars of Creative Nonfiction know that stories have great power over us. So do scientists. In the preface of *The Storytelling Animal* (2012), Jonathan Gottschall argues that "...science *can* help explain why stories...have such power over us... how fiction subtly shapes our beliefs, behaviors, ethics – how it powerfully modifies culture and history."⁶ Remarkably, stories are essential to our survival. Humans are so enraptured by stories that the message remains long after the story has ended -- and unless woven into a narrative, facts don't lodge themselves in memory as effectively. The voice of the literary journalist is powerful, indeed.

The popularity of animal literature is not a passing phenomenon. A paradigm shift in regard to how we view our relationship to the natural world is taking place. Not since the naturalist movement that sought to protect wilderness from environmental catastrophe has our culture been so preoccupied and enchanted with our relationship to nature and other species. Although there is increased awareness of the importance of our ecological interdependence with the environment, the idea of saving the planet and whether or not there is anything that needs to be saved – is a fundamentally political issue.

In another chapter, animal welfare issues are explained as part of an overly politicized argument. It is also part of the larger scope of environmental issues because animals, whether wild or domesticated, are inextricably linked

⁶ Gottschall, Jonathan, (*The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012), xvii.

with environmental and political concerns. In the Introduction to *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind*, Theodore Rozak and Mary E. Gomes argue that

Every political movement has its psychological dimension. Persuading people to alter their behavior always involves probing motivations and debating values, political activism begins with asking what makes people tick. What do they want and fear and care about? How do we get and hold their attention? How much can people take - and in what order of priority? Have we overloaded them with anxiety or guilt? How do we make credible the threats we perceive? Movements that fail to think carefully about this may fail to persuade.⁷

Safran Foer also makes the connection between the ways we think about environment and animals, writing that “Virtually everyone agrees that animals can suffer in ways that matter, even if we don’t agree on just what that suffering is like or how important it is... Another thing most people agree on is that the environment matters.”⁸ Though animal literature is often seen as either entertainment or educational, it is essentially a form of political activism. My dissertation is inherently commanded by the psychological dimensions Rozak and Gomes imply. To ask the question “Why write about animals?” is to engage with subjects of great importance to contemporary society, including politics.

⁷ Roszak, Theodore, Mary E. Gomes, and Allen D. Kanner, (*Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind*. San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1995. Web. 13 Apr. 2014.

⁸ Gutkind, Lee. *You Can't Make This Stuff Up*, 17.

Just like we do with the environment, when we speak about animals, we are not using the language and belief systems of a generation ago. Rozak and Gomes argue that the environmental movement has seen a progression into the front of our consciousness; today that has only grown. It is the same with the animal welfare movement. Only a generation ago the word “vegan” was not in our lexicon, nor was “factory farming.” The link between both movements collides in the latter term. Still, the political dimensions of both environmental and animal issues remains sensitive and tense. Our culture simultaneously disparages attacks on nature and distrusts those who seek to protect it from even the most egregious harm and injustice. The role of the journalist, therefore, is more important than ever to this timely topic. Safran Foer, for example, asserts his journalistic ethos early on in *Eating Animals*, writing that,

While this book is the product of an enormous amount of research, and is as objective as any work of journalism can be - I used the most conservative statistics available (almost always from government and peer-reviewed academic and industry sources) and hired two outside fact-checkers to corroborate them - I think of it as a story. There's plenty of data to be found, but it is often thin and malleable. Facts are important, but they don't, on their own, provide meaning—especially when they are so bound to linguistic choices...But place facts in a story about the world

we live in and who we are and who we want to be—and you can begin to speak meaningfully about eating animals.⁹

This is my goal. *Animal People* is a confluence of Simms’s criteria for literary journalism, and Rozak and Gomes’s criteria for persuading readers. My dissertation covers the contemporary intersection of people and animals in a range of issues and contexts chosen because of their special ability to illustrate either a needed paradigm shift in the way we treat or view animals, or to illustrate that one is currently underway. To do this, immersion with people who work with animals in everyday situations is a must. The book follows individuals in several different spheres including the pet industry, the scientists and scholars who seek to study and understand animal intelligence, animal activists, artists, and even spiritual practitioners. The overarching theme of the book is a call to a shift in thought, characterized by the importance of restoring our bond and our respect for other sentient beings. The profile structure is an effective way to expand on not only these issues, but to explore the intersection of animals and people in a real, and meaningful, way.

⁹ Foer, Jonathan Safran, *Eating Animals* (New York: Little, Brown and, 2009), 14.

Introduction

Billions of animals are killed every year based on this ethical premise: Animals are lower than humans on some abstract moral scale, and they can therefore be considered property. However, a growing percentage of compassionate and educated animal lovers and advocates reject that premise. It's now possible to live comfortably and happily without subjecting animals to fear, pain, and stress for non-essential products. Whether it be food, clothing, scientific experiment, or entertainment, alternatives now exist to take their place. A broad range of investigative journalism and scholarship have exposed the detrimental effects of the use of animals for industry. An increasingly large number of compassionate, attentive people are beginning to understand that animals, too, deserve to their life as they choose, and many of us are determined to spread the word.

When I was 23 years old I began keeping a small notebook. In it, a bibliography of animal-related material and ideas that struck me as important, and I continued to read and collect ideas over the years, determined to write a book someday that distilled everything that I had learned, while at the same time voice my own thoughts. In a way I've always been writing this book that you have in your hands. I was fascinated by animals as most young children are and had a menagerie at home (I wish I would have taken better care of them and that the pet stores had not been so willing to send home a ten-year-old with any species of animal she could afford). In school I sponsored bake sales

for Green Peace's Save the Whales campaign, the first major animal rights campaign to get a lot of media attention. Later, I organized and participated in rallies to stop the rodeos from coming to town, to prevent the BLM from rounding up wild mustangs, to protest fur designers at fashion shows. There was always something, yet there was never enough, that I could do.

We pay special attention to animals because they bring us such great joy. Whether at home or in the wild, my heart opens to animals more easily than it does to a child of our own species. We seek to communicate with a species so vastly rich, yet different from our own, in order to get closer to, and delve into, the mysteries of nature.

It's a mysterious , than I do to people most of the time. I see them as unique, smart, sensible fellow beings who are achingly familiar, no matter the species. My attentive habit towards all creatures great and small has also helped me recognize animals in distress. For example, on my way to class in college one day, studying the geese as I had loved to do, I noticed that one poor bird had a blow dart stuck clean through his or her head. It must have missed every vital piece of anatomy. I skipped class to call Fish & Wildlife rescue which miraculously intercepted the goose hours later and gave it veterinary care.

Once, I peered into the trash and rubble in the stoop of an old building in Seattle and saw a beautiful, blue-eyed bird staring back at me. It was a baby crow, dropped from the nest, suffering from rickets and unable to fly. Cautiously, I put it in my jacket near my heart and carried it home, and took it

to the wildlife sanctuary the following day. Unfortunately, it suffered from rickets, a painful, but common condition for malnourished birds born in the city, and it had to be euthanized. While I was gutted by the news, I was glad I could help end the bird's suffering.

These are just two examples, among many others, that illustrate both the power of paying attention to animals and our power to either harm or heal them. Animals also speak the language of compassion. Even the most solitary desert lizard will thank you for rescuing it from a cat's maw. But my experiences of aiding animals are small in comparison to the many great individuals who dedicate their lives to it. I set out to find people who were engaging in advocacy in new ways and tell their stories, which are ultimately stories of building a better future for animals and humans alike. Though their fields of interest and expertise may be very different - they have backgrounds in science, social media, animal husbandry, and philosophy— their stories illuminate the progress we're making in thinking about animals and interacting with them in a more positive, less-exploitative manner.

During my twenties I became a restaurant reviewer. My posh job took me to all the best restaurants in Las Vegas, and I was eating everything from Axis deer and Nilgai antelope to wild boar and alligator (and of course the requisite chicken, fish and cow). The trend towards sustainable agriculture and grass-fed animals seemed like progress at the time; the chefs were delighted to tell me about the heavenly ranches and pastures the animals were raised on.

But after one assignment (the one that gave me the deer, antelope and boar on the same “ensemble plate”) I got sick. Hours after the interview, I was pressed into a pillow, curled up in the fetal position. Preserved in the voice recorder next to me were all the facts about the creatures I had consumed: they happily ranged over acres in the Montana mountains, they weren’t fed hormones or antibiotics, the sampling of all three exotics together “softens the adventure” for the diner. But in my stomach, these exotics had banded together and refused to digest; and in the following days they caused me so much misery that every picture of an animal I saw made me queasy. I could taste every blade of grass, every flower stem, every ounce of mountain spring water they drank, which spiced their flesh and made them such a “delicacy” for patrons from around the world. Not long after that, I became a vegan and never reviewed a meat dish again.

Here’s where the moral schizophrenia comes in. I was a dyed in the wool animal lover. I was curious and concerned for their welfare, but I still ate meat. Unfortunately for the billions of domestic animals we farm in this country every year, the two feelings – compassion and craving – are not incompatible in most people’s minds. Animal protection can grow out of the seed of compassion, but it often doesn’t extend to our own cravings and desires for their flesh. Because meat tastes good and has nutritional value, our brains, like the brains of other carnivorous creatures throughout time, easily bypasses morality.

Every day, new research may continue to expand our understanding of other species, but does it matter? Deep down we already know that animals are sentient beings, that they have personalities, speak, love, and inhabit their animal bodies not unlike the ways in which we inhabit our own. The human and animal worlds are not different, nor does nature privilege one species over the other. Size doesn't matter. Ravens grieve and perform funerary rites just as elephants do; ants build complicated cities underground, and prairie dogs build towns.

Animals are our helpers. In childhood, we learn to count, to spell, even how to conduct ourselves morally, through images of animals and stories with animal characters. The other day I heard someone singing Old MacDonald Had a Farm, a nursery rhyme that has been a favorite for generations. The children were encouraged to sing along and imitate the quacking of the duck, the mooing of the cow. In my mind I grasped the sad reality that the farms of today are nothing to sing about - much less places where we'd take our children.

In America, farmed animals are confined to CAFOS, cages, and crates, forced like robots to produce materials for our consumption. Generation after generation of these animals have never experienced a natural life. Temple Grandin believes that the mothering instinct in Holstein cows has even been bred out. (I disagree with that claim, and expand on my beliefs in "Chapter 3: Dairy Cows, Orphans on the Farm.") It's terrible to imagine that Old Macdonald's chickens, with an innocent "cluck cluck" here and there, are killed

by the hundreds of millions each year? They are given life sentences which are the true definition of “nasty, brutish and short,” expending their bodies so rapidly that none are even allowed to live out a fraction of their natural lifespan. An American farm animal is a tragic thing.

We have far indeed from the times when a chicken was a respected and contributing member of a household, who would offer you companionship along with their eggs in return for a good, decent life. Any sense of what is ethical – and reciprocal – is gone, and we can only imagine what their life was like from nursery rhymes and the images from a bygone era. But what about the stories of the pigs who sing to the moon? Dog with ESP?

Even as humans kill and consume as many animals as there are stars are our in the Milky Way galaxy each year, science continues to discover both the distinctive beauty, as well as the similarities, between species. Interestingly enough, science is also discovering more unexplainable phenomena, whether it be spiritual or otherwise; I cover the issue in the final chapter, “Lost Languages.” However, science has shown that, like humans, animals are shaped both by nature and nurture. In one odd study, researchers proved that if exposed to the sounds of “mice porn,” mice reach sexual maturity earlier. In a study meant to demonstrate the impact of a traumatic childhood on the functioning of the adult human brain, rats who were exposed to fear and stress in adolescence became violent and aggressive, anxious and depressed. The same was true with young rats who were separated from their mothers. Animal

models were sufficient in testing these hypotheses because our brains produce the same chemicals in the same parts of our brain; in this case, the amygdala, which regulates fear and stress. Of course, even the studies were done for human benefit, it's easy to assume that even mice and rats have an inner emotional world that is both vulnerable and complex.

But animal models are not only used for the sake of human study. Animals are becoming subjects in their own right to determine what is on the inside of creatures who cannot speak for themselves. The world of animal sentience is big business these days. Researchers are opening up new fields of study devoted to it - ethologists, or animal behaviorists, conduct studies like the ones with the mourning ravens - anthrozoologists study the interaction between humans and animals (for example, does petting a rabbit reduce anxiety in a stressful situation? The findings suggest it does). When I asked Gary Francione, the father of the vegan abolitionist movement, if any of these new studies about animal sentience excited him, he balked. "It will never be enough. Someone will always point out slight differences that make us supposedly greater than them. The only study that excites me is one that shows ten percent of the population can change the culture." If the study, conducted by Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, holds true, we are only a decade away from a massive cultural shift towards veganism. In 2009, only 1% of the American population was vegan - but in 2013, 2.5% abstained from eating or using animal products of any kind. That's hopeful news. And the number of vegans in America, which has more than doubled in the last three years, only continues to

grow. Why? According to a recent survey, nearly 70% of vegans say that they do it for the animals - who are now gaining a voice through individuals and groups like those I write about in this book. But we're not there yet.

People like me - animal people - are still confronted with gruesome images when we lay in bed at night. For example, the other night, I couldn't fall asleep because I had a crick in my back. Not wanting to take anything for it that would leave me groggy, I tossed and turned for hours, waiting for the pain to go away. It didn't. I tried stretching, I tried breathing. I tried stillness. Finally, at 3 a.m. I got up and went into the medicine cabinet. I took out a sleeping pill, moved the couch, pulled a blanket over my head, and fell asleep. That was nearly a week ago. If I was that sow in the gestation crate, or a fox waiting to be skinned alive for my fur, I would endure many such nights without the comfort of anesthetic among a row of thousands of others like me in a dark, rank, odorous cavern. Of course they have no private bathroom, no medicine cabinet. And for them, there is no couch, no blanket, not even a dawn.

It's time to acknowledge those who work on behalf of animals, spread the news of their compassionate missions, and together create a better world where all species have their equivalent of a couch, a blanket, and a dawn.

In 1789, Jeremy Bentham, the "first patron saint of animal rights," famously wrote what would become an oft repeated phrase of the animal welfare movement: "The question is not, Can they *reason*? nor, Can they *talk*?"

but, Can they *suffer?*” But to the chagrin of those animal lovers who use it as a slogan, Bentham himself was not a vegetarian. Nor was he against animal experimentation. Many years later, in 1825 at the dawn of the vivisection debates in Victorian England, Bentham contradicted that sentiment by saying, “I have never seen, nor ever can see, any objection to the putting of dogs and other inferior animals to pain, in the way of medical experiment, when that experiment has a determinate object, beneficial to mankind, accompanied with a fair prospect of the accomplishment of it.¹⁰” It seems that despite Bentham’s genius, he also struggled with how to understand his relationship to animals. He wasn’t alone.

In the centuries prior throughout Europe, animals were still being tried in courts of law and executed, serving as witnesses to crimes, and were the source of unimaginably cruel sports and entertainment like bull baiting, which happened several times a week in some English towns¹¹. England was regarded as “a hell for dumb animals,” but it wasn’t long before people changed their minds¹²The Victorian era was the start of the organized animal welfare movement, beginning with the RSCPA, founded in 1824 and given Royal status by Queen Victoria herself in 1840. But as Harriet Ritvo notes in her seminal work *The Animal Estate*, “As animals were released from the burden of witchcraft, homicide, sodomy, and other crimes, a sense of independence and

¹⁰ "Letter to the Editor of the Morning Chronicle, by Jeremy Bentham." *Letter to the Editor of the Morning Chronicle, by Jeremy Bentham*. N.p., n.d. Web. 13 Apr. 2014.

¹¹ Ritvo, Harriet, *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age* (London: Penguin, 1990) 37.

¹² Ibid.

power that had been implicit in the ability to intentionally transgress was also withdrawn.¹³ It has remained so, up until the present. The question of the animal is still hotly debated, as it has been for centuries, beginning with the Victorians, who were known for their obsession with other species.

In *Reckoning with the Beast*, James Turner notes that while there was a culture of animal exploitation that was unquestioned in England until the Victorian age, “Cruelty implies a desire to inflict pain and thus presupposed an empathetic appreciation of the suffering of the object of cruelty¹⁴. Empathy, however, seems not to have been a highly developed trait in premodern Europeans.¹⁵” “People who walked hand-in-hand with plague, famine, and dying children could ill afford to squander their affective capital on useless emotion,” as charity for the dying even seemed “self-indulgent.¹⁶”

At the same time, animals were seen as heathens, as well. In *The Illustrated London News*, an illustrated newspaper first printed in 1842, animals were often depicted as brutal beasts – attacks made by sharks, crocodiles, lions, gorilla, and boa constrictors (elephants were given more sympathy, “usually very quiet and harmless” -- alongside stories of with the stories that were reported on. Martin’s Act, a bill introduced in 1824 to protect domestic animals such as cattle, was amended. It became *Act for the More Effectual Prevention of Cruelty to Animals*, which extended the protection to all animals; it was again

¹³ Ritvo, Harriet, *The Animal Estate*, 2.

¹⁴ Turner, James, (*Reckoning with the Beast: Animals, Pain, and Humanity in the Victorian Mind*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1980) 2.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

amended in 1876. This bill was what Patrick Glynn, was charged with in 1878; the *Illustrated London News* carried the story entitled: “Brutal Treatment of a Cat,” and describes delusional man who tortured a cat after believing it to have been following him around for a period of five years. The article ends with his penalty, “he was committed to prison for two months.¹⁷”

In 1859, Darwin published *On the Origins of Man*, his book that acknowledged the fact that humans are descended from other species in a long chain of evolution. All animals and plants, scientific evidence showed, are part of the same essential web of life on this planet. This led to a shift in consciousness all over the world; for now we could no longer see ourselves as the center of the universe, created in God’s image and the rightful owners of the Earth. Instead we saw ourselves as complex organisms who seemed to kill our way to the top. Other creatures did too; and this led Tennyson to his famous line from *In Memoriam*, “Nature, red in tooth and claw.”

But Darwin himself didn’t see it that way; to counter what to some was evidence that we lived in a world without compassion or mercy, he wrote *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* in 1872, which posited that animals as well as humans felt emotion, and that our emotions registered on our faces similarly. And other writers, too, were similarly taking up their pen to show how the new theory of evolution united all creatures more than it divided them.

¹⁷ *Illustrated London News*, Vol 78.

In today's culture, the argument has made surprisingly little ground; yet the meaning of empathy has certainly entered into our consciousness as life has grown more comfortable. Still, at what level do we assess animals in an empathetic way? Peter Singer, the founder of the modern animal rights movement and author *Animal Liberation* (a philosophical heir to Bentham and utilitarianism) is not completely against using animals for our own utilitarian purposes, for example, within certain situations. Others, who draw a stricter moral line like abolitionist Gary Francione, believe that animals should not, under any case, be viewed as property, and we therefore should not use them or kill them for our purposes.

An argument that Singer puts forth is derived from Bentham -- the question of why we would ascribe rights to a person with reduced mental capacity (in Bentham's argument it is "an infant of a day or a week or even a month, old") with very little intellectual capacity, and not to clearly more intelligent, capable animal (In Bentham's words, "an old horse or dog").

Chapter 1: Dairy Cows, Orphans on the Farm

I am up to my ears in cow manure. Literally. The back ends of twenty young dairy cows, big black and white Holsteins, are lined up side by side in front of me for their last day's milking. The cows' hooves are covered in muddy, pungent smelling excrement, and a cow on the right, startled by the strange visitor to her parlor, shoots a powerful stream of urine just inches away from my head.

Jerry, a second generation milker at Mickey's Dairy, sprays the mess down and within seconds is detaching the hoses from the udders. They have given their last milk of the day. The next group of cows enters the stalls as Jerry clucks, "Come on, come on." They do so, one right after another in polite but fearful succession.

They know the routine but seem intimidated by the process. Not surprising; the milking parlor is a confusing place. It's a tangle of hoses and sounds from the hydraulic pumps. Yet the cows are polite. And clean. No mastitis here, though the painful infection is present in more than half the dairy cows in the country. So is lameness - and I do notice that Mickey's cows' hooves are large and gelatinous. I had always thought a cow's hoof was hard; these seemed soft, fatty, and fragile. Later I learn that hooves get soft for several reasons. When they are wet and muddy they become soft; and grain-fed

cows typically do not have “enough time to grow a solid skeleton and hard hooves that would make them less susceptible to lameness.”¹⁸

Though the family that runs this dairy is nice enough, and everyone here knows the cows by number and temperament, the milking parlor itself is not a happy place. It’s cold, dark, dreary and damp. When looking up at the cows, they seem like prehistoric giants; strange, yet sad exaggerations of the cows I’ve imagined throughout my life.

But the business of making milk is, as few realize, inherently cruel. The cycle which keeps the industry aloft (and cheese on pizzas) is this: The cows are usually black and white Holsteins, inbred and biologically engineered to produce so much milk that their bodies are spent within 2-3 years, or one-tenth of their natural lifespan. These cows are continually forced to calve. The calves are taken away at birth and sold, sometimes still wet from the birth canal. Cows give several orphan calves to the dairies, and when they can give no more they are slaughtered. The calves, if female, are fated to follow their mother’s path, and the male calves are usually turned into veal. The cycle continues, endlessly. And the government not only allows it, they subsidize it. But what kind of people would knowingly run such a business? Are they as mean and cruel as their industry? I came to Mickey’s Dairy to find out.

Mickey’s Dairy got started over forty years ago on Coors Boulevard 15 miles south of the city. Mickey, Jerry’s grandfather, was savvy, able to multiply

¹⁸ Grandin, Temple, (*Animals Make Us Human*. New York: Houghton-Mifflin Harcourt, 2009) 76.

his herd over and over again until his family had jobs for life. Or so it might have seemed. Most of his children grew up here, on this small patch of land, learning how to count with cows and eggs and the dollar bills they brought in. The family home, a small brick one story, still stands next to the faded blue dairy building, behind it the two acres where the cows live, and a housing pen for the calves. The dairy cows (and one bull) spend on average 2-5 years here, outdoors, milked twice a day until they are spent and either sold to a butcher, taken off to the auctions in Moriarty, or picked up by the dog food company.

The number of teats to be milked demands speed... and a lot of rubber tubing. Graying but stout and virile, Jerry does both milkings every day. His face, a wide, expressionless mask hinting at a fierce interior, is quintessentially New Mexican - Spanish mixed with Native American - and no nonsense. He has spent his whole life tending to this dairy, and doesn't know the taste of store-bought milk. When I ask him if he's ever tried it, he doesn't dignify my question with a response. He turns away in disgust.

The south valley of Albuquerque is mostly farm country that straddles the new west and the old west. Settlements around here predate the Declaration of Independence. Houses and farms still stand where the Spanish conquistadors first set up villages alongside the Rio Grande. But despite its history, Mickey's dairy, in its 41st year, is much like the Isleta pueblo five miles south of it; a remnant of the past now facing extinction.

In the last twenty years, dairy production has shifted dramatically from the Midwest to the Southwest, and the state of New Mexico, with its abundance of flat, dry acreage, ramped up production in two main corridors, both stretching north-south in the bottom half of the state, separated by a few hundred miles.¹⁹ Even though it's ranked only ninth in milk production, New Mexico has the largest average herd size in the country, with an average of 2088 cows in each herd.²⁰ That's bad news for small scale dairies like Mickey's. The younger generations on those farms must head for greener pastures, and a more viable future.

One of those young people is Brett, Jerry's fourteen-year-old cousin. At 6:30 p.m. on a cold February night, he had already been hard at work for hours with more to go. His tennis shoes were soaked through with chocolate milk and water, but it didn't seem to matter. It was rush hour and there was bottling to be done, and customers had started forming a line at their drive-through to get the milk, eggs, orange juice and bread they'd need for dinner and the following morning's breakfast.

He shows me around and takes me to see the milking. Brett doesn't look like a kid with a savings account earned through hard work. He's tiny and appears, at first glance, much younger. But his dark skin and hair, his big brown eyes and pink lips, belie a mature, articulate soul. I follow him with my

¹⁹ "The New Mexico Dairy Industry" (http://aces.nmsu.edu/ces/dairy/documents/nm_dairy.pdf) N.p., n.d. Web. 13 Apr. 2014.

²⁰ "Dairy Producers of New Mexico." *Dairy Producers of New Mexico*.

eyes as he rushes around the bottling machinery. His pace is so frenzied that it's difficult to imagine anyone but a child doing this work. But it's taking its toll: He's been having trouble sleeping lately, he says, as he stacks a dolly with several green milk crates and drags it into the freezer, the doors of which he props open with a rope. "The doctor told me to just go to bed later," he says. Tomorrow, he'll go to his top-ranked charter school that pays for him to take college courses in business and marketing, go to basketball practice, and then come back to the dairy.

Mickey's Dairy could be just another example of the changing face of the dairy industry, as private farms like this one go extinct and concentrated animal feed operations (CAFOs) milk tens of thousands of cows a day using high-tech robots, rather than workers like Jerry and Brett. It's nearly impossible for small operations to keep their overhead and prices low enough to be competitive. Even though today's dairy cows are biologically manipulated to be super producers, pushed to the edge of their natural limits, this alone doesn't keep the farmers in business - nor does it earn the cows retirement. They are disposable. Rather than keep a cow, milking her steady for a decade or so, average working dairy cows are pressured to yield high quantities of milk for a very short time (on large dairies this is about 2-3 years), after which they are labeled "spent," slaughtered, and replaced.

The abundance of milk, while seemingly a good thing, actually isn't. Too much milk means lower prices, and farmers must scale up to keep up. However,

to do so means going into debt to buy more cows and equipment to make a profit; and this, of course, means more milk on the market. Historically, subsidies from the government kept American dairy farms producing milk by giving farmers money when feed prices fluctuated or too much milk was being produced, but this didn't solve the problem, as thousands of dairy farmers have been forced to go out of business in the last several years alone. Enter the Farm Bill 2014, the most sweeping reform passed in the last 70 years. It replaces the Milk Income Loss Coverage, the Dairy Product price Support, which is widely seen as being "outmoded and ineffective." The Bill affects dairy farmers across the board, including small operations like Mickey's Dairy, by eliminating expensive subsidies and forcing farmers to purchase margin insurance. While it would seem as though the government is getting out of the business of milk, that isn't the case, and "...even with these reforms, the federal government maintains much control over the industry, artificially inflating prices and heavily subsidizing crop insurance premiums."²¹

According to the futureofdairy.com website:

In 2009, a perfect storm of plummeting milk prices and high feed costs combined to push dairy margins to the brink. Thousands were forced out of business and many of those who survived went deep into debt.

Nationwide, dairy farmers lost \$20 billion in net equity between 2007 and 2009.

²¹ "The 2014 Farm Bill Subsidy Reforms Don't Go Far Enough." *American Action Forum*. N.p., n.d. Web. 13 Apr. 2014.

It took five years of work, but Congress finally responded by including a new Dairy Producer Margin Protection Program in the 2014 farm bill. It wasn't everything the National Milk Producers Federation wanted. But the 950-page bill does feature the most significant rewrite of dairy policy in more than a generation. The program will help address the volatility in farmers' milk prices, as well as feed costs, and provide appropriate signals to help address imbalances in supply and demand. Overall, it provides a more effective and reasonable safety net for dairy farmers. And whatever its shortcomings, it is far better than the programs it replaced.²²

It's like a snake eating its own tail: The industry will still need to get rid of the excess milk. It does so by developing marketing campaigns (The "Got Milk" campaign has recently been replaced by the more healthful-sounding "Milk Life") and through partnerships with retailers guaranteeing that more milk and cheese gets into our food supply, despite the hidden costs to human and animal health. Despite waning milk consumption in the US, the Farm Bill ensures that the dairy industry will remain artificially propped up despite overproduction and naturally occurring fluctuations in agribusiness.

These changes come too late for Mickey's Dairy. Brett points to a "Land For Sale" sign out front. "We're just selling the land. No one's going to buy the dairy," he says. I ask about Jerry, who's spent his entire life around the cows.

²² "NMPF - Foundation for the Future Dairy Policy Programs." *Protecting Dairy Producers' Margins*. N.p., n.d. Web. 11 Apr. 2014.

“Oh, he’ll be fine. He’s a carpenter as well.”

The cows, of course, are much less resourceful.

Manure Wars

“There are plenty of good dairies,” Brett says as we leave the herd and head for the parking lot. “But there are enough of the bad ones.”

“What makes them bad?”

“Is it really that hard to get a few extra employees to check on the cows and do a little extra work? When they die in the middle of those CAFOs, it can take up to 4 days to find the cow,” he says disgustedly. “Here the cows get more attention. We don’t pet them or give them a bath, but we feed them well and at least they get a vet.”

Seeing thirty thousand cows in one place is a strange sight, but if you drive down Interstate 10 towards the Texas Border, you’ll hit Dairy Row, the land of the CAFOs. A place of characterized by polluting odors, flies, and excessive amounts of manure, Dairy Row is more like Dante’s inferno than farmland, and it bears the distinction of being one of New Mexico’s most notorious groundwater polluters, sparking the so-called ‘Manure Wars’ between the dairy lobby and regulators in the state. In the last several years, the EPA has repeatedly fined farmers on Dairy Row for polluting New Mexico’s shallow water table with waste runoff that leaks from gigantic manure lagoons that

store waste until it either evaporates or is turned into fertilizer for crops.

Despite the state cracking down on the farmers by “rewriting and tightening regulations for dairy discharge permits,” it’s an uphill battle, as “the powerful dairy lobby blocks tough state regulations, and the federal EPA lacks broad powers to crack down on agricultural runoff.”²³

But how do you milk thousands of cows two or three times a day? We’ve come a long way from hand milking and a bucket. The increase in herd sizes began with the 1889 invention of mechanized milking – and transformed with the introduction of rotary milking parlors in the 1980s. Manned by only 3-4 workers, these parlors can service 500 cows per hour.

Even more efficient (though less cost effective at a few hundred thousand dollars apiece) is the milking parlor robot. It entirely cuts out the need for humans, and instead uses a robotic arm to do all the work. The cow, wearing a radio collar, enters the parlor on its own accord (needing to be milked or wanting to feed on the snacks placed at the head of the stall). The parlor’s computer reads information from the collar, which contains the cow’s information, i.e. whether she needs to be milked, how much she gave last time. Based on that info, the computer allows the cow to enter by opening the parlor

²³ Burnett, John. "New Mexico Dairy Pollution Sparks 'Manure War'" *NPR*. NPR, n.d. Web. 13 Apr. 2014.

door. The cow steps in and the robot arm swings into service, cleaning and disinfecting her udders before attaching the suction machine.²⁴

Though it sounds more efficient and humane, the milking parlor does not spare the cow from the hardships of life on the farm; they are still exploited and produce milk that is not as healthful and nutritional as the industry wants you to believe.

“What the public learns of the scientific data on nutrition and health (especially from the government’s nutritional guidelines) comes to us by way of many hands,” writes Jonathan Safran Foer in *Eating Animals*. The National Dairy Council is particularly savvy in doling out information that reinforces the image of happy dairy cows and strong bodies built on milk. However, they do so “without regard for negative public-health consequences and even markets to communities incapable of digesting the stuff” according to Foer, 145-146. The NDC advertising range is not confined to commercials and marketing materials for dairy. The idea that osteoporosis can be avoided with milk consumption has been largely disputed, with scientific data actually showing that countries which consume less dairy have fewer incidents of the disease. But the USDA has allowed the NDC to “become arguably the largest and most important supplier of nutritional-educational materials in the nation” (Foer 146).

²⁴ Kardashian, Kirk (*Milk Money: Cash, Cows, and the Death of the American Dairy Farm*. Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire, 2012) EBook.

It is not in the NDC's interest to draw attention to animal suffering on the dairy farm. It's their job to ensure that the image of milk intake and production remain constant, the ways in which they do so sometimes bordering on the ridiculous. For example, in 2010, the National Milk Producers Federation fought to ban the word "milk" from being used on nondairy products such as soy milk and coconut milk, backing up their claim with the supposed health benefits of milk and ignoring the otherwise glaring issues with factory farming, which produces the majority of milk in the country. *Mother Jones* summed up the absurdity of that proposition well:

Firstly, even though NMPF president Jerry Kozak said that "...many products that use the term [milk] have never seen the inside of a barn," he could have just as well have been talking about the NMPF's own products. Most of the milk produced in this country doesn't come from a bucolic barn: it comes from factory farms [like the] one run by Dean Foods, the nation's largest milk producer, where cows are confined in filth-filled pens and have their tails amputated.²⁵

CAFOs also produce substantial waste runoff and the potent greenhouse gas methane. Air pollution from airborne particulates, which include biological and biogenic aerosols, and gases such as ammonia, methane, and hydrogen sulfide²⁶ can cause severe respiratory problems for those who live and work near them.

²⁵ "Blue Marble." *Mother Jones*. N.p., n.d. Web. 13 Apr. 2014.

²⁶ Airborne Cow Allergen, Ammonia and Particulate Matter at Homes Vary with Distance to Industrial Scale Dairy Operations: An Exposure Assessment." *Environmental Health*. N.p., n.d. Web. 13 Apr. 2014.

California's San Joaquin Valley is a frightening example of what happens when 180,000 cows live within a ten mile radius. The valley becomes one of the most polluted and dangerous places to live.²⁷ Yet throughout the country there is a "virtual absence of agricultural air emission regulations and rural monitoring programs."²⁸ The EPA even acknowledges the connection between these gigantic herds and danger to the environment. The EPA website states:

Expansion to larger herd sizes has allowed producers to increase the efficiency of production and capitalize on economies of scale, but it has resulted in environmental challenges with larger numbers of cattle and more manure concentrated in smaller areas.²⁹

And if the dairy industry knows one thing, it's how to expand, even if the areas of production have dramatically decreased. In 1970 there were 650,000 dairies around the country. Today there are only 100,000, yet the number of cattle has decreased from 12 million³⁰ to 9 million.³¹ Still, given their stake in the nepotistic circle of agribusiness in American today, some are reluctant to agree. Companies like Monsanto (the primary manufacturer of BGH, bovine growth hormone) sponsors studies that seem more like fear-mongering fiction than fact. In "Increased Production Reduces the Dairy Industry's Environmental

²⁷ Kardashian, *Milk Money*.

²⁸ Airborne cow allergen, ammonia and particulate matter at homes vary with distance to industrial scale dairy operations: an exposure assessment

²⁹ "Dairy Production." EPA. Environmental Protection Agency, n.d. Web. 13 Apr. 2014.

³⁰ Airborne cow allergen, ammonia and particulate matter at homes vary with distance to industrial scale dairy operations: an exposure assessment

³¹ "Background of Dairy Production in the U.S." EPA. Environmental Protection Agency, n.d. Web. 13 Apr. 2014.

Impact,” the authors suggest that the only way to feed an increasing population “given the finite resources available... can only be achieved through the use of efficient, high-yielding systems.”³² The study then goes on to cite the USDA’s recent “Dietary Guidelines For Americans,” which recommends “a daily intake of three 8-oz glasses of milk,”³³ despite increasing evidence that most Americans are unable to digest it.³⁴

Also absurd is the idea that these cows are “better” because they are more productive, but that’s the logic behind dairy farming in America today. There’s a willing blindness, a purposeful ignorance, on the dairy industry’s part, to congratulate themselves despite evidence that cows are sicker, unhappier, and produce a lower quality product than ever before. Take this quote from the *Dairy Moos* website, which describes itself as “Moosworthy Information From a Real Dairy Farm: “Cows are getting better at producing milk every year. Records are being broken all the time about how much milk cows can give. It’s really quite amazing how much cows have improved over the years.”

In order to “improve,” dairy cows must be bred. And another issue at the heart of dairy cow welfare is the breeding process itself. Mickey’s dairy cows are the typical black and white Holsteins, the ‘supermodels of the dairy industry,’ bred to have wide, bony hips and long legs.³⁵ According to Kirk Kardashian in *Milk Money*, this isn’t the best build for a dairy cow, just the

³² Capper, J.L., “Increased Production Reduces the Dairy Industry’s Environmental Impact” N.p. n.d. Web. 13 Apr. 2014.

³³ Capper, J.L. Increased Production Reduces the Dairy Industry’s Environmental Impact.

³⁴ “You’re Drinking the Wrong Kind of Milk” *Mother Jones*. N.p., n.d. Web. 13 Apr. 2014.

³⁵ Kardashian, *Milk Money*.

prettiest (when farmers began manipulating their genes, they wanted to give them a “sexy” look). But now the Dutch Holstein, brought to America in the 1800s to replace the English breeds like the Jerseys which give less milk, suffers from a range of issues due to being inbred (like less fertility which requires more technology to impregnate them); and they have a much bigger body size than is necessary (after a forty year study, the University of Minnesota concluded that size doesn’t translate to more milk, necessarily).

Modern Holsteins also suffer from fatty liver syndrome and in-breeding depression, yet the simple solution – cross-breeding with other cows – still isn’t the industry norm. Kardashian believes that the system is broken and the cows are left to suffer the consequences. He writes, “The dairy industry lost sight of the foundation of milk production: overall cow health and happiness.”³⁶ Holsteins are nearly seven times more productive than they were just seventy years ago. In 1944, a Holstein, the cow with the highest capacity for milk production, gave an average of 3000 lbs. of milk a year; today, that number is around 20000.³⁷

CAFOs and Calves

Cows are a funny thing. The way they reproduce is similar to that of humans (they also carry their babies for 9 months before giving birth) yet they are so unlike us. It is very difficult for people to read the emotions of other people,

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

and when it comes to animals, people are abysmally bad at it. Even dogs, who respond and, some say, express more emotion than any other domesticated animal, are still a long way from having their emotions decoded and understood by humans. Cows, with their wide, stiff faces, giant black eyes and deep, bellowing moos, are more like aliens to most people, rather than fellow beings. That's bad news for them. And for us. But if you know what to look for, the cows will show you how they feel. "As perceptive, cognitive beings, animals can express preferences, which is a window into their feelings," writes Jonathan Balcombe in *Second Nature*. "Recent studies with cows find that the amount of eye-white visible in the animal's eye increased during temporary separation from their calves. It also corresponds to their frustration when food is temporarily withheld and to contentedness when it is provided."³⁸

It's not in the interest of agribusiness to recognize emotion in animals. The dairy industry, for example, cannot acknowledge the bond between a mother and her calf. To do so would mean less milk to sell. In the beef industry, calves are given time to bond with their mothers until they are weaned, which is done in two ways: either by fence line weaning, where the calf and the mother are separated by a fence, but can still see one another until they've both acclimated to the separation; or through nose-tag weaning, where the calf has a tag put through its nose that prevents the calf from sucking milk from its mother's udder, yet it remains free to stay by its mother's side. Both

³⁸ Balcombe, Jonathan P. (*Second Nature: The Inner Lives of Animals*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 59.

ways are practiced by the industry to decrease stress levels, but for the sake of their welfare: A stressed calf gains less weight and is highly susceptible to illnesses like pneumonia³⁹.

Dairy cows, on the other hand, don't have the luxury of bonding time. According to Temple Grandin in *Animals Make Us Human*, the mother instinct in Holstein's has been bred out after so many generations so that they don't balk when they are separated from their calf. Grandin writes,

The welfare issue for dairy cows is different. A dairy cow has to have a calf every year to keep producing milk, and she can't nurse her calf because she has to go back on the line. The calves are taken away on the day they're born and raised individually in stalls, where they live for six to eight weeks before moving to group pens. The weird thing is that you can go to these calf farms and you don't hear all the bawling and screaming you'd hear on a beef farm. A beef calf would go nuts alone in a hutch, but Holstein calves just don't get that upset about being taken away from mom. That's because we've bred some of the social bonding out of them. The reactions of the PANIC system are less intense. The Holstein mama is less traumatized than a beef cow when she loses her calf, too. She's been bred so intensively for milking that she doesn't care as much about her baby. A beef cow would be screaming if you took her newborn baby away.

³⁹ Grandin, Temple. *Animals Make Us Human*, 75.

The big welfare issue with dairy cows is: what do you do with all the calves? (160)

Is it that the hardworking Holstein, the beautiful, quintessential black and white cow in our imaginations, have lost her mothering instinct? Or is it something else, something like apathy, a knowing of the ways in which they earn their keep? Despite what Grandin says, there is proof that dairy cows indeed express mourning behavior when their calves are taken. According to the Mercy For Animals blog post "Mourning Dairy Cows Prompt Calls to Police,"

Responding to "[strange noises](#)" coming from a local dairy farm, concerned residents in Newbury, Mass., called the police.

After investigating the situation, Sgt. Patty Fisher informed neighbors that the sounds were of mother dairy cows lamenting the loss of their calves, who were taken from them shortly after birth. "It happens every year at the same time," Fisher said.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ "Mourning Dairy Cows Prompt Calls to Police." October 25, 2013. <http://www.mfablog.org/2013/10/> Web. 13 Apr. 2014

Most calving happens on large dairies in January. During this time, the cows are forcibly separated from their calves. Some report that the cows don't care, even ignoring their calves and refusing them even a lick. But in "Breaking the Mother-Calf Bond: The Untold Story of Milk" Robert Grillo discusses why dairy cows endure psychological and emotional pain, just like humans. He cites a recent *Psychology Today* article by Jessica Pierce, PhD, on the often invisible world of emotional pain that animals feel. Sometimes, however, the pain is not invisible. Sometimes, as in the incident in Newbury, Mass., we can see it in dairy cows. Grillo writes of his heartbreak after watching a French documentary called *Adieu veau, vache, cochon, couvée*:

The facial expressions; the mother cow running after the truck carrying her stolen baby; the confused and frightened calf, peering out the truck window at his mother. These all clearly confirm the scientific findings that measure chemicals in the brain. Did we ever really believe that maternal affection was unique to human mothers? Probably not, but the propaganda was powerful while the reality was stifled.

The incident in Massachusetts and the documentary film show that dairy cows are concerned for their welfare of their calf and experience grief. It also shows how ignorant most people are to the ways in which the dairy industry produces milk. But what kind of people could do such a job?

In order to find individuals who can handle this type of work, the industry often employs cheap, unskilled labor. Undocumented immigrant

workers are one source; that's why immigration policy is a major concern of the industry. In 2014 the International Dairy Foods Association (IDFA) joined a coalition on immigration reform⁴¹ that would guarantee their people won't be rounded up and taken away in the middle of the night. Other sources of cheap unskilled labor may also keep the industry afloat in milk, but the animals pay for it.

"In the big dairies, it's a work atmosphere," Brett says. "They're waiting for their paycheck. The owners are living two states away in a nice house, and paying the workers and managers. They're not caring for these animals to the best of their abilities." Tragically, issues of cow welfare go far beyond simple neglect. Despite the recent passage of so-called "ag-gag bills"(often sponsored by the dairy industry⁴²) undercover video from whistleblower organizations like Mercy For Animals continues to record criminal acts of cruelty on dairy farms across the country. In February of 2014,

Four workers at a dairy farm that was supplying cheese to DiGiorno Pizza are being charged with a total of 11 counts of criminal animal cruelty. Each count is punishable by up to nine months in jail and \$10,000 in fines.

The charges stem from shocking animal abuse captured on a [hidden-](#)

⁴¹ "IDFA Joins Coalition to Push for Immigration Reform." *IDFA Joins Coalition to Push for Immigration Reform*. N.p., n.d. Web. 13 Apr. 2014.

⁴² "Milk Money Used to Buy Ag-Gag Bill" October 29, 2013. <http://www.mfablog.org/2013/10/> Web. 13 Apr. 2014

[camera video](#) by Mercy For Animals at a Wisconsin dairy farm late last year. Abelardo Jaimes, Crescencio Pineda, Lucia Martinez, and Misael Monge-Minero were charged with violating the state's animal cruelty statute after they were caught on video viciously kicking, beating, whipping, dragging and stabbing cows at Wiese Brothers Farms in Greenleaf, Wisconsin.

As the Mercy For Animals undercover video shows, a culture of cruelty and animal abuse exists within the dairy industry. In her many years in the industry, Temple Grandin has observed that if a culture of abuse exists at the managerial level, the employees will follow suit. Therefore, she advocates for better training for stock people and better management to prevent this. According to her observations, often there is a “ringleader within the stock people who must be weeded out.”⁴³ Other things that may cause a worker to become criminally abusive have to do with the workers themselves “as frontal lobe function which regulates emotions is dimmed when fatigue sets in, typically around the 6 hours mark after working in tough and strenuous farm conditions.”⁴⁴ Grandin’s solution is to work with an animals, and humans, natural behaviors, to limit negative reactions like fear and rage, to create a culture of understanding around animal behavior that would put down the prod and turn to a more natural “there is no technological substitute for *understanding and working with an animal’s behavior*” (169).

⁴³ Grandin, Temple. *Animals Make Us Human*, 75.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

Grandin, who has worked with farm animals for over four decades, acknowledges that the most unfortunate of them all is the dairy cow. And it begins at birth. She writes,

...breeders have been pushing the biology too hard. There's a huge difference in strength between baby Holstein and baby beef calves. The little Angus calf will be up and nursing and running with mama a few hours after birth but the Holstein calf is not fully mobile for two days. Breeders have over selected so much for milk production that they've created a weak, fragile animal that's so frail it's starting to be hard to breed them. Holstein cows can carry a pregnancy to term but it's hard to get a pregnancy started."

You would think that the industry would respond to the cow's natural biology and its psyche. Indeed some dairies do, using brushes to massage a cow as she enters and exits milking parlors, installing waterbeds for bedding, and even playing music for them as they are being milked. (In a famous video circulating the internet, cows approach a group of musicians who are playing Dixieland music, responding with moos and undeniable enjoyment.) But this isn't for the sake of the cow - it's for the sake of production.

There's this mistaken belief that human stories draw more concern than animal stories do. For this chapter, then, I should talk about human workers and the environment. That the fate of Brett and Jerry at Mickey's Dairy would be more compelling to an average reader than, say, a story about a calf who was

weaned at one day rather than the natural and normal 6-12 months. But I have evidence that directly opposes that. For years, I've been showing my English 102 students the documentary Food Inc. (as an example of effective argumentation, of course). When I ask the students to recall what scenes in the film generated the most pathos, they always mention the animal scenes first: the images of hogs being electrocuted, chickens being kicked and mutilated by workers, downed cows being shoved with forklifts. The human stories (make of this what you will) always are a distant second.

But when asked what makes people go vegan or vegetarian, they don't say because of the environment" or "because of the way workers are exploited." In fact, 69.16% of people became vegan⁴⁵ on behalf of animals. And while eating E. coli infected hamburger or chicken tainted with drug resistant salmonella poses more of a direct threat to our health, humans, just like animals, if asked to choose, would rather endure physical, than psychological pain.⁴⁶ Our

⁴⁵ <http://www.topmtoobsn.com/veganism/>

⁴⁶ "Based on a range of scientific studies (many of them horrific and unconscionable), we know that emotional harm actually hurts more than physical harm, and that animals will "choose" physical suffering over emotional suffering, if forced to pick. McMillan cites an experiment in which an electrified grid was placed between a puppy and a person to whom the puppy was socially attached. The puppies crossed the grid, despite being shocked the entire way, to be reunited with their social contact. In another electrified grid experiment, mother rats were separated from their infant pups. The mother rats consistently chose to cross the grid and retrieve their pups, one by one, and return them to the nest, despite being shocked the whole way there and back. One mother rat crossed the grid 58 times before researchers terminated the test. McMillan also mentioned the well-publicized case of a cat named Scarlett who ran into a burning building five times to rescue her kittens, despite severe burns to her face and head. These animals are willing to suffer physical pain to alleviate emotional suffering" Pierce, Jessica <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/all-dogs-go-heaven/201204/emotional-pain-in-animals-invisible-world-hurt>

sympathy for animals, if we allow ourselves to feel it, cuts deep.

Lost and Found in the Field

Last week, I got lost on my bicycle among some country roads in New Mexico. I missed a turnoff at a railroad crossing and went further into cattle country along the Rio Grande. When I stopped to watch some brown beef cows grazing in a field, I noticed that, without knowing me, they were hostile, maintaining their distance while keeping a suspicious, “come no further” posture.

I started singing. I sang to them to acknowledge love and peace in the universe. I sang to acknowledge the possibility of humans and cows and all sentient life living together in harmony. I sang to them to let them know that humans are not all bad, and that the destructive powers that may have tagged their ear were not liked my me, either. They looked at me. The mood changed. One cow, a young beautiful brown heifer, came forward. Slowly, with great agency, she came to the fence. When the cow was just ten feet from me, she gave a great, booming “Moo!” I wasn’t prepared for how loud, or how powerful, her voice was. It was earthy, intense, and truthful. (This wasn’t a threat, as her vocalization accompanied seeking behavior.) She continued to stare at me until the train came barreling past us, sending the herd scattering to the back of the field.

After the herd gained a comfortable distance from the train, the cow returned to staring at me. It was then, in that achingly beautiful New Mexican

dusk, that I suddenly felt thrust into history, back to a time when humans first reached out to the cow to ask for assistance, before industry severed our precious friendship. I said a prayer of thanks for all the cows in that field, for all the cows everywhere, throughout time, who have not received thanks for what they've given: their calves, themselves. I had been hoping for the opportunity to journey into the psyche of one of humankind's most cherished, and exploited, animals, and that evening one cow showed me that inside the bovine body was a spirit, a thinker, a giver. In deciding to break with her herd, she not only chose to engage me, but to learn from me and allow me to learn from her. Giving is in the cow's nature - and it's time we learn how to give back.

Several weeks later I returned. The cows had calved. The calves ran happily, playing with one another in the field, drinking from their mother with that funny, brash entitlement of youth. Again, a train whizzed by, and they all scuttled off together. I couldn't help but notice that the dairy cow, despite what some say, have the same curious, dark eyes as the beef cow. Just because they are black and white, instead of brown, is a silly reason to say that they don't love their calves. Stoicism is not the same as apathy.

Chapter 2: The Petpreneurs

According to BARNES Reports, in 2013 demand for pet food, pet supplies, pet services and live animals have created a \$16 billion dollar industry in America, which has a projected growth of nearly 4% this year.⁴⁷ It employs over a hundred thousand people. And that's just in our country alone. The largest arm of the pet industry belongs to the pet food supply chain, which is tied to key economic drivers and US farming interests, and demand industries which include livestock ranching and farming, as well as wholesale and retail markets.

The Mandalay Bay in Las Vegas, Nevada is the site of one of the largest retail pet shows, SuperZoo. At over a million square feet, the Convention Center could house ten Hindenburgs. And a lot of doggy snacks. Nearly 1,000 exhibitors fill the giant space teeming with animals, people, and a dizzying assortment of products that promise both our pets, and us, a better life.

The Cult of Dog

For the creative dog groomers with nothing to sell except the beauty of their pooch, SuperZoo is a place to shine. Although pet grooming, and the associated products, are a multi-million dollar segment of the pet industry, pet stylists are cashing in by winning prize money in these increasingly competitive (and some would say wacky) shows, in which the groomer becomes part of a living tableau.

⁴⁷ BARNES Reports: Pet & Pet Supplies Stores Industry (NAIS 45391). *United States Pet & Pet Supply Stores Industry Report*, 1-200.

Superzoo hosts the Groomer Supershow, and the participants are given a special curtained-off space to do their manic preening before they appear before the judges. The name of the contestants are called over the PA system, and groomer's strain to hear over a cacophony of hair dryers whirring and the intermittent prattle of the groomers who sound more like high school students getting ready for a high school musical.

That's how I meet Cindy Oliver, a lanky woman in pedal pushers and crocs grooming an uncomfortable-looking dog named Paisley. The large poodle's natural snow white coat is mostly hidden under bright, primary colored patches. Paisley's back legs, one red and one green, are offset by a deep blue chest, dark chocolate brown ears and eyebrows, and a sunflower yellow face. Protective socks cover his whiskers from being colored by the nontoxic chalk used to dye his fur.

In a thick Tennessee accent, Oliver tells me that she and Paisley are competing in the 10:30 a.m. Large Poodle and Terrier grooming contest.

"What do people say when you take Paisley out to the park?" I ask.

"Well," she shrugs. "It ain't normal."

Near to us is another poodle at a grooming station. The dog looks similar to Paisley: big ring-like puffs of fur around his legs and chest, bright colors. Oliver tells me that they are made up to look like superheroes. I don't recognize the resemblance.

“That over there is Green Lantern,” she says cordially. “And next to him is Batman.” Without passing too much judgment on Oliver or the others like her who subject their dogs to endless hours of dying, grooming, and probably a little shame from their doggy friends, their level of attachment and commitment to their dogs is pretty sweet.



Cindy Oliver (left) fights for the trophy with other competitors at Groom Expo 2013 in Hershey, Pennsylvania, where she and Paisley took top prize.

But SuperZoo is really all about the retail. And it’s no surprise that dogs, and their accoutrements, account for nearly half of the merchandise. In fact, I’m here to meet Anthony Bennie – author of self-published *Confessions of a Dog Food Salesman*, which purportedly reveals hidden secrets that most dog food manufacturers don’t want you to know. He’s the founder and president of his own dog food company, aptly named Clear Conscience Pet. Not only does the name reflect the holistic ingredients in the food, it is a promise of Bennie’s “ethical and fair business practices” and an ethically minded philosophy that

“directs every aspect of how we source, make, and formulate our treats, natural chews, and our SuperGravy food enhancer.”⁴⁸

Although I can't agree with his product, which contains meat products, Bennie's story is an analogue for the pet food industry. The first time I saw Bennie, who resembles a slightly older version of Freddy Mercury, is in a YouTube video. He sits in front of a glowing fireplace, and takes a moist, meaty sample from an elegantly designed package of “Sliders,” his own product. He applies a touch of mustard. He waves his arm around as he chews, conjuring the words to describe the character and flavor. “Mmm!” He emphatically hums. “Yummy, nice flavor of beef... dried vegetables and flax...” As he speaks, a morsel gets caught in his throat. “Excuse me,” he coughs slightly, “for talking with my mouth full.”

It all started in 1995. Anthony Bennie was just a guy from South Jersey who spent most his life working at his family's pizza parlor. One day he took a chance and answered an ad in the paper to be a sales representative for Natura, a little-known California pet food company. The people hiring were a husband-and-wife team, John and Ann Rademakers, and their business partner, Peter Atkins. The owners were ready to approach the East Coast market. With Bennie they had a lucky break. He was a good fit. He had an interest in nutrition, loved animals, and he wanted to do something ethical with his talent for sales. He

⁴⁸ "Founder of Clear Conscience Pet®, Anthony Bennie, Will Be Presenting "Confessions of a Dog Food Salesman" at This Year's Supply Side MarketPlace Conference." *PRWeb*. N.p., n.d. Web. 13 Apr. 2014.

didn't want riches; he didn't want fame. With the Rademakerses and Atkins, he wanted to change the world.

“Natura was like a love fest you’ve never seen. You would have thought John was the king of the world. We were all riding the train.”

In fact, the pioneering brand of pet food that began Bennie’s career in animal nutrition did become something of a cult among its customers and employees. Progressive-minded sales people, who met up in Hawaiian resorts for conferences paid for by the company, backed the brand with their hearts, believing that they were onto something big with natural pet food – and they were.

During the succeeding decade, sales of Natura dog and cat foods catapulted skyward, feeding millions of dogs and cats across the country and feeding Bennie, or at least his career. Bennie’s decision to sign up with Natura would take him from salesperson to author, inventor, and business owner. Bennie worked with Natura from 1995-2009 – leaving around the time Natura was bought out by Procter & Gamble one of the largest corporations in the world. Sales initially plummeted.

Comment [SB1]: The phrase “drink the Kool-Aid” usually implies mindlessly buying into a cult-like program. It might not be quite right to suggest that Natura was like a cult.

“In people’s minds, it was like ‘You took our family brand and you kidnapped it,’” Bennie says carefully. “Procter and Gamble paid hundreds of millions of dollars, and instead of being welcomed with open arms they were never accepted as part of the cult of holistic natural pet nutrition.”

Despite consumer rejection, P&G kept Natura afloat, consolidating production and manufacturing – standard practice for large corporations after acquiring a small, privately-owned business – but it would end up costing the corporate giant millions in lawsuits and recalls over the next five years. *Ko v. Natura Pet Products, Inc.*, was a class action lawsuit filed against Natura brands for mislabeling its products as human grade food and violating California’s Business and Professions Code in their advertising. Customers who bought Natura products for the time period established in the claim were offered up to \$200 out of a \$2,150,000 settlement fund. Though Natura denied the accusations, they changed the labels and revised their ads.

Then came the recalls.

This year alone, Natura pet foods issued two voluntary recalls in a three-month period after the Michigan Department of Agriculture and the Georgia Department of Agriculture discovered salmonella contamination in some of its product lots. "We are truly sorry," the Natura website reads, "We know this news disappoints you; we are disappointed too. Natura will always focus on high-quality ingredients, product safety and innovation in pet nutrition. We remain committed to making products you can trust."

If you visit your local, independent pet store today, look for P&G brands on the shelf. Chances are you won’t find them. Retailers don’t want to deal with recalled food. However, it is still possible to obtain Natura and Eukanuba by visiting their websites, which are paid for by Proctor and Gamble. Natura does

not specify that it is a P&G subsidiary. Instead, the pictures of the Rademakers and Atkins are still up; and it's marketed as it was in the glory days when it was still a good old fashioned, wholesome California family brand. Though it maintains that "Dogs and cats are healthiest when they eat whole, natural foods: USDA-inspected chicken, turkey and lamb, whole grain rice and barley, fresh fruits and vegetables, and Grade A dairy products," it's sadly apparent that the USDA, drastically underfunded, heavily gutted in recent years by legislation and politicians from both sides of the political aisles, may not have stopped the tainted ingredients before they were shipped off to the manufacturing plants. Natura was voluntarily recalled, P&G was not fined, nor did they complain. Instead they continued production without missing a beat.

And for P&G, it was one setback after another.

In August of 2013, another subsidiary brand, Eukanuba, issued a voluntary recall for salmonella in some of its pet food products. Since the Eukanuba press releases did not mention the Natura recall, the connection between brands was cleverly avoided. It's hard to imagine that these brands, once held up as the pinnacle of pet nutrition, were potentially more toxic than the most inexpensive, adulterated brands on the market.

Perhaps the fans of Natura were correct, then, to assume that P&G "kidnapped the family brand," considering that no recalls were ever issued in Natura's history before P&G bought them out. That's why Bennie and other

independent retailers like him are gaining the trust of so many consumers – whether or not big business puts the squeeze on them.

Bennie's characteristic perseverance often makes for a great story. Like this one: It was their tenth wedding anniversary. The Bennies were in Chicago. Bennie insisted that Amanda bring her wedding dress. Later that night, the couple exchanged vows in their hotel room and read to one another from *Gifts from The Sea* by Anne Morrow Lindbergh. Later, up on the Sears Tower, they discovered that their picture, one they had taken at a conference several years ago, was the generic photo used to sell souvenir frames. "It was serendipity," Amanda says. "I knew that we had to be there; that we are on the right track."

Comment [SB2]: great anecdotes

The pet industry may be a behemoth in terms of capital, yet the American economy still has 1.8 million fewer jobs than it did in 2008.⁴⁹ Independent owner operators like Bennie often start on shaky ground, as their competitors own the majority of the premium pet food market. Surprisingly, our preoccupation for feeding our dogs well, and the style of marketing dog foods, hasn't evolved much since James Spratt mass produced the first dry dog biscuit in the 1860s. Spratt's Patent, Limited produced the "Meat Fibrine Cake," which was modeled after army ration hardtack biscuits, and marketed to wealthy aristocrats who wanted a healthy snack for their sporting or show dogs. The dog biscuit and the dog fancy craze converged in the 1870s, and soon there was a line of nearly a dozen products that not only addressed

⁴⁹ "Time.com." *Business Money Jobs Report Tells Us the US Economy Still in Desperate Need of Electroshock Comments*. N.p., n.d. Web. 13 Apr. 2014.

specific health conditions in dogs, such as “Patent Charcoal Dog Cakes for sour canine stomachs,” and the idea of life-stages food, including Puppy Cakes, Pepsinated Cakes for weaning, dry milk products to help nursing bitches, and Cod Liver Oil Old Dog Cakes. Spratt’s ads also used words like “healthy” and “wholesome” and “balanced” when describing the foods long before the idea of “holistic” nutrition came into vogue in the 1990s.⁵⁰

Can you imagine the poor, working class Londoner walking home from a 12 hour day in the factory, staring up at the city’s very first billboard advertisement, and wondering what the world had come to as he or she glanced upwards to see a canine friend eating wholesome meals and enjoying an coddled existence denied the poor? But before long, even they would shelling out for Spratt’s biscuits.

In less than 20 years of wild success, Spratt was able to take his company public, saturating middle income families all across Europe and the United States with the firm belief that it was not appropriate – or healthy –to feed your pet discarded table scraps. (That is, until recent pet food recalls and lack of faith in the government regulatory agencies made table scraps –or at least pet food that seemed closest to it – desirable for pet owners once again.)

Fairness to Pet Owners Act

A strange corporate message is spinning in the sky: BAYER. The drug company. What are they doing here, I wonder? Do dogs get headaches?

⁵⁰ Grier, Katherine C. (*Pets in America: A History*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 2006) 175.

Suddenly, as I walk nearer, I feel as if I am being funneled into a space loaded with all the tricks of corporate marketing strategy. Sleek-looking professionals wearing black. iPad stations set up on bright, Apple-white minimalist furniture. A cold, “Come on over but not too close” attitude. Yes, it’s all there. But so are the giant bottles of flea and tick shampoo, standing probably six feet tall, making it feel like you’re in some kind of strange pet medicine wonderland.

Recently, Bayer sent the fur flying when it agreed to purchase Teva pet pharmaceuticals in 2012 for \$145 million,⁵¹ and is reportedly “kicking the tires” on Novartis.⁵² Bayer sells parasticides and tick prevention products through online company PetMedExpress (which had sales of \$227.8 million in 2013⁵³) and through so-called “big-box” retailers like PETCO, Target and Walmart.

I gingerly approach a young Asian man at Bayer and he gives me a card. He can’t talk to me because of the letters P-R-E-S-S on my badge. Lauren Dorsch, Sr. Communications Representative will handle it from here, he says. I look down and see her name on the card. Where is she? At the moment, he isn’t sure.

Bayer’s huge presence here at Super Zoo is indicative of the changing way we medicate our pets. The Fairness to Pet Owners Act was defeated in 2011 but

⁵¹ "Bayer Picks up Teva's Animal Health Biz for \$145M." *FiercePharma*. N.p., n.d. Web. 13 Apr. 2014.

⁵² "Sources: Bayer and Others Are Kicking the Tires on Novartis' Animal Health Business." *FiercePharma*. N.p., n.d. Web. 13 Apr. 2014.

⁵³ "PetMed Express, Inc." *Answers*. Answers Corporation, n.d. Web. 13 Apr. 2014.

resurfaced in 2014. Drug companies and big retailers are pushing Congress to adapt this legislation which would, according to the text of the Act, "promote competition and help consumers save money by giving them the freedom to choose where they buy prescription pet medications, and for other purposes."⁵⁴

An article on TheBark.com, an online news source about everything dog, explains:

If passed, Fairness to Pet Owners Act of 2011-IH) will require vets to give clients a written copy of all prescriptions. It also will require them to notify clients, in writing, of the client's option to have the prescription filled elsewhere, and to confirm (via fax or other means) any prescriptions sent to outside pharmacies. This is not a novel concept; a majority of veterinarians already do this for those who request it. The act would, however, make it mandatory for vets to provide the prescriptions without being asked.⁵⁵

The American Veterinary Association opposes this law because veterinarians argue that not only do they do this in most cases anyway, but that they are being out-competed by major retailers who can offer the drug cheaper. This sounds good, but veterinarians depend on the sales of pet drugs for between 14 and 28 percent of their income. Walmart and the National Association of Chain Drug Stores lobbied for the Act. Access to cheaper drugs may sound like a good

⁵⁴ "'Fairness to Pet Owners Act' Resurfaces, Spurs Calls for Veterinary Opposition." *NewStat*. N.p., n.d. Web. 13 Apr. 2014.

⁵⁵ "Making Pet Meds More Affordable | The Bark." *The Bark*. N.p., n.d. Web. 13 Apr. 2014.

idea, but veterinarians argue that they will be forced to compensate in increased service fees or go out of business. Perhaps until Walmart and the retailers who stand to profit from this Act offer rebates for veterinary care or pet health insurance, the cost of cheaper drugs for our pets may be too high.

Natural pet remedies are a multibillion dollar industry, and many at Superzoo are seeking to cash in on it. There are products for every kind of ailment that you can imagine, and they are being hawked by individuals of all backgrounds. That all may change soon enough. Enter the National Animal Supplement Council. The NASC, created in 2004, interacts with the FDA to provide cautions and warnings, as well as recommendations for regulating the kinds of natural ingredients that pet supplements can contain. Major drug companies don't want to invest in products that they can't patent, nor do they want to compete with small retailers who are unregulated. In 2001, the NASC formed "when the multibillion dollar animal health supplement industry was threatened by a complicated and erratic regulatory environment."⁵⁶ So a group of wily, well-connected individuals within the pet supplement industry decided that regulation would not only concentrate the authority to them, but also help keep profits in the family. Leading the charge to the doors of the FDA was Bill Bookout, a former executive and Director of Sales & Marketing for Marquest Medical Products. He has resumed his role as president at NASC, and even

⁵⁶ "NASC - National Animal Supplement Council - NASC Seal." *NASC - National Animal Supplement Council - NASC Seal*. N.p., n.d. Web. 13 Apr. 2014.

serves on the Expert Advisory Committee for Veterinary Natural Health Product in Canada.

Throughout many meetings with FDA, Bookout helped create a list of acceptable ingredients and unacceptable ingredients based on criteria that he wouldn't discuss with me. When I spoke with Bookout, it was at the Genesis Ltd. booth, a holistic pet product company that he created then later sold but remained in an executive position. The booth looked more like an REI store, with elaborate, expensive displays made of natural, untreated wood, video monitors that broadcasted scenes of waterfalls. When I asked Bookout what he thought of Bayer being such a big presence at SuperZoo, he responded positively. I didn't understand why, considering that Genesis Ltd., a very successful homeopathic animal product company, would be in direct competition with Bayer. "Bill, why are you supportive of Bayer, a major, corporate pharmaceutical company, entering the market with such vigor?" Suddenly, Bill didn't want to talk anymore. He excused himself. Bayer joined the NASC later that year.

The Future of Our Pets Belongs To...

There are reasons to be optimistic about the future of the pet industry. One of them is in the form of a skateboarder with loose fitting jeans, black T-shirt that says "ShakeTrainer" and a baseball cap. His name is Sean Onkey, and he's a

young entrepreneur who travels across the country with his mother going to trade shows to promote his product, a small white can called the shakeTrainer.

“That’s it?” I ask.

“That’s all you need,” he smiles.

Onkey is there with his mother, an older, quiet woman with graying hair and an unrecognizable foreign accent. The shakeTrainer is simple and costs very little to manufacture. Like all salesman, he has a pitch: the story of how he came to make a better product. “I paid \$500 for a dog trainer. What did they use to train my dog? An aluminum can filled with pennies. That’s all we came away with at the end of the session.” There are no pennies in Onkey’s can – it’s a white powder that rattles. And it’s a lot less expensive. With the training video, the shakeTrainer retails for \$29.99. According to the promotional material, the shakeTrainer “Stops your dog’s unwanted behavior in seven minutes or less. Guaranteed or your money back.”

Onkey asks if I want to check out the SuperZoo product showcase and awards ceremony that is going on. By now he’s an old hand at these shows, so I agree to go. He seems genuinely happy when a dog training device is awarded a major prize. The presenter is, too. “Another family run business... I love this. Bring the whole gang up on stage!” Then 8 people, representing three generations in turquoise shirts, accept their award with tears in their eyes.

Onkey is more supportive than jealous. "It's cool that families who work together are successful," he says.

"What is the Shake Trainer?" a young woman from Florida asks him. She has sparkly sandals and a bright pink tank top. She is in a fuss because her product, something for cats, is not with her. Something went wrong with the manufacturing or she couldn't get it shipped. She mentions a woman named Lori, and Onkey nods.

"I wanted her to get it on QVC, because we got it on HSN."

The product, called "Wizzis," is only at the "bad prototype" stage, she confessed, yet she's patented it. Onkey says that he knows Lori and might be able to get her on the show. She smiles and flicks her hair. "Is that possible?" He pulls out a smart phone to get her phone number, and I walk away.

Cat and dog training devices are clearly popular among the judges here; but when they announce an award for a fishbowl, I must admit I am totally disgusted. Having kept fish and written about fish in the past, I am very sensitive to the needs of our aquatic friends, even down to the smallest gold barb. They need a filtered tank that circulates oxygen; they should also have live aquatic plants, as they would in their natural environment to maintain the delicate PH balances in the water. The goldfish bowl that took the award for most innovative was nothing more than a clear glass bowl with a snap-on plastic decorative housing. How progressive.

I decide to leave, but not before stopping at one more booth. In a corner, I see two young men standing next to what look like earthenware Dutch ovens -- biodegradable burial pods for your pet. These “memorial urns” are made of bamboo fiber and rice husks. Ben, who was previously in telecommunications, has a pitch that begins with a story about his hunting dog and ends with how he wished Pod were available when the dog died. He’s careful to mention the importance of checking state regulation before burying animals in your yard, and gently reminds me that it’s “Pod, not casket,” as I walk away. It’s a hard thing to talk about for three days straight, I’d imagine.

Most residents of America’s 70 million pet owning households have probably had an idea or two about some product or service that might be convenient or simply lucrative... These are the petpreneurs.⁵⁷

I wish I would have coined that term, but that honor belongs to Michael Shaffer, author of *One Nation Under Dog*. Though Schaffer visits New York pet fashion week, with “pet bling” like “jewel encrusted canine kimonos” the stories of determined, industrious ‘petpreneurs’ is the same here at Superzoo, which seems to represents every slice of American life. But it’s easy to forget that, at the center of this industry, are the animals. For every corporate sponsor with massive booths and eye-catching displays there are a hundred little guys like Bennie crammed into themed areas like Critter Row and Rodeo Drive; that is,

⁵⁷ Schaffer, Michael (*One Nation under Dog: America's Love Affair with Our Dogs*. New York: H. Holt, 2010), 80.

people who have designed products at their own expense and have come to the show at their own expense. The expenses can add up in a hurry. Despite the happy chatter of exhibitors and the cheerful imagery of healthy animals plastered across every product and sign, it's clear that there is a sense of urgency here to capitalize on a growing market in a recovering economy. Sadly, not all of the exhibitors are concerned with animal welfare so much as they are concerned with promoting their business. Some of the products can be depressing, especially those represented by the glum Chinese exporters who stand together silently in front of a wall of hamster cages made of wire and plastic. Or the collapsible aquariums that are provisional homes for fish and reptiles who might die anyway so why bother with something more complex or permanent? Indeed many of these products are clearly designed for the benefit of the human, rather than the animal who must live with whatever cheap apparatus some half-witted pioneer has dreamed up. But amidst it all, a man in a dark apron is drawing a little crowd. "Try it for yourself!" Bennie thrusts a treat into his mouth for onlookers, and some move on and some stay.

Chapter 3: Animal Rescue

In 2006, I was living and working in Seattle, Washington. I took late night walks through downtown. One night, I peered into a doorway of an old building.

There, in a pile of garbage, was a creature with a striking blue eye.

A man with a light beard and fishing cap walked up, curious about what I'd found.

"Looks like a baby crow," he said. "The mothers are dropping them from the nest this time of year," he said.

"But his eyes?"

"They're still blue until they mature."

"He seems sick. Maybe I should take him home?"

"It's a big responsibility," he said and walked away. I took off my scarf and threw it over the bird. I picked it up and put it into my jacket, over my heart. He was so small and fragile. He didn't struggle. He seemed grateful to be off of that stoop.

When I got him home I was scared to touch him. I took off my jacket and, with him still wrapped inside, put him in the bathtub. What was I going to do with this bird?

After a very awkward introduction (I lifted the quilt and screamed a few times) I noticed that the blue eye looking at me was *processing* everything. Out of his small, broken body radiated a presence and fiery intelligence.

Throughout the night I nursed him like a baby in the orange glow of a night light. When he was done feeding on the mashed up veggie burgers I'd prepared, he closed its eyes really hard. "I'm tired," he said. But he was not really tired - he was full.

How do you communicate a full tummy? He chose to say he was sleepy, knowing that this was an easier cross-species communication.

But what was wrong with it? To find out, I took it to a

In the car, on the way to the wildlife rehabilitation in Everett Washington the next day, he said nothing. In the waiting room, while being cradled in my arms, he said nothing. He was quiet and trusting. But as soon as they took him from my arms he began squawking, loud protests of separation and anger. He wasn't fearful, I don't think, because he knew I wouldn't have betrayed him.

They X-Rayed him and found tiny hairline fractures throughout his bones; he was just another malnourished city bird suffering from rickets. I didn't want to leave him, but they told me that I had to. I called the next day, and they told me that he was euthanized.

That night, I decided to take a bath. I ran hot water to save my bones that were also degenerating in the northwest weather. Someone had given me

dried lavender for Christmas, and I emptied the small sack into the tub. When I got in, the lavender fluttered around me. Then, the strangest thing happened: The dried lavender became crows that fluttered around me, the water filled with thousands of tiny, flying birds.

The next day, I was downtown. I stopped to have a sandwich as I did many times before in a building courtyard. I was still thinking of the crow when a seagull approached me and began squawking. It told me that its nest was just a few feet away, and that I would be a fool to mess with it. Then another seagull came, and another. They began talking with each other, flapping and squawking in a way unlike anything I'd ever seen - it seemed "behind the curtain," as if no human was around watching. I didn't know how to react. It felt as if I was seeing their hidden language and movements.

I had entered the "bird realm," and I was still in it. The seagulls were reacting to me - and I know this sounds strange - as if *I* was a bird. I could only imagine that my closeness with the crow had brought me into their world. I was speaking their language without realizing it. When you choose to show compassion to an animal, nature's doors open to you.

The St. Francis of Social Media

Of all the things I've learned in my research, it is the promise of technology that gives me the most hope for rescue animals. One particularly encouraging story

is that of David Hendrick, the 26-year-old wunderkind founder of Hendrick Boards, an online apparel company. They've taken social media to a new frontier and achieved wild success: In a little more than three years, the once fledgling startup has now donated over \$350,000 to their ever-growing network of animal rescue organizations across the country, raising money for critical needs cases of abuse and neglect, helping provide foster and rescue organizations with desperately-needed funds, and by doing education and outreach.

Hendrick Board headquarters occupies a large, well-organized 1800 square feet office nestled in the back of a large complex of suites off of Raymond Road on the border of Fullerton. Larry, 38, is friendly when he greets me. He wears dark maroon slacks, beat-up white sneakers, and a plain T-shirt. He hasn't shaved in days. "Let me show you around," he says cheerfully. "I spend a lot of time here."

Like Pet Pardons, the Facebook app that connects users with individual animals up for adoption in shelters across the country, Hendrick Boards has reached a larger audience than they could with traditional cause marketing or advertising. And their approach, though laid back, is all business.

"This is Taylor," Larry says of David's newest dog. She's golden-colored, wiry and energetic.

"Hi Taylor," I say as she squirms with delight.

Larry smiles. He's used to working side by side with canines. "She's a handful." Taylor zooms off like a bored child and Larry shows me around. Again, Larry says to me as he did over the phone: "You'll love David, he's amazing."

Cool T-shirts and hoodies hang along the walls next to bamboo skateboard decks, hand painted by David. T-shirts with slogans like "I Saved an Animal with this Shirt" and "Keep Calm and Rescue On" are made in popular cuts and colors, and have an effortless vintage look. Because it's winter in southern California, light scarves and thin sweatshirts also hang for sale. Being both California and animal obsessed, I love every single thing that I see.

Like 80% of Americans, I also prefer to buy products that are associated with a cause. But, as Larry points out, many companies often use cause marketing to maximize profits. "So many companies are illegitimate. They use the nonprofit name to give maybe ten percent. We are not your typical company. We landed our first nonprofit and then we started to grow. Now we have over 350 organizations that we sponsor, and a waiting list of 58 to get into our giving program."

But giving isn't easy. Although Hendrick Boards accomplished its mission of having partners in every state, state laws often complicate that process. David and his team must navigate through co-venture laws that vary from state to state; they also must carefully scrutinize each application they receive, approving only those who make it through an exhaustive process based on

certain criteria, such as whether the organization has a good foster care apparatus already in place, as well as phone interviews. “Hoarders always hit the news,” Larry says. “So we need lots of information.”

While we wait for David, Larry whisks me into David’s office. The first thing I notice are two large marker boards.

“What else does ONE stand for?” is written on one board in big, pink letters. It’s a question that David has been asking himself and has invited the others to think about, like a Zen koan. The answer might be used to start a new campaign; perhaps that slogan may even be their next shirt design. Other sayings and meditations, all written in a legible, focused hand, fill the board on one side of the room. No quotas, no keeping track of who-sold-what; just a lot of inspiration and planning.

The board by David’s desk is crazy. Every day in the Hendrick Board universe is broken up into hour increments, starting at 4:35 a.m., and stopping at 8:35 p.m. Each hour is planned for on the board. Then, the content they’ve created in advance is automatically posted to Facebook.

Last year, Hendrick Boards won a contest sponsored by Facebook. Part of the winnings was a sit down with Facebook and the social media team at American Express.

“They flew out to Anaheim and stayed all day,” Larry recalls. They were supposed to give us tips on how to improve our social media presence. They

told us things like ‘Keep your posts at 50 words or less,’ ‘Only do 2 posts a week.’” He chuckles.

Larry hunkers over a desk made of gorgeous, shellacked bamboo. It’s an elegant, oversized version of the longboards that started their company. He moves the mouse and the computer screen lights up with the wet, mangled head of a kitten. “Aspen,” Larry says. “We just got him.” I ask him how the story of Aspen made it to his inbox.

“The stories come from our nonprofits,” he says, clicking through a series of gruesome photos that show the feline’s injuries, probably caused by another animal. “They give us these photos and then we create a campaign page.” Larry takes the photos, rewrites the story, and creates html graphics that reach out to Facebook users asking them to share or create a type post. This gets the post a higher ranking in the feeds.



A campaign animal named Yoda. Sharing the campaign post gets it higher ranking in the feed. Courtesy of Hendrick Boards 2014

Discovering a more useful model of cause marketing that has worked for them and the partners they sponsor came through old fashioned hard work and trial and error. Larry admits that in the beginning, they were just like every other business focused on promoting their products. Then, Larry, David and Donny sat down and thought about what was wrong. “We’re losing the reason we’re here,” David said. “We’re about saving animals, not just making profit.” When they changed their approach and began putting the animals first, people shared. Business skyrocketed.

Larry explains how the Facebook campaigns work:

We encourage people to type something in the post. If we have over six thousand comments, that’s better than a share. People say things like ‘she will be beautiful.’ This is when nonprofits call us crying. People need encouragement. These women and men need to feel good. Sometimes just a single comment can make it worth it.

Through links, shares, comments, and type posts, Hendrick Boards has managed to crowd source using their own model

If it gets two thousand shares, roughly forty-eight thousand people have seen the post. When they type LOVE and 1,000 people share it, that number edges up to around seventy-five thousand people who’ve seen it. You get more traffic to your site that way. Most of our posts have nothing to do with us. It’s about a cause, a campaign. If a person wants to donate,

they can do so directly. But we don't say 'donate.' We want them to *share*, and that's the key.

The idea to create campaigns around individual animals came through serendipity. David found a dog roaming the streets all bloodied up with severe gashes all over his face. He cleaned him up as best as he could, then brought him to the Pet Rescue Center in Orange County. He didn't want to dump the dog and leave the shelter to pay the medical expenses, so he created a Facebook post that said 'Can you help save Sammy?' and people responded with donations. After Sammy healed, he became a blood transfusion dog (donating blood to other animals with critical medical needs) and a few months later he was adopted.

In the fall of 2013, the Pet Rescue Center made a video of Sammy's story and adoption and submitted it to a contest sponsored by the Ellen DeGeneres & Halo PETCO Holiday Foundation Grant. The Pet Rescue Center was one of its grand prize winners. It was awarded \$100,000 and featured on The Ellen show.

"Sammy was the first time we connected a campaign to an animal in need," Larry says. "We just wanted to raise funds."

We leave David's office and Larry continues the tour. "Here is our lonely kitchen," he says without sarcasm. "And that's a portrait of Hooch." He points

to the colorful oil painting of a bulldog above the refrigerator. “Someone cut out his tongue.”

We just begin to settle into Larry’s office, a small, cluttered space with a faded black couch and a wastepaper basket in dire need of emptying, when the door bells jingle. I don’t remember getting up from my seat next to Larry’s desk. I don’t remember thinking anything. All I know is that I am standing in front of an exquisitely handsome young man with a snap brim cap.

He looked, as Dorothy Parker once said of Zelda and F. Scott Fitzgerald, as though he’d just “stepped out of the sun.”

“This is David,” Larry says, and I think we shake hands. He hands me iced green tea, lightly sweetened. “In case you’re thirsty,” David says.

How did he know?

I was shocked by his kindness, but most of all, his prescience: Not only was I dying of thirst after leaving my water in the hotel, he’d picked my favorite drink at Starbucks. That’s when I remember thinking: *There is something about David. Something very strange, wonderful, and powerful indeed about David.*

Though David has no college degree, enrolling in no less than 5 different colleges before dropping out, he is preternaturally gifted in the arts and uses his own design on every product. He flips through the pages and shows me letters which look like old school grocer’s stencils, but modernized, beautifully,

skillfully done. And then, a carousel, with the silhouettes of horses and other animals all drawn with the hand of a professional artist. Both the designs made it onto a light, drawstring hoodie, which says “Giving Makes the World Go Round.” When I fawn over the drawings, he says “It’s less about the clothes and more about the cause.”

Although any of the designs are worthy, he often tests them first on Facebook.

“Facebook is about testing, changing,” he says. “We sneak in market testing for new designs and come up with something new every Monday. Based on what people respond to on the posts, we know that’s going to be our next shirt design. Our shirt that says ‘My Kids Have Paws’ was tested out beforehand.”

From this office the Hendrick Boards team ships 700-1200 orders a week from the back office, which is like the rest of the place: uber-organized and highly functional, to pack merchandise and send it. There are the same long, shellacked bamboo tables, shelf space with boxes, and enough room for everyone to work efficiently without bumping into each other. The office also hosts adoption events out front every Thursday, when they spring up a tent and have their sponsored rescues bring pups in from all corners of the city.

We keep talking despite the fact that we are scheduled to see Terry, the head of one of their sponsored rescues. We keep getting distracted, as one idea,

another story, comes up, almost like we're old friends who have met up for a drink and keep having another, and another, despite the fact that we've got to get home. Here are some of the things we talk about: This year they are implementing a Skype video tutorial to teach social media, fundraising, and crowd sourcing to their network of nonprofit shelters. "A lot of times they reach out to us for help," David says. "They were just like us. We want our nonprofits to be as successful as possible. We have such a good relationship with them. They're our friends now."

That is a continuous theme: friendship. He gushes about the extraordinary connections he's made with others; he truly lights up when talking about it. But there is also a dark side to animal rescue which is difficult for David, who is bipolar, to handle. Sometimes the pressures of the job, and the negative comments from the trolls online, get to him. He recently made a suicide attempt, but has used this experience as well to create awareness for mental health issues on his website. He says that he started going to therapy, meditating and taking piano lessons.

He recently launched create A Loving Goodbye, a project that organizes volunteers to be with shelter animals as they are being euthanized. The Facebook page already has over one hundred thousand followers. On this page, users can also post pictures and eulogies of their pets (read by thousands) as well as news and trending issues in animal welfare.

Despite the emotional resiliency that it must take to hold animals in their final moments, and to work in an occupation where cases of abuse and neglect can take their toll, David is generous and kind and lets the animals heal him. He has a special needs dog that requires round the clock diaper changes, and of course, William, his small Chihuahua mix, the Hendrick Board mascot. And now Taylor. He also takes great joy in seeing the animals that his sponsored organizations foster.

Before we leave, I say that I'd like to purchase some merchandise to save on the shipping. David begins pulling out T-shirts and jewelry from their stock and loads me up with merchandise, shirts, jackets, jewelry. When I take out my wallet, he tells me to put it away.

“No, I won't take it,” he says firmly. “Give it to your favorite charity.”

Larry, David, Taylor and I pile into David's classy white luxury Ford Explorer. Larry is in the backseat with the GPS and tells David where to turn. David smoothly navigates according to Larry's directions. In the car, David opens up a little bit more about his depression, his suicide attempt, and his dedication to creating awareness for mental health. It isn't uncommon for rescuers to experience compassion fatigue, and combine that with the hate email and at times, David's work, though extremely positive in nature, can become heavy. There are workshops all across the country for animal care professionals who see the worst of human behavior on a daily basis and

struggle with the pain of not being able to prevent it. Depression and suicide isn't uncommon in this field. The American Humane Association has one day seminar. The Compassion Fatigue Awareness Project, founded by Patricia Hill, who has partnered with Petsmart charities, created a webinar series to help treat organizational compassion fatigue. She's also written a book, focused more generally on compassion fatigue in caregiving, with the beautiful title *To Weep For a Stranger: Compassion Fatigue in Caregiving*. In "Compassion Fatigue and Suicide Haunt Animal Care Professionals," Jeanette Smith, writing for the Examiner from Virginia, cited an [October 2012 Virginia Animal Control Association \(VACA\) Conference](#) in Charlottesville, Virginia, where [Chaplain Greg Czerniak of the Staunton, Virginia Police Department](#) spoke on treating the disorder.

Comment [SB3]: I think a period here is better.

Comment [SB4]: who has

Comment [SB5]: Streamline this part of the sentence to make it less wordy.

I can't help thinking, as all look over at this bright, wonderful young man, that he is a rare gift to the world. He's got so much on his shoulders.

"How do you do it?" I ask. "How do you not get overwhelmed?"

"It's not about how we're feeling," he says matter-of-factly. "It's about what we can do to help animals."

As men in working in animal rescue, David and Larry are exceptions. More women than men are in this field; there are many different theories for why that is. One of them is that women are more biologically driven, and are

more susceptible to “cute” faces; i.e. big forehead, big eyes, like in babies.

Another is that men compartmentalize better.

In the PETCO parking lot, we jump out of the car. Larry gets out and scrapes his knee as Taylor tries jump ahead of him. The storefront has been temporarily converted into an adoption event. Cages line the sidewalk.

We find Terry next to a massive silver-gray pit-bull; his head is as big as a watermelon, and he stands nearly three feet tall. He’s as muscular as the Incredible Hulk, and stares catatonically at one spot or one person for minutes at a time. He’s strange and wonderful. Terry comes over and hugs David as laugh with delight at the pit bull. “That’s Scooter. He’s got a head like a hammer. He’s my boyfriend.”

Technology and social media may result in a more disconnected society in some ways, but Scooter is a reminder that there are real animals to be saved. I say goodbye to David as other volunteers come to say hello and introduce their fosters. David takes immense joy in seeing each one, and asks thoughtful questions about not only the animal, but also about how the volunteer is holding up. Sometimes people need to be rescued too.

Chapter 4: Lost Languages

Nearly every day for the last thirty years, a man named Eugene Makela, the principle preparator of animal specimens for the Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture in Seattle, Washington is either cutting, cleaning, and then sewing up carcasses, or directing one of the many volunteers on how it's done properly. He's the expert around here - his knowledge a precious resource to tap into regarding a species, a cut, an artery, an eyeball. He's been doing this so long he made a scientific discovery about the sclerotic ring (a ring of bones in a bird's eye) that would change the way some bird species are classified. In songbirds, the optic nerve passes through a U-shaped bone. Crows and ravens are the largest songbirds. But Makela has found this bone in falcons and kites, long thought to be related to hawks and birds of prey. "My discovery with the eye bones is confirmation," he says in his exceedingly soft-spoken, slow cadence, "that falcons and kites are songbirds."

But what makes Makela unique is not what he's discovered in birds or his encyclopedic knowledge of animal physiognomy. It's his belief in the afterlife. When Makela was in his late 20s, he stepped into the forest on a vision quest. (Makela is part Native American, descended from the Nuuchanulth peoples from the west coast of Vancouver Island.) There, in the wet forests of the northwest, Makela says he learned that he was destined to help animal spirits transition to the next world.

“I’ve always felt a connection with any animal that I encountered whether it was alive or not. There was just some kind of spiritual connection. I could feel that spirit. It was like ‘You’re there, I know you’re there.’”

Belief in animal spirit is not isolated to Native American cultures, of course. Unfortunately, some religious practices involve cruelty to animals, such as Blood Fiestas still practiced throughout Spain, where donkeys are beaten and crushed, and chickens are slashed at by blindfolded young girls like piñatas. Ritual sacrifice is still performed in religious ceremonies, like Santeria, and Muslim and Jewish traditions forbade the stunning of animals before slaughter. In general, however, after the Roman Empire cast off the need for sacrifice the world followed suit, though one can still read about divination from sheep bowels in classic plays from the ancient world.

Makela’s tall and thin and pale, and at least physically favors his Dutch heritage more than his Native American. He has the spooky air of a man who, on most days, carries dead animals with him in his backpack from his home on Bainbridge Island, a 35-minute ferry ride from Seattle. I ask him what his house looks like.

“It looks like it does upstairs. People say I should charge admission,” he says. Around his neck is a necklace with a mountain lion tooth, surrounded by human bones carved into miniature skulls. These beads are from the Hamatsa secret society, given to him by his grandfather.

When he was ten years old, Makela discovered the Burke museum, and believes that he was drawn to it through serendipity. He was instantly smitten with all the creatures on display, and came back every day that summer. Founded in 1885, the Burke Museum is now a part of the University of Washington, and has millions of objects in its collections, including Makela's art. He is a master basket weaver, and his re-creations of ancient techniques of weaving are part of the museum exhibits about the native cultures of the Northwest.

It's hard to find people in the sciences with such unabashed beliefs in the supernatural. Makela agreed to talk to me about his seemingly contradictory life of spirituality and science.

"What process do you go through when you receive a dead animal?" I ask him.

"Sometimes the spirit has moved on by itself and I can get that feeling. Sometimes I can feel there is something still there. Then I have to process it mentally and figure out how to help that spirit move along. It's not like I do any ritual or anything; it's really hard to describe what happens. It's almost like you're communicating with that spirit on telepathic level - there is a two-way communication."

Makela works amid humming industrial freezers, the Dermestid beetle colonies that he tends, and today, two young female interns that have come to gain knowledge in their particular fields of interest. One girl, a red-head in a

blue smock over black stockings and leather boots, is dissecting – at least trying to dissect – a reindeer that is almost as big as she is. She giggles as she pets his nose, and Makela answers her questions about how to keep the frozen blood from spilling out before the reindeer’s flesh thaws.

“Eugene’s a really nice resource to have around,” she smiles. She’s studying the deer family, which she finds interesting because there are species of deer all over the world, she says.

All around the room, animals are in various stages of after-death. Makela shows me a collection of recently prepared birds tacked on long pieces of cardboard. A snowy owl, a sandpiper, and a male golden pheasant, regal, with what looks like an Egyptian headdress made of feathers, all await their final resting place in the museum’s collection. Drawers and cabinets, like Noah’s own private closet, are filled with every creature imaginable. Dried up baboon faces, like leather masks, are laid delicately on tissue paper; brilliant colored birds, like jewels, are organized neatly, one lying beside another, now relatives in death.

Makela and I go to the museum café, with its 17th century paneled walls, imported from France, and sit down to discuss his beliefs over tea. I ask him what information he receives when he first sees the animal.

“Sometimes I’ve actually felt that some animal’s been put to sleep for some reason, or shot by a hunter – you can actually feel some anger or

resentment the way it died. And I have to kind of mentally help that animal come to terms with that so they can move on.”

In my notebook, I have quotes from an author/animal psychic named Penelope West. I ask him to respond to these.

“In her book *Animals in Spirit*, Penelope West says that animals don’t dread death like humans do. She says that ‘it is welcomed as a healthy or even a joyous occasion to join their ancestors or dwell with the Gods or spirits in other dimensions.’ What do you think of that?”

“I can see that but I can’t say that I get that same thing. Sometimes I can feel that their spirit is still there. Sometimes you find them in different emotional states, but a lot of times it’s confusion – they don’t know they’re dead and they don’t know what to do. They’re stuck in this place and they don’t know how to move on and I have to direct them.”

“Can you give me an example of what you’ve felt or experienced helping an animal transition to the other side?”

“What comes to mind is a raccoon that had been hit by a car years ago. I just got the feeling that the spirit was still there and confused and hurt and upset and just very unhappy in general. I felt like I had to put my hand on the body and give it the reassurance and direction that it needed. You could feel this change like something left. It’s hard to describe. It feels like you’re holding

something heavy and it goes away. Something goes. The spirit goes 'I know what to do now.' I feel a physical change in that body that's laying there."

I said this reminded me of the psychics that purport to help human souls transition to the other side.

"It's not unlike humans at all," he says.

"Is there a difference between a human and animal soul?"

"I don't think their spirit is any different than ours. They can feel all those emotions and feelings that we do. Because they can't express them like humans do, you can't see it unless we get close. Their personalities are just like a person's spirit but inside a chipmunk or a squirrel or a mountain lion or whatever."

People can agree with Makela or not, but I do. And I have my own story to tell.

It was cold on the road to Montana. The endlessly undulating yellow-green hills of Idaho turned into mountains covered with dense green vegetation. I was thankful that the ice was west of me; yet I had a new hazard to contend with. The hairpin turns within the mountain valleys dropped off into gorges; then they emptied into flat exits that lead to the most miniscule of mountain habitations. The traffic was local; I knew that because the speed at which the vehicles raced through the harrowing curves.

I struggled to keep my speed up and my eyes on the road. “God forbid I get stuck on this shoulder,” which I remember thinking was undeniably, and dangerously, thin. That is when I noticed the shape, a brown and black mass, drifting manically in the road up ahead.

It wasn’t long before I took the shape for a dog; it was a Rottweiler, a giant even for the breed. What was it doing? For all intents and purposes, the dog was committing suicide. It looked as though it wanted to die.

With a frantic carelessness, it bounced around in the narrow two lane road, barely missed by one driver after another. Although the shoulder was thin, I thought, it’s not that thin. I made a safe stop about 100 yards away from the dog, and then, trying not to look, I reversed. I kept going, and kept going, until the dog was to my left.

I didn’t want to see what was going to happen next; all I could do was hope and pray that when I opened my door, he would get in.

But my luggage was piled high on the passenger’s seat, and there was no room for him to get in! I started looking for any way, any possibility of shifting the contents of my car – and then, suddenly – Thwoosh!

It was like being tackled by a wide receiver. The dog didn’t jump into the car so much as he threw himself in the car, as though he was a shipwreck survivor in a tangle of sharks, throwing himself aboard rescue. His face was broad, nearly two hands wide; he was a healthy adult male. The other cars passed him

as though he was trash on the road; or, they were too afraid to stop at this especially dangerous, tight bend of highway. Maybe they were cautious of the breed.

I had never been up close and personal with a Rottweiler before; the reputation of the breed should have made me pause, but I didn't have a say in the matter. My fear and caution had no time to register. As soon as he was in the car, half sitting on me and half straddling the empty space in the console, sideways, his giant face, his dark eyes glazed over with emotion, was pressed against mine. His tongue, a wide band of wet, pink flesh, was a cheerful and desperate greeting as licked me, toppling over the basket of clothes and into my lap. His paws, big, heavy things with short, but powerful black nails, pressed into my leg and stomach as he poured out his gratitude.

"Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!" His thoughts pummeled me like a giant wave.

My luggage nearly fell out of the open door onto the road under the bulk of his hindquarters; I lifted myself up and squeezed beyond him to close the passenger side door. As soon as I did, and fell back in the driver's seat, his message of gratitude kept coming. It was as clear to me as if he were saying it in English: "Thank you!"

On the road, in the traffic, this dog had a look of despair in his eyes that I will never forget. It was so raw, so powerfully emotional; it was as someone going to their death in a violent, horrific way. In my car, I could hear him - I was

stunned that I could - It was like I was in another dimension, like being spoken to by a ghost or an alien. The communication was so strong - the dog knew I spoke it.

He licked me as I looked around, trying to get an idea of his size. Giant Rottweiler's can reach up to 200 pounds; and stand over 3 feet tall. He was no average Rottweiler.

It was clear to both of us that the car could not carry the two of us very far on this road. It pained me that I had no options. But he didn't care. My only choice was to drive with the dog on my lap, his head scraping the headliner. Somewhere there would be a road, a turnoff, and we could sort out the details then.

Out of danger, now, we both attempted to regain our composure. Still, he was overcome with gratitude at times and unapologetic as his tongue reached out and the words spilled from his being: "Thank you!"

He licked my face uncontrollably at first, with the zest of someone who had been saved from oblivion. He had a desire to live. His desire for self-preservation was as strong and as powerful as any human being's that I had ever witnessed. He was a huge dog - and his emotions came through just as big.

In that little car, with no space between us, the smell of slobber and a strange dog and the sounds of heavy traffic whizzing by at 90 miles an hour, the dog's gratitude was more palpable to me. It was from a being brought back

from the brink of death. The message was the clearest interspecies communication imaginable – it was nature’s channel – being broadcast in high def. The dog was speaking human. He was speaking dog. He was speaking something. But he was speaking. Short bursts that hit me like a wave – short bursts of communication that had an energy form – a thought form – palpable ESP.

I drove very cautiously, and slowly, on the shoulder of the highway for another 5 miles until I reached a turnoff. The town, if you can call it that, had a general store with a small plank walkway, and it was also the post office. It looked exactly like the setting from Northern Exposure. I went into the store and spoke with an older blonde woman wearing flannel. I could not make it to Spokane, to a small apartment that I eventually left after one night anyway, with a Rottweiler on my lap. I was told that the local humane society was a good one, and that a fine woman would collect him and find him a home.

I couldn’t help but think about him after that. I tried the call after him, but I never could get an answer on the telephone. It seemed as if the town, and the dog, disappeared into the nature and mystery of the curvy, mountain roads of Montana.

A Language Older Than Words

Makela's shamanic acts with the specimens at the Burke Museum are part of long tradition in interspecies communication. Scores of authors have also written about their experiences with pets, cattle and wildlife. Not only do people believe interspecies communication is possible, most people feel that they can prove it.

When I was a student at the University of Reno, I had the pleasure of meeting Derrick Jensen, the brilliant, yet humble author of *A Language Older Than Words*. His book, published by Context Press in 2000, would fall under the category of what Ernest Hemingway said about Cyril Connely's (another great observer of nature) *The Unquiet Grave*: "It is a book which, no matter how many readers it will ever have, will never have enough."

Jensen's book is chalk full of the most beautiful meditations on our connection to nature that you will ever read; he recounts episodes of interspecies communication that he experienced while working on his own farm in California, stories of talking coyotes, conversations with trees, and others that are so deeply intriguing and touching, they will stay with you forever. Like Makela, like my own story, we might not find answers in science, with its necessity for repeatable outcomes observable by current technical means. But the more we strain to listen, the better we get at observing the interconnectedness of all beings.

Chapter 5: Human Health

What do Bill Gates of Microsoft, Sergey Brin of Google, and Biz Stone and Evan Williams of Twitter have in common? They believe that alternative meat – that is, plant-based proteins that taste nearly exactly to beef, chicken, fish, and eggs – are the future of food. And they’re putting their money where their mouth is. In the past few years alone, the brightest minds from all areas of science and technology have been joining forces to create high quality, sustainably produced, and not to mention *delicious* versions of meat products that “create a whole new model that makes the current system obsolete.”⁵⁸

And the time is now. In October 2013, a massive recall of Foster Farm chickens took place. The affected chicken contained seven strains of salmonella, four of which are drug resistant, and two of which are multiple drug resistant. It sickened hundreds, and half required hospitalization. Some were unfortunate enough to acquire *Salmonella septicemia*, a bacterial infection of the blood that causes full body inflammation and can be deadly.

The strain found at the California slaughterhouse is different from the strain (which sickened 134 people before being recalled) that was found at the Washington state Foster Farms slaughterhouse less than a year before.

The most troubling news from the most recent outbreak is that the government agencies who are supposed to protect us from foodborne illness --

⁵⁸ "The Future Of Food." *Future of Food*. N.p., n.d. Web. 13 Apr. 2014.

like the FDA – were on furlough due to the government shutdown. *Wired.com* ran a story featuring an interview with CDC Food Safety Chief Chris Braden, who acknowledges that the CDC indeed *knew* about the outbreak *before* it was announced – but were prevented from taking action because the workers needed to continue the testing were sent home.

This is specialized testing. We have a special laboratory that does it and we have people with specialized training that work in that laboratory. All that testing has stopped. There is no staff doing that type of testing, so that even if there were isolates coming in that might be associated with an outbreak, we wouldn't know it and we wouldn't know that they're antibiotic resistant.⁵⁹

Was Braden just playing dumb when he also said, “We may be missing something out there. We may have blind spot”?⁶⁰

When multiple strains of salmonella are resistant to multiple strains of antibiotics, and facilities which are located throughout the US show the same hazardous trends, it seems clear that slaughterhouses in America aren't just scary places for the animals; they should be viewed as scary places for humans. Rather than slow down the lines and send in more workers, however the opposite has been proposed.

⁵⁹ "Shutdown Salmonella Outbreak Continues. CDC Food Safety Chief: 'We Have a Blind Spot.'" *Wired.com*. Conde Nast Digital, 08 Oct. 0013. Web. 22 Oct. 2013.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

Under the “Modernization of Poultry Slaughter Inspection” pilot programs, which were designed from hog pilot programs, inspection lines would speed up, and the inspectors would be company employees, not government employees. In these pilot programs, which speed up lines to an inconceivable 1/3 second per bird, some workers didn’t last an hour.

The Southern Poverty Law Center responded to this, by saying:

In an industry where a worker fears he may lose his job for stopping the line – even choosing to urinate on himself rather than risk angering a supervisor by requesting a bathroom break – it is a legitimate question to ask how these workers will summon the courage to slow the processing line to ensure only healthy, clean birds are shipped to the nation’s supermarkets.⁶¹

The Government Accountability Office published a report critical of the new pilot programs. According to the report, the pilot program recommendations were not safe, not effective, and based on outdated data. The bill did not pass, but was sent up for revision.

It’s clear that government agencies like the USDA, the FDA, AAFCO, and the CDC have been incapacitated by legislation which favors irresponsible and dangerous policies over safe ones; these agencies have been cleverly, and systematically, stripped of the power to oversee the giants in the food system in a meaningful way that keeps us, the consumer, and the animals, safe.

⁶¹ Ibid.

Instead, the power has been handed over to the factory farms – which have perversely become *Salmonella* factories – which continue on without missing a beat.

But what is *Salmonella*? It is a strain of bacteria that is found in the feces of animals and makes its way through the food system in a number of ways. Manure from livestock can be used to fertilize fields, which can contaminate the vegetables grown in those fields; and in water, agricultural runoff from “waste lagoons,” which are acres wide, can spill over into rivers and make their way into drinking wells. It can also be present in the feces of slaughtered animals that accumulate in the slaughter plants, and be transported with the carcasses to your favorite grocery store. It is actually allowed in small amounts in chicken, that’s why the labels warn you to cook it thoroughly.

But *Salmonella* Heidelberg, the type found in the Foster Farms outbreak, actually consists of seven strains of bacteria. It is unlike your run-of-the-mill acceptable salmonella because it is resistant to multiple types of antibiotics. Pharmaceutical companies profit wildly from selling 70-80% of their antibiotics supply for use in factory farmed animals. And getting the antibiotics out of animals is like untying Gordian’s knot. Animals, who are not sick, take more antibiotics than all of the sick people in this country do – combined. Why? Bovines stand knee deep in their own manure and share such close quarters that without antibiotics, sustaining these massive “herds” (if they can even be called such) would be a biological impossibility. Nor would raising chickens in

battery cages and in giant warehouses that reek of ammonia. These giant operations, littered with the dead, diseased, dying, deformed, have their pushers: big pharma. And the junkies: the animals. And so, pharmaceutical companies and big agribusiness alike have self-serving regulation tied up – with dollars sent to Washington.

The dependency, and incestuous link between industry and politics, continues until we support legislation that demands safer, better routes to healthy, sustainable food. Though the population is growing, we don't need to streamline production of animals. The cheapest, most efficient way to produce meat happened very rapidly over a period of a few decades, in which animal science replaced husbandry. According to Foer, who writes about the history of the factory farm,

In the 1950s and 1960, poultry companies began to achieve total vertical⁶² integration. They owned the genetic pool (today two companies own three-fourths of the genetics for all broiler chickens on the planet), the birds themselves (farmers only tended to them, like counselors at a sleepaway camp), the requisite drugs, the feed, the slaughtering, the processing, and the market brands.

This wasn't always the case. Foer continues:

It wasn't just that techniques had changed: biodiversity was replaced with genetic uniformity, university departments of animal husbandry

⁶²Foer, *Eating Animals*, 153.

became departments of animal science, a business once dominated by women was now taken over by men, and skilled farmer were replaced with wage contract workers. No one fired a pistol to mark the start of the race to the bottom. The earth just tilted and everyone slid into the hole.

The “requisite drugs” are growth booster. Even antibiotics, which prevents animals from digesting their food efficiently, can add as much as 3% weight and with the added benefit that it destroys pathogens that would otherwise wipe out such crammed populations of animals.

The Animal Agricultural Alliance, an alliance of industry groups, including pharmaceutical companies, who “advocate for producer interests and modern science-based practices,” published an article called “The Myth of Factory Farms.” According to this article, people like me who tell the animal’s stories have an agenda. They don’t want you to trust me. They insist that you distrust even the term factory farm, a term they say was “born from the animal rights, anti-agriculture movement that’s meant to conjure up an image to the public of huge, dirty warehouses where animals are worked as machines and people [are not involved with the] animal’s development.”⁶³ They would have us believe that, according to Melanie Joy, author of *Why We Love Dogs, Eat Pigs*

⁶³ http://www.animalagalliance.org/images/ag_insert/manurematters_may03_page18.pdf

and Wear Cows, it is “normal, natural, and necessary⁶⁴” to kill billions of animals a year this way.

In 2013, reports began surfacing that a controversial bovine growth drug called Zilmax was making cows’ hooves fall off. Reuters reported that the hooves of cattle would simply turn to sludge. The drug, which some in the industry referred to as “Vitamin Z,” can add more than 30 lbs. of flesh to the cattle in the weeks before they are slaughtered, but is both ineffective and inhumane if the animals don’t make it to market. In August of 2013, Merck stopped sales of Zilmax, but apparently, the effects were far beyond those originally reported:

As new research findings indicate, the number of U.S. cattle deaths linked to Zilmax could reach into the thousands. That’s far higher than the figures Merck reported to the FDA, *Reuters* reports. And it could seriously interfere with Merck’s plans to relaunch the \$160 million growth-stimulating drug⁶⁵

Zilmax is not natural, nor necessary; it is, like antibiotics, a nontherapeutic drug with hidden side effects. But Merck will not accept the loss; part of its plans to relaunch the drug includes testing a herd of 240,000 cattle to prove its safety and effectiveness; some farmers, who are already in financial distress, are more

⁶⁴ Joy, Melanie. *Why We Love Dogs, Eat Pigs, and Wear Cows: An Introduction to Carnism: The Belief System That Enables Us to Eat Some Animals and Not Others*. San Francisco: Conari, 2010. Print.

⁶⁵ "Study Finds Deaths of Zilmax-fed Cattle Dwarf Merck's Official Reports to FDA." FiercePharma. N.p., n.d. Web. 13 Apr. 2014.

concerned with payment than the welfare of the cattle, reports Reuters. One feedlot owner in Texas says, “I'd be happy to sign up, just as soon as Merck tells me who is going to pay me after they're done. It's been a horrible time, with the drought. I can't afford to give away a steer, let alone hundreds.’⁶⁶” Since the sales of drugs like Zilmax are banned in China, Russia and some European countries, Tyson Foods announced it would no longer take the cattle. This strikes some as public relations, more than a public health strategy.

In December 2013, the FDA finalized its approach to curbing the problem of antibiotic use in farm animal: Have drug companies change the labels so they no longer state they the drugs are used to promote growth, and require that farmers get prescriptions for the drugs. Oh yeah, and... these changes are voluntary. Louise Slaughter says this new law “falls woefully short of what is needed to address a public health crisis⁶⁷.” And a health attorney at the Natural Resources Defense Council called the policy “an early holiday gift to industry... FDA has essentially followed a voluntary approach for more than 35 years, but use of these drugs to raise animals has increased.⁶⁸”

According the Foer, “the factory farm industry (in alliance with the pharmaceutical industry) currently has more power than public-health

⁶⁶ Huffstutter, P.J., and Tom Polansek. "Exclusive: Merck Wants to Test Zilmax on 240,000 Cattle but Beef Industry Resists." *Reuters*. Thomson Reuters, 04 Apr. 2014. Web. 13 Apr. 2014.

⁶⁷ Dennis, Brady. "FDA Finalizes Voluntary Rules on Phasing out Certain Antibiotics in Livestock." *Washington Post*. The Washington Post, 11 Dec. 2013. Web. 13 Apr. 2014.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

professionals.⁶⁹” The Washington Post cites an October 2013 report from the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future that found that:

...farm lobbies had successfully blocked legislative reforms to the widespread use of antibiotics in U.S. livestock, and the organization said regulation had grown only weaker under the Obama administration.⁷⁰

Foer says while these industries have incredible power, “We give it to them. We have chosen, unwittingly, to fund this industry on a massive scale by eating factory-farmed animal products... and we do so daily.”⁷¹”

But despite the figures that indicate the consumption of most animal products is not only decreasing but rising, there is good news. Dairy consumption, for example, is on the wane. The stories of happy cows, despite switching campaigns from “Got Milk?” to “Milk Life,” are no longer convincing our culture that dairy is good for us, a new reports of the dairy industry continue to send bad signals to the public. Americans are slowly evolving away from drinking cow’s milk, as alternative milks like almond, coconut and soy become the norm. However, demand and production of dairy still increase every year, with other nations, like China, expanding American export markets yearly.

⁶⁹ Foer, *Eating Animals*, 157.

⁷⁰ *Ibid* 1.

⁷¹ *Ibid* 2.

American farmed animals in particular are neglected in ways that are still considered “humane” under U.S. laws that favor the industries they seek to protect. In farming, an animal’s basic right to fresh air, good food, and mental comfort are not provided for, but an analogue exists in European countries that is far more progressive and compassionate. Europe may have just banned the use of animal testing in cosmetics in March 2013, but for decades it has implemented Brambell’s Five Freedoms, a recommendation published in a report by Robert Brambell in 1965. This report was commissioned after *Animal Machines*, a book by Ruth Harrison which exposed abhorrent conditions of working animals, and its recommendations were enacted into law, and subsequently adopted by the World organization for Animal Health, an international organization that counts 178 countries among its members. Though these are just recommendations, participating members can choose to adopt them or not. America lags far behind Europe in implementing these recommendations because the agribusiness industry uses its influence in American politics to squash regulation that would cut into profits. That’s why in America, we don’t guarantee animals the Five Freedoms recommended by Brambell. They are:

- Freedom to express normal behavior – by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animals’ own kind.
- Freedom from thirst, hunger and malnutrition – by ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigor.

- Freedom from discomfort – by providing a suitable environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area.
- Freedom from pain, injury and disease – by prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment.
- Freedom from fear and distress – by ensuring conditions that avoid mental suffering.

Yet as we ramp up our production of animal products for an increasingly global market, our health, the animals' health, and the planet's health pay the costs of this increasingly cruel industry. Our appetite for animals has indeed created a monster; it's convenient to turn away from the reality of factory farms but to our own peril. The animals that we eat, in particular, no longer have stories – therefore their real life stories are impossibly the same. Each and every one of them is an ill-fated character of an experiment in coldness; written by us, and our genius for unhappy endings.

But technology, when used to further compassionate, ecologically sound choices, is our friend. Cultured beef, that is, beef grown in labs from cow cells, has been pursued for several years now with the help of a private donor, who was recently revealed to be Sergey Brin. ⁷²"I like to look at technology opportunities. When the technology seems like it's on the cusp of viability. And if it succeeds there, it can be really transformative for the world," Says Sergey Brin in a promotional video for cultured meat, that is, meat that is lab grown.

⁷² "The First Lab-Grown Hamburger Is Served." *Popular Science*. N.p., n.d. Web. 13 Apr. 2014.

Brin knows a thing or two about viable technologies. He's the founder of Google, and in the video, published on July 29, 2013, days away before the first cultured beef hamburger was consumed to much media fanfare, Brin looks like a man from the future who cares for animals. Not because he's wearing a flashy metallic outfit or has bionic limbs. Because he's casually, naturally, speaking to the camera as he wears his Google Glass, the technology they've invested billions in that projects information into your retina, such as translations and recipes, anything you can imagine, basically giving you all the information you need, all the time.

We're embarking on a new consciousness - and it starts now. "We have a vision in our minds of these pristine farms that have a couple cows, a couple chickens, but that's not actually how meat gets produced today," Brin says. "When you see how these cows are treated it's certainly not something I'm comfortable with."

It starts with people like Brin, backing those who run culturedbeef.net. Brin's genius is knowing just how unmotivated, uneducated, and naïve people can be - hence the reasons why Google and Google Glass exist. We are hunters and gatherers who like to conserve energy at all times, to put it nicely. But we are often very wrong about reality.

Epilogue

Images don't speak to me like they do to others. I can't really see the poetry of light and shadow, the message in a great photograph that conveys higher meanings and divine truths. Actually, I'm not even sure what I'm talking about now; I'm only relating it to the way words and music speak to me. While I can appreciate a great photograph, the top of my head doesn't come off.

I know plenty of others for whom photographs speak great truths of their soul that they couldn't otherwise pinpoint or express. Ansel Adams fans, for example, who see something mysterious in all that mountain and foreground.

But I know that images are powerful. That's why I'm buoyed with hope about the film *The Ghosts In Our Machine*, which follows animal activist and photographer JoAnne MacArthur as she travels the world, sneaking into horrible places like fur farms, whispering "I'm sorry" to the helpless beings in the cages as she must inevitably, and briskly, walk past them to get to her subject and get out before she is found. I believe that this film can change the world, like *Blackfish* did for killer whales or *The Cove* did for dolphins, for animals around the world.

Then I think, those pictures of suffering are the only pictures that show me, in an image, the mystery of cruelty. They make the top of my head come off - not for an aesthetic reason, but for a moral one. I wish I could be like her, I think. Why am I a writer? Why does everything have to be so written, so

explicit? Why must I philosophize through words, rather than pictures? Because I have a place. As do you. We are all made differently, with different talents, to expose on all fronts the cruelty on this planet. What is your gift? This book is for those who have found their special gift, and for those who are still looking.

Keep looking, and then do.

Not long ago, when I was teaching English in France, I walked calmly toward Lake Geneva, which was right out my backyard. I was stationed in the countryside in an alpine cottage four or five miles from the nearest grocery store, and two miles from the nearest payphone. My accommodations were beautiful, yet Spartan. The only thing to do that morning was to walk to the lake and imagine having company.

The lake was crystal clear and placid, as it always was, and I knew that it would be too cold to swim in. But as my feet traveled the gravel path towards the lake, I was seized with an overwhelming loneliness. It had been days since I had spoken to or interacted with another human being. I was yet without transportation to go into town. So at that moment, I did something that seemed desperate—I called out to the universe to magically bring me a friend.

Why I said it I don't know. I was lonely, of course, but *magic*? I forgot about it as I made my way through a leafy, narrow part of the road. But once I got to the shore, I looked towards the water. There, I could see a giant swan, munching casually on the algae on the water's edge. I tiptoed towards the swan and squatted near him. He acknowledged me, and continued his business of

chewing. He paddled a few inches more up the shore, grazing on the next rock, and I went with him. Then the next, and the next, and I followed him along the water's edge like this for quite some time. I needed company, and somehow, he knew that his job was to provide it.

After a while, a second swan came floating towards us. I believe it was the wife. She squawked an annoyed "Who is *she?*!" to which his unmistakable reply came: "Ah, leave her alone, she's OK." She ruffled her feathers and dragged him away. Together they swam off where I could no longer follow.

In no way, on that afternoon, did my humanness make me superior to those swans. Not in my physical attributes or in my sensibility. There are still time when I wish I was a swan.

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