



November 18, 2012

HUFF
POST POLITICS

CANADA 

What Is it About Animal Rights That Brings Out the Worst in People?

Posted: 10/29/2012 2:49 pm

Animal rights activists, opposed to the No Kill movement, recently threatened to kill Nathan Winograd's beloved pet dog. The threat appeared [on a Facebook page](#) entitled "I Hate Dog Breeders."

Nathan Winograd is of course the leading voice for the No Kill movement. His campaign to end the unnecessary killing of shelter animals has inspired all sorts of slurs, one of which is that he is in the pocket of the puppy mill industry. Ironically, Winograd -- a vegan who himself speaks in terms of animal rights -- is a virulent critic of puppy mills. He is no friend to irresponsible breeders of any sort.

The breeder issue is a canard. The real reason for targeting Winograd is that he has demonstrated that three million healthy shelter animals are butchered every year without reason: this is a threat to shelter workers with blood on their hands, and -- worse -- goes contrary to the ideology of animal activists who believe in the extinction of domestic creatures.

The two most prominent animal rights figures revered by these activists -- Ingrid Newkirk of PETA, and Wayne Pacelle of the HSUS (the Humane Society of the United States) -- were once outspoken in their wish to rid the world of pets. [Newkirk said to Newsday](#) in February 1988: "In the end, I think it would be lovely if we stopped this whole notion of pets altogether." [Pacelle remarked](#) in 1993: "In fact, I don't want to see another dog or cat born."

Both have since tempered their statements with "nuance," but until recently their [casual approach to killing pit bulls](#) was fully evident, and Newkirk's organization is [still slaughtering pets](#) at a sickening rate.

It is crucial to stress that neither PETA nor the HSUS is responsible for the threat against Nathan Winograd's dog. In fact, none of the stalkers and trolls I shall describe below is officially allied to these organizations. Some of them, however -- while carefully retaining plausible deniability -- devote much of their spare time towards shilling for these two groups.

We are talking about vigilantes -- not all of them sane -- who feel that they are doing America's beleaguered pets a good turn by threatening to kill one of them. The word "terrorist" is abused these days, but many are, in a very real sense, minor terrorists.

No, they are not threatening to fly airplanes into buildings. Nevertheless, as Winograd [emphasizes](#): "threats of harm [to a dog who is nearly blind, needs to be carried up the stairs, and can't hold his bladder very well](#) is beyond the pale."

I've avoided writing about the worst of the anti-No-Kill thugs, because trolls and stalkers thrive on attention. It is perhaps time, however, to discuss just what kind of people are trying to undermine the effort to save shelter animals in the United States.

Those unfamiliar with the [tenets of the No Kill movement](#) might want to read my [interview with Nathan Winograd](#). The essence of the program is easily summarized, and would seem pretty innocuous.

Every year, American animal shelters kill four million pets. Three million of these are perfectly healthy and adoptable. Moreover: statistics prove that there are more than enough adopters to take them in. In fact, there are over seven times as many adopters, nationwide, as there are animals requiring a home. No Kill is hard work, but simple to comprehend: it is a rigorous and proven protocol that prevents these animals from being killed unnecessarily. It protects them from the people who are supposed to be sheltering them. It keeps these creatures safe, and finds them homes.

And it has inspired an astonishing number of truly venomous enemies. Not all of these activists think clearly (to put it mildly), and many are conspiracy theorists: because Nathan Winograd has explained that pet overpopulation is a myth, they have decided that he must be in favor of puppy mills. [Winograd stresses](#), however, that there are plenty of reasons to despise puppy mills without having to rely on a statistical untruth.

"Even if every shelter embraced the No Kill philosophy and the programs and services that make it possible, even if no dog or puppy was killed in a shelter again, we'd still want to close down puppy mills. You don't have to believe in or perpetuate the lie of pet overpopulation to work on efforts to curtail harm to dogs in puppy mills. Puppy mills fuel inbreeding, provide minimal to no veterinary care, lack of adequate food and shelter, lack of human socialization, overcrowded cages, and cause neglect, abuse, and the killing of animals when they are no longer profitable. That is a distinct and separate harm from the fact that shelters are needlessly killing them."

There is a much more obvious reason for hating No Kill, as I mentioned above, and as Winograd explains at greater length in the interview: the program is hard to swallow if you're one of those shelter workers who has been responsible, throughout your career, for killing animals unnecessarily. No Kill assaults your conscience. It impugns your life. It is unbearable.

Hence you end up with people like the one threatening to kill Nathan Winograd's dog. He described the posts, which were reported to Facebook and have since been removed: "One or two shelter workers posted photos of dogs they themselves killed, saying they killed the dog because someone is breeding somewhere."

Contemplate this. A *shelter worker* -- someone paid to keep defenseless animals safe -- slaughtered dogs, in order to make a righteous statement: there are breeders out there, contributing to the pet population, so these shelter dogs must die.

Hence this shelter worker -- a valiant guerilla taking a stand against the evil people who bring pets into this world -- threatened to kill Nathan Winograd's dogs. As an experiment: to see how that would make Winograd feel. (The threat was to kill his "dogs" -- plural -- but Winograd has only one dog, Pickles, since Topham died.) "They called me a 'piece of shit'."

My own encounters with these people have been ugly, but thus far come short of this kind of viciousness. Still, it is important to put these on the record. The harassment began when I wrote [a series of article exposing the pet-killing practices of PETA](#), but has become significantly more virulent now that I am [taking on the hypocrisy of the HSUS](#).

As I say, the thugs I am dealing with are never on staff. They are volunteers -- pro bono hit men -- and they stridently deny that PETA and the HSUS are themselves responsible for the harassment. Technically speaking, they are correct. One of the most notorious, for instance -- John Schiff -- runs a website devoted entirely to attacking enemies of the HSUS. But he is not paid by the HSUS, so he can rightly claim "independence."

I have [written about Schiff before](#). He generally writes as "John Doppler Schiff". Under the name "JohnDopp", he attempted to have an article about me removed from Wikipedia.

Someone similar, whose identity I am still trying to determine, has been attempting to undermine sales of my novels on Amazon. First I discovered that a search on my name in the Kindle store brought up not simply my Young Adult novels, but also teen-focused pornography. (Anyone can suggest "similar" books on Amazon.)

A couple of days later, a reviewer named "donny random" described my YA novels as brimming over with R-rated material. This is not simply inaccurate, but comically inaccurate: my girlfriend is always giving me a hard time about how innocent they are, given their intended readership.

The literate Mr. Random left a more probing review of one of my novels for adults: he found the work "self-aggrandizing." (It's almost impossible, when you think about it, to write self-aggrandizing fiction; I have clearly broken new ground. I in fact feel aggrandized by his observation.) His reviews appeared almost simultaneously. What can I say: it's always warming to see someone read his way through my complete oeuvre in a matter of hours.

These people aren't generally very swift when it comes to covering their tracks. "JohnDopp" isn't the most clever pseudonym, especially since he uses it widely elsewhere; nevertheless, he howled about the invasion of his privacy when I outed him to his fellow Wikipedia editors. My charming if random literary critic has a trail of Amazon reviews identifying all sorts of traits typical of a certain kind of animal activist: among other things, he is engaged in a pitched battle against his neighbor's barking dogs.

It may be counterintuitive, but the hatred of either dogs or cats, or both, is a characteristic shared by many of these self-described animal activists.

The most disturbing is a woman who writes under various pseudonyms, but is generally identifiable by a number of features. She is often barely coherent, and almost always vulgar in a way that you don't have to be Donny Random to find disturbing. She hates pit bulls venomously, and is equally unhinged in her bigotry towards cats: she believes that feral cats kill elderly people, and that litter boxes contribute to insanity.

Whether this woman is responsible for the current threat to kill Nathan Winograd's dog I don't know. It is certainly her style. And she has stalked Winograd for years.

Only recently has she taken to stalking me. She has, among other things, accused me of laundering money in Mexico for the American meat lobby. On her blog she has conversations between herself and an anonymous commenter (also herself), about my various crimes. She is fixated on my geography -- that special kind of bigot who assumes that any activity south of the border must be criminal. Apparently I run puppy mills when I'm not busy laundering money. Oh, and she seems to think that Canadians eat dog-meat. (If you add two plus two, it's clear that I run puppy mills in Mexico to keep Canadian chefs supplied.)

All very humorous, until you remember what this is really about: it is an effort to discredit a movement that would end the killing of millions of innocent creatures.

You will encounter, in fact, an entire grotesque community of these people on the Web: an extended Addams Family. These pet killers -- most of them bent on the extinction of domestic animals -- like to paint themselves as the moderates in this debate: No Kill is "radical." They arrive as a pseudonymous gang whenever No Kill is proposed, and reinforce each other's slander.

It can be difficult to separate out the speakers, since most have at least a couple of sock puppets. They almost all use the same language: Nathan Winograd is referred to as "Wino"; No Kill advocates are described as "whores" who are "pimped out" by breeders and meat lobbyists.

In this age of cyber-bullying, this has become an urgent question: how do you counter these people?

We tried a parody blog, echoing the woman who insists that feral cats kill the elderly. It was a pretty simple parody, along the lines of what *Saturday Night Live* did to Sarah Palin: we mostly just quoted her own words verbatim. Unfortunately, it only served to drive her to new levels of strangeness: she began babbling about identity theft and meetings with the FBI.

We set up a No Kill Awareness Fund, and [named it after JohnDopp](#). This has proven more successful: it hasn't shut him down, but it clearly embarrasses him.

These are humorous responses to ridiculous people, however, and they are hardly appropriate to the latest threats: how do you deal with self-styled "activists" whose idea of helping animals is to threaten to kill someone's family pet?

No, nobody is taking aim at Nathan Winograd's life, or mine, but the threat -- if you love dogs -- is vile: as he [points out](#), if they killed his dog Pickles it would cause his family "unimaginable pain."

The assault on me and my books is nothing by comparison, and would not particularly bother me, except that it is evidence that I am being targeted, obsessively, by a truly vicious group of people. I am far enough away that my dogs are safe. (And it would not be paranoia to worry if I lived close to, say, PETA's headquarters in Norfolk Virginia.)

If you care about animals, this situation matters. Deeply. If anything were to happen to one of my dogs, I'd be suicidal. And the threat against Nathan Winograd's ailing pet is as vile as any cult tactic I've encountered. This to a man who has been described, by many people -- sane, decent people, who have a true picture of him -- as [a modern day St. Francis](#).

Call me hopelessly naive and softhearted, but I would lay my life down to prevent these people from killing this one nearly-blind, incontinent dog: the family pet belonging to a man whose sole crime in this world is that he puts all of his time towards ending the yearly slaughter of three millions shelter animals.

Follow Douglas Anthony Cooper on Twitter: www.twitter.com/dysmedia