

UNTOLD STORIES:

The Personal Insights of a Former ALF Advocate

This transcript is based on the speech given by Freeman Wicklund at the United Poultry Concern's Direct Action Forum in Machipongo, Virginia on Sunday, June 27, 1999. The weekend-long conference addressed issues of strategy, movement unity, and mobilizing the public in support of animal issues. Wicklund was formerly an ardent Animal Liberation Front (ALF) supporter who founded and ran the publication *No Compromise*, acted as an ALF spokesperson, and travelled the country promoting and defending the ALF. In 1997, after 11 years of activism, he halted his ALF advocacy, and with new insight began promoting Gandhian nonviolence. He shares his thoughts as a former ALF advocate here.

Usually, I speak on the power of non-violent action, however, as Norm Phelps and Dean Smith will discuss this, and since my thoughts are available in the *Animals' Agenda* article "Direct Action: Progress, Peril or Both" and the publication *Strategic Non-violence for Animal Liberation*, I will depart from my usual presentation.

Instead, I thought that the most vital information I have to bring to this weekend's strategy discussion includes my unique experiences and insights as a former ALF advocate. I hope this information will allow us to understand the challenges we face, and help us find constructive solutions to them.

My Statements to the Media on the A.L.F.

Before I begin, however, I think it is necessary to address the issue of my statements in the media regarding the Animal Liberation Front or ALF.

I feel it is vital that the public know there are a lot of people committed to non-violence within the animal rights movement. Our association with non-violence helps keep people's minds and hearts open to the message of compassion towards animals, instead of giving them another excuse to ignore or ridicule the painful and often overwhelming topic of animal exploitation.

Unfortunately, humane education, distributing leaflets, negotiating with

animal abuse industries and other non-violent actions that help animals do not make headlines like bombings, arsons, and acts of sabotage do. This skewed reporting portrays the impression that the animal rights movement lacks a strong non-violent contingent to it, and this hurts our cause.

A similarly vital, yet sometimes conflicting interest, is the need for movement unity and solidarity. We have to direct our limited time, energy, and resources towards our opposition--*not each other*.

I will be the first to admit that in my effort to utilize non-violence to the fullest potential for the animals I have made numerous mistakes.

Maintaining movement unity despite our diversity is an extremely difficult and complex issue. Each of our actions as activists affects every other activist, whether intentional or not. In general, ALF actions cause members of the public to be less receptive and trusting and more hostile towards non-violent activists who are trying to educate work with them. In general, non-violent activists who voice disagreement with the ALF's actions hurt the morale of ALF supporters. So what do we do to maintain unity? Do we ban all ALF activity and silence all activists who do not support the ALF? Would this be fair to anyone? Even if we tried to implement such a policy, there is no way to enforce it. What's the right thing to do? What is fair to everyone involved?

These questions are not easy to answer. I have struggled to answer them for many years, and I still struggle with these issues. Sometimes I make mistakes. But through those mistakes I continue to evolve as an activist.

For those of you who are unfamiliar with this controversy, let me start by giving you some of its history. When the Animal Liberation League changed its position from vocal support of the Animal Liberation Front, to adopting the principles of Gandhian Non-violence, we felt it was strategically important to notify the media of our change. On the third Monday of January in 1998—the day set aside to honor Martin Luther King, Jr.—we held a news conference explaining that change. In our news release we said, "The acts of sabotage we used to defend, we now condemn." I believe that statement was a mistake. We no longer condemn the ALF's actions, and our position is changing and evolving to better reconcile our needs to promote non-violence while maintaining movement unity.

Our latest ALF-related media work involves the April 5th raid at the University of Minnesota, where 113 rats, mice, pigeons, and salamanders were removed from the labs and millions of dollars worth of property damage was done. I learned about this raid from an unsolicited call from the *Start Tribune* (Minneapolis' newspaper) asking us for a reaction. We were unprepared to handle the call. During the interview I tried to

focus on what non-violence advocates do, rather than criticizing the ALF. For the most part, I was successful, but the quote that the Star Tribune chose to run did not reflect this.

Activists have also criticized me by saying I should speak about the animals when I am given the chance to speak to the media. The truth is, I do. Most of my interviews with the media regarding the University of Minnesota raid were spent promoting animal rights and explaining the horrors of animal research. But, as many of you know, if you are interviewed by a newspaper or radio station for five or ten minutes, they tend to only use one quote, and, at the time, we had not yet developed a sound bite that combined our two positions of non-violence and animal advocacy.

I have struggled and continue to struggle to find a fair way to promote non-violence while maintaining movement solidarity. This is not an easy issue, but I will tell you where I currently stand on this issue. To begin, we must acknowledge the fact that our movement is diverse and will never reach consensus on tactics. Given this diversity, how can we give everyone a voice, yet maintain movement unity?

Some activists feel that in the interest of movement unity, non-violent supporters should not make any statements to the media on strategy. But I don't think that's fair. ALF advocates promote their tactics in the media and explain their rationale behind ALF actions. Why shouldn't non-violent activists have the same ability to promote non-violence and explain their rationale behind it? To be fair, any codes of conduct must apply to all activists across the board, regardless of the content of their message. Either, every activist can discuss these issues in the media or no activist can discuss these issues in the media.

So after struggling with these two vital interests of increasing the visibility of our movements' non-violent contingent, and maintaining solidarity with every

activist—whether non-violent or not—I have developed the following position on the ALF, which is also my position media position on this issue as well:

I am disturbed by the ALF's recent actions of clandestine sabotage, but I am more disturbed by society's indifference towards the institutional violence inflicted on animals in factory farms, slaughterhouses, research labs, and fur farms. I consider the ALF's actions to be threatening and destructive, but I consider the public's inaction on animal abuse to be even more threatening and destructive. I think the ALF's actions are tragedies, but it is even more tragic that the public ignores and participates in the wholesale exploitation of animals.

In other words: despite any differences in opinions between non-violence supporters and ALF advocates, we must remain united in solidarity. Our common goals of animal liberation must be stronger, and bind us together more than our differences in strategy tear us apart. Movement solidarity is vital to our shared eventual success. Our scarce time and money should be devoted to combatting our mutual nemesis: the violence directed towards animals—not misdirected at other participants of the movement.

I have had the pleasure of working and struggling with many of you here today—Katie Fedor of the ALF Press Office, Bruce Friedrich from PETA, Zoe Weil from the Center for Compassionate Living, Kim Stallwood from *The Animals' Agenda*, Miyun Park from *No Compromise*, Sarah Moran and Christopher Patterson from the Animal Liberation League, and many more of you. Some of you I worked with predominantly when I was an ALF advocate, others since I have adopted the strategy of Gandhian non-violence. However, I respect the passion and dedication that all of you have for helping animals, and I don't want to sever any of the comradery, solidarity, and friendship that has been built between us.

The way I see it is this: we are a family. And like our biological family, we can't choose who our family members are. But we can choose whether to be a dysfunctional family with infighting, hatred, and rumors, or to be a loving and supportive family that shows unconditional respect for our family members, regardless of our differences. There are times when our beliefs will allow us to work together and there are times when they won't, but we need to respect each other either way. We need to foster mutual respect for each other, and we need to give each other the freedom to follow what our individual conscience deems necessary for us to help the animals.

So how would I summarize my position? By saying this: *GET ACTIVE FOR ANIMALS!* Yes, I would prefer your actions are loving, dignified, open, and respectful towards all, but ultimately, *the worst crime you can perpetuate against animals is to know the violence they suffer and do nothing to stop it.* So get out there and get active!

Defining Violence and Non-Violence

Because there are numerous definitions of violence and non-violence, I would like to define what I mean when I say "violence" and "non-violence."

To me, violence is more than just physically injuring someone. Otherwise, actions like separating a mother cow from her newborn calf and imprisoning sows in intense confinement, would not be considered violent when they are. So I define violence broadly as, "the use of physical force, harassment or intimidation, or abuse of power or authority, where the impact is to control by causing pain, fear, or hurt."

Next I want to share my definition of non-violence. Granted, this is a terribly inadequate word for its meaning. I say this because—on the surface—it defines itself by what it is not, making it seem

very passive and weak. The poor word choice has allowed people to re-interpret and confuse its meaning as they attempt to co-opt it to serve their own agenda. Certainly, within our movement, people claim to be non-violent because they do not injure or kill their opponent. But in our larger Western culture, the term "non-violence" is not limited to this narrow definition.

Historically, the term non-violence arose to describe the extremely pro-active and dynamic noncooperation used by social reformers to further social change without degrading the people whose practices they opposed. This powerful technique was wielded by courageous individuals willing to make significant sacrifices for their cause. Those who used it—like Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr.—were the embodiment of courage, compassion, and personal power. These revolutionary figures helped clarify the three main principles of non-violent action:

1. Non-violent actions are conducted in a loving manner—without hatred or malice for those who oppose us.
2. Non-violent actions are conducted in an open and truthful manner—without lies, secrets, or distortions.
3. Non-violent activists accept the consequences of their actions—be that prison, beatings, or other forms of repression—without retaliating in violence or hostility.

Culturally, the public at large still see the three components of love, truth, and self-sacrifice as integral to the definition of non-violence, and so do I.

Misplaced Motivations *My Awakening in Utah*

I would like to share some of the personal experiences and insights I gained

when I was an ardent ALF advocate in the years preceding 1998.

The rest of this presentation will consist of ideas for you to consider, reflect on, and think about. I humbly ask that all of you listen with an open mind and in a spirit of how we may work towards improving our movement.

One of my most eye-opening experiences was when I visited Salt Lake City, Utah. Before I go any further, however, I want to make the disclaimer that there are some very dedicated and compassionate animal activists in Utah, and what I am about to say should not be generalized to all animal activists in Utah.

When I was working for *No Compromise* and an ALF advocate, activists in Utah called me and complained about the FBI harassment they were receiving. So I went to Utah, trained activists on how to handle harassment, interviewed dozens of them about the harassment they had received, and tried to mobilize them in opposition to the harassment.

While I was there, some of the activists told me their "war stories." Apparently, some of the animal activists were involved with a very violent "straight edge" following in Utah. [NOTE: straight edge is a philosophy that is against the recreational use of drugs, tobacco, alcohol, and other mind-altering substances. Most people who are straight edge are not violent.] I was told of fights, stabbings, and other violence between different groups of people in Utah. From the war stories I heard, and by the way they were told, it became apparent to me that many activists were quite proud of the fights they had been in, and considered their involvement with them to be a badge of honor. When this particular violent straight edge scene began to adopt animal rights, being vegan was another badge of honor, being harassed by the FBI was another badge, and being involved in direct action was another badge. All of these things helped increase one's social standing among their friends.

Although we want to believe that everyone is motivated to help animals for altruistic reasons, what I saw were people who were motivated by a need to belong, a need to feel important, and a need to impress their friends. *The realization that some people may conduct ALF actions for personal reasons came to me as a total shock.* I thought that anyone who was willing to risk so much for the animals, could only be motivated by the most unselfish reasons. I admit, I was very naive, and this experience in Utah helped me see that.

The implications also worried me deeply. If animals are not the main motivation behind ALF actions, then what assurance do we have that: the animals interests are primary? the animals are found loving homes? the activists are committed to non-violence? the activists have done their homework to ensure no animal—human or non-human—is injured by their action? the activists are willing to go to jail rather than inform on other activists?

Unfortunately, we do not have these assurances. The ALF, because of their need for secrecy and concealment, have no accountability to the larger movement.

Dumping Animals

My experiences as an ALF advocate also brought me into contact with numerous activists within our struggle who had what I saw as mixed priorities. To them, direct action was more important than animal liberation. To illustrate this point, I want to share an e-mail discussion I had with other ALF supporters.

ALF supporters were (and still are) well connected on the internet. We would often discuss important issues on private e-mail lists. One of the discussions we had was on the dumping of liberated laboratory animals. People who defended the practice did so with the stand-by rhetoric of "at least the animals will have a fighting chance."

As someone devoted to animals, I feel

that animal rights activists have an obligation to be role models for how animals should be treated. We should show the animals in our care the best treatment, regardless of whether we acquired them through legal channels or through liberations.

However, the fact that some lab animals would die when released, did not seem to discourage people from this idea that dumping animals is preferable to not conducting the raid. It appeared to me that people wanted to make it acceptable to do live liberations, without having to be concerned about the ultimate welfare of the animals. Why? Because the difficult and risky, yet necessary work of getting animals proper veterinary care and finding them good homes may prevent people from doing live liberations.

During the discussion people who supported dumping the animals were weighing the negatives of any death or harm caused to liberated animals against the alleged positives of media coverage, economic sabotage, and the convenience and safety of the activists. They were playing this balancing game with the animals' lives and well being, and for most of them the equation justified neglecting the animals to death. They were trying to make direct action as easy and as accessible as possible, *but at the expense of the animals!*

It seemed to me that many of the people I was working with belonged to a Direct Action Movement as opposed to the Animal Liberation Movement. These misplaced priorities made me extremely uncomfortable, and I believe have had serious negative consequences for animals and our movement.

The ALF's Lab Raid

On the morning of April 5th of this year, the ALF raided the University of Minnesota's research labs. One-hundred and thirteen rats, mice, pigeons, and salamanders were removed from the labs. An ALF spokesperson told the media that

the animals were given good homes. The next day, more than a dozen pigeons were found in a nearby suburban community, captured and returned to the labs. The University identified the pigeons as their lab animals because of the bands on their feet. The ALF spokesperson changed their story and told the media that sometimes the ALF does release animals whom they consider suitable for life in the wild.

But this is not the end of the story. Five albino rats who had died from dehydration were also found in a nearby community. Once again the ALF spokesperson's story changed. Now they were suggesting that the University planted the dead rats to defame the ALF. Is this scenario possible? Yes. Is it probable? Not likely.

Unfortunately, I think it is more likely that the ALF dumped those animals. Why? To begin with, dumping animals had been given the go-ahead within the direct action community after the e-mail discussion I previously mentioned. Also, I have tried to legally place mice and rats in loving homes before, and it is extremely difficult. People don't want mice and rats, and certainly not stolen ones that have been genetically altered and could implicate them in Minnesota's largest ALF action to date. And the idea that the University planted them is far-fetched. The risks of being caught planting the animals far outweigh the benefits of doing it.

So yes, I believe the animals who died or were recaptured, were the same animals the ALF took from the University. And I believe that dumping them was an act of pure neglect. If a human infant was in an abusive home, it would not be enough for a social service organization to take the baby out of the house and dump her in the street so that "at least she had a fighting chance." That service would be charged with neglect and manslaughter. The ALF are equally responsible for their neglectful actions.

Once again, direct action and its

alleged benefits seemed to over-shadow the health and well-being of the animals. Certainly, misplaced priorities within the movement is not exclusive to ALF activists. However, other activists are not playing with fire, bombs, and live animals like the ALF do—which makes any misplaced priorities more problematic than in other situations.

Confronting Skewed Priorities

What can we do about this problem of skewed priorities?

All animal rights activists—regardless of the strategy we advocate—should regularly scrutinize our own motives behind what we do for the animals. All of us are vulnerable to letting personal issues take precedence over the animals, and by regularly taking a personal inventory we can spot any problems and work to change them for the better. The alternative is that we live in denial, assume the best about ourselves, and let the problem fester and grow until it harms our activism, the movement, and the animals who have already been victimized enough.

A word of advice on this self-inventory: it is OK to find fault. We are all human. As humans, we have a variety of needs including the need to have friends, feel important, believe we are good people, be safe, etc. These are valid needs. Many people have these needs met from their involvement with animal rights. Still, we need to have the discipline to keep an eye on them and make sure they do not over-shadow our commitment to serve and protect the animals.

Also, I want to stress that this self-inventory is a personal activity. You are *not* to find fault in other people. The way you address the problem in other people is by being setting a good example of a committed animal rights person who does things with the animals' best interests at heart, thereby helping to create a culture

within our movement of people who take action for the right reasons.

Dogma and the Lack of Accountability Bomb Threats

Another concern I had when working as an ALF advocate was the dogma within the direct action movement that prevented constructive dialogue from occurring. It prevented people from seeing problems and from creating solutions.

For example, on the same e-mail list where the dumping of liberated laboratory animals had been discussed, an e-mail message was posted saying the ALF had made a bomb threat against a hotel that was hosting a fur sale. This hotel was occupied, and it had many people in it who had no involvement with the fur trade. I posted that this could not be an ALF action because it was violent. Others argued: "The action is non-violent because it was only a threat, there was no bomb and no one was hurt." So I responded by explaining that the ALF can threaten to raid a lab, rescue an animal, and destroy property because it can follow through with those threats, but it cannot threaten to bomb a building full of people, because that act would violate the ALF's own guidelines of taking all precautions to not harm another animal—non-human or human.

That is when the rhetoric of censorship was hurled at me: "Who are you to define what the ALF can and cannot do?" "These ALF activists are risking their freedom, and you have no right to criticize them." "You sound like the animal exploiters." "Your criticisms of the ALF call into question how committed you are to the animals" Etc.

All of these comments were designed to put me on the defensive and sidetrack us from discussing the issue at hand. But when people are not even willing to discuss the issues, they will never be addressed, and the problems will continue to grow, harm our movement, and hurt the

animals. Also, if activists are not allowed to define the ALF's non-violence guideline [to take all precautions to ensure their actions do not harm humans or animals], then how can they hold the ALF accountable to it? They can't, and the non-violence guideline will continue to be weakened and corrupted, until it is meaningless.

[We were later informed that the first e-mail incorrectly attributed the bomb threat to the ALF, when actually another group had claimed responsibility for it. This however, does not invalidate my points on the harms of dogma and the ALF's lack of accountability.]

The Cover-Up

Unfortunately, the rhetorical dogma I have described is common within the direct action movement, but it is not the only kind of censorship out there. A few years ago, a controversy arose surrounding the way Rod Coronado—a convicted ALF activist—handled his court strategy. Some ALF supporters mobilized against him, and Rod attempting to defend himself, sent a letter to the North American ALF Supporters Group's newsletter *Underground* for them to print. Because Rod mentioned the Student Organization for Animal Rights—the group I was Coordinating—in his letter, I was allowed to see his original letter and respond to it.

In part of his letter he spoke of his knowledge of the ALF's involvement with killing liberated animals who had allegedly been given good homes. After much pressure from others, he agreed to take this part of his letter out before it finally went to print.

Again, the movement was denied the access to truthful information that would help us understand the problem, and better help animals. Instead, we chose to ignore the violence towards animals, cover it up, and continue to perpetuate the myth of the ALF's perfection.

The ALF Advocates Killing People?

One of the ALF activists who had been convicted for the arson of a McDonalds in Salt Lake City, Utah was on a national news show saying that he thought it was acceptable to kill people to save animals. He was speaking as an ALF activist.

The ALF activists claim to have a strong non-violence guideline. How strong can it be when there is no way to hold them accountable to it? What can be done to prevent ALF activists from advocating violence? These are questions that ALF advocates are going to have to develop answers to, if their alleged commitment to non-violence is to be taken seriously by anyone.

CHALLENGING THE DOGMA, ADDRESSING THE ISSUES

To those of you who advocate the ALF: if you want to better the ALF, then you need to challenge the dogma and start addressing the ALF's mistakes. Please address these issues. I am not in a position to do this myself, because I no longer have credibility among the ALF supporters. So I appeal to those of you who are ALF supporters to help get rid of the empty rhetoric and personal attacks that prevent discussion on vital issues. Let's keep our actions focused on the animals as our number one priority.

How can we challenge the dogma within animal rights? We can allow for constructive criticisms and dialogue. We can stop using the rhetoric of censorship and personal attacks during discussions. We can all think for ourselves, realize the validity and importance of our own opinions, and express them, especially when they differ from the currently accepted dogma.

ALF supporters can start the discussion of developing larger, more compassionate interpretations of the ALF's non-violent guideline. The ALF

spokespeople should be strong enough to say that an alleged ALF action is not an ALF action if it does not conform to the ALF's more compassionate interpretation of its non-violence code.

Where's the Strategy?

Video Footage of the ALF's Lab Raid

Another major concern I have is that the ALF seem to promote—instead of combat—their public image as violent, threatening, terrorists, who don't know what they are talking about, and who don't care about animals. I will once again refer to the recent University of Minnesota raid to explain my point.

Thanks to Miyun Park from Compassion Over Killing in Washington, D.C. we all had the chance to watch the ALF's footage of their April 5th raid in its entirety, and I would like to talk about that video. In it, we mostly saw young people in their late teens or early twenties, wearing ski masks and black garb, karate-chopping through doors, spray-painting walls, damaging equipment, and placing pigeons into unventilated plastic boxes. Furthermore, the video had no sound. I presume this precaution was done for the activists' own safety. However, it only added to the clandestine, terroristic feel of the video.

This video was distributed to the media via the North American ALF Press Office. Which parts of this video do you think the media aired for public viewing? As could be expected, the media chose to show those images that made the ALF look the most violent. They were shown breaking through doors and kicking the cages around.

But there were some even more disturbing images on this video. If you noticed, the pigeons were placed by the ALF in plastic containers that had no air holes. The animal lab technician pointed this out on television news, making the ALF look ignorant towards the needs of the animals, while assuring the public that

they would never do anything so cruel.

Also, when the ALF are literally kicking and smashing cages around the room, the plastic carrying case in which they just placed the birds is only a few feet away from them. Where is the concern for these animals who are confused, scared, enduring poor ventilation—and now—are hearing loud unfamiliar crashing and banging noises just a few feet away from them? Even worse, during the time while the ALF are destroying the cages by literally kicking them across the room, in the lower left-hand corner of the screen you can see a loose pigeon who is completely vulnerable to being hit by the flying objects.

If the ALF's actions are motivated by love and compassion, then they should show that in their videos. Where is the footage of the ALF gently holding the animals, giving them water or food, or stroking the animals? Where is the footage of the post-raid veterinary care that the animals should be given to treat any problems they developed while in the lab? And where is the footage of the animals in their new loving homes, living their life free from exploitation? These are the images that the ALF need to show if the general public is to believe they care about the animals, and are not simply terrorists.

Furthermore, the ALF did not send any accompanying documentation to their spokespeople explaining what had been done to the animals in the labs and why. During the video, there is a scene where pigeon are shown to have "No Food" tags on their cages. A lot of us here at the conference assumed that these tags meant they were involved in food deprivation experiments. The ALF Press Office showed the "No Food" tags footage to the media in an attempt to expose the cruelty of the labs.

How do you think the researchers responded? Well, they explained that those tags were there to alert the technicians, who usually feed the lab

animals, to not do so, as the researchers themselves fed the animals during the course of the experiment. These studies were not food deprivation experiments, as many of us thought. It is easy for us to believe the worst and jump to conclusions, *but we need to do our homework*. It is not hard to go to a library and research the experiments, and attach the grant proposal and experimental protocol with any communiques that are sent to the ALF spokespeople. Then, at the very least, they may speak with some credibility and knowledge on the subject, instead of coming across as people who do not know what they are talking about.

Finally, the ALF video focused on the activists—not the animals. It gave the media the evidence they needed to convict the ALF for being violent, angry youth, who are ignorant of the needs of animals. The treatment of animals in labs was ignored, and made the public dialogue focused on the outrageous behaviors of the ALF activists.

So we need to ask ourselves: why did the ALF make this video? Who was their intended audience? What message were they trying to convey? More importantly, were they successful in conveying that message? How could future ALF raids be conducted and video-taped to increase the chances that a message of compassion is conveyed? If we want our direct actions to be educational in nature, then all activists—ALF or otherwise—need to be more conscientious in how we present our information.

The Hen Rescue Video

At this point, I would like to contrast the ALF's video with the video that Patty Mark, from Action Animal Rescue Team of Australia, showed us earlier today of her group's hen rescues which were conducted in the spirit of Gandhian non-violence. In her video, the main focus was on the sick and injured hens and the deplorable battery cage conditions in which they were raised.

Because the rescuers were prepared to go to jail for helping the hens, they did not conceal their faces, names or voices. The sound on the video allowed us to hear the horrible cries of the animals on the battery farm, and the rescuers' concerned voices as they described what we were seeing on the video.

The hen rescuers came across as the compassionate, reasonable, dedicated people who they are. It was apparent that they were only there to rescue animals and document the wretched conditions on the battery farm—not damage property.

When the general public sees the Animal Action Rescue Team's videos on the news, there is nothing—such as property destruction or threatening spray-paint messages—to distract them from seeing the violence that animals suffer, and the compassion of the activists. What the Action Animal Rescue Team is doing in Australia is amazing. It should serve as a model for what Gandhian non-violent direct action for animals should be.

Name-calling, Threats, & Ignorance

Getting back to the ALF, other aspects of their strategy could be significantly improved with little effort. When I acted as an ALF spokesperson, I was continually disappointed by the communiques that the ALF sent us. They were usually a few sentences long, and consisted of listing the action done (such as "3 locks glued at a McDonalds") and the location of the action. If anything else was added it was usually some grand-staging (such as "We will not stop until every animal is out of every cage") or a threat (such as "We will be back" or "Next time fire"). Communiques rarely, if ever, describe in a respectful and persuasive manner the details of the animal exploitation the activists wish to abolish. Neither do they, as would have been nice with the University of Minnesota raid, include additional factual information to support the ALF's claims of animal

torture. Rather, the communiques seemed threatening, fanatical, and juvenile.

Often the ALF's actions come across in the same way. Many ALF activists leave behind spray-painted messages that are nothing more than name-calling and threats, including: "Vivisection Scum, your time has come!" "We are watching you!" "Murderers!" and other similar phrases. With all the time ALF advocates spend claiming the ALF are non-violent, maybe the ALF should think about and take steps to ensure their actions look consistent with their supporters' claims.

Show Compassion in Your Actions

For starters, the ALF should stop using threats, name-calling, and grand-staging, while adding many doses of love, compassion, sincerity, and concern for the animals to their messages. Any spray-painted messages left at a raid should focus on the love the ALF have for animals, and not the hatred they have for the abusers. These messages could read: "Compassion for all beings," "Listen to your conscience—stop violence towards animals," "Study love, not violence," etc.

When the ALF plan an action and before they write the communique they should also consider the general public's (a.k.a. their audiences') perspective and how they will view the action. Then they can plan the raid in such a way that it communicates to the public the compassionate motives behind it. If the ALF videotape their raid, it should be choreographed so the activists look as compassionate, dignified, and non-violent as possible. They should never look like they are enjoying gratuitous property damage. Any communique written should be compassionate, professional, respectful, and accurate. It should also provide irrefutable evidence of the cruelty they oppose. Communiques should not say anything that will help the media portray the ALF as violent, ignorant, terrorists acting out their angst against

society.

On some of the earlier U.S. ALF raids, the activists would leave behind a copy of the book *Animal Liberation* by Peter Singer. This was a simple way for the ALF to show their compassion. Embodied in this gesture was the notion that the ALF had not given up hope on the animal researchers' abilities to see the error of their ways, and stop their violent practices. It was a simple thing to do, but it sent a very powerful message of compassion. The ALF of today should make similar compassionate gestures during their actions in an attempt to improve the action's educational and persuasive value.

Educate to Liberate

Many of you may be wondering, "why should the ALF care about the educational value of their actions? They only need to focus on rescuing animals and damaging property that exploits animals."

To answer this question I want to tell a story I heard from Rae Sikora, of the Center for Compassionate Living, which she told at the Humane Educators Training Conference we organized in Minneapolis last month. It's the story of the wind and the sun.

One day, a lady walked through a field with a coat on, and the wind said to the sun, "I bet I could get the coat off of her before you can." The sun took the wind up on his challenge. So the wind began to whip around her, blowing as hard as he could, trying to rip the coat off of her body. But the harder he blew, the more she clutched her coat tightly around herself, and held on to it even stronger.

After the wind had tried in vain to take off her coat, the sun interrupted and said, "let me give it a try." So the wind stopped to let the sun do his best. And the sun shined down on her, warming her up until sweat beaded off of her brow, and she promptly removed her coat. The moral of this story is that if we want to

create change all we need to do is "shine."

If we want to create change, all we need to do is shine. So how do we shine? We shine by being loving and compassionate towards both non-human and human animals. We shine by being open and honest, to ourselves and others. We shine by being passionate, dedicated, and by voluntarily making personal sacrifices for the animals who we care about so deeply. We shine by being good people who embody a consistent ethic of compassion, love and non-violence.

Another important aspect of this story to note, is that the woman *voluntarily* took her coat off. When the wind attempted to remove her coat against her will, she fought back and prevented him from doing so. This wind is a metaphor for what the ALF is trying to do: force change against the public's will. And the public responds like the woman, by fighting back and digging in their heels. That is why the ALF should think about the educational component of their actions. *Only when people voluntarily adopt a position of animal rights will they make the needed compassionate lifestyle changes we need to bring about lasting animal liberation.*

The ALF's Welfare Focus

Actually, I see the ALF as a welfare organization. Before the word "welfare" was corrupted and co-opted by those who profit from exploiting animals, it meant treating animals who have already been victimized by cruelty, neglect, and human exploitation. This would include wildlife rehabilitation centers who treated injured wildlife, animal sanctuaries who care for rescued animals, and shelters who try to help unwanted dogs and cats. Animal rights groups, on the other hand, focused on trying to prevent the problems of dog and cat overpopulation, institutionalized exploitation, and injured wildlife from happening in the first place by educating the public so they modify any harmful behaviors.

According to this traditional

definition of welfare, the ALF would be considered primarily a welfare organization. Their main goal of rescuing animals only seeks to ameliorate an existing problem, without changing the society that perpetuates the problem. This is a band-aid solution. For the ALF to halt the meat industry with these welfarist tactics, they would need hundreds of millions of activists willing to perpetually house animals and conduct liberations. Meanwhile, the public would still see no problem with eating or confining animals.

Don't get me wrong, non-violent welfare activities are crucial to helping animals who need our help. But if we hope to achieve lasting liberation for all animals, we need to focus on non-violent educational efforts. Non-violent education is what changes people's hearts and minds, and it is the only way we will make significant gains. That is why all activists need to worry about how our behaviors are perceived by the public-at-large, because they are who we need to win over to the animals' side if we ever hope to end the exploitation.

Keep Struggling!

Thank you for your patience and attention during my talk. I hope that collectively, we as a movement will police ourselves to ensure that the animals' health and well-being are our top priorities. I hope that we will be able to break through the walls of dogma and interpersonal hostilities so that we can discuss the many difficult issues that confront our movement and create solutions that will help us achieve animal liberation. I also hope that we understand the value of education and the fact that in most cases, our actions are the message, and we need to be careful that they convey a message of compassion towards all.

I also hope we all remember the importance of movement solidarity. Yes, we all disagree on strategy, tactics, and what the best way to proceed is. Despite our differences, we need to foster a mutual

respect for one another. We need to remember our shared goal to end animal exploitation as quickly as possible. We need to let this shared goal bind us together stronger than our differences can tear us apart, so we can maintain our solidarity and friendship with each other.

Finally, I want to ask each and every one of you to make a promise today. I want you to promise the animals that you will never stop being an advocate for them. This afternoon, we have talked about strategy and ways to increase our effectiveness as activists. However, if you don't remember anything else from my speech, remember this: Get active for animals.

Yes, I strongly encourage you to engage in well-thought-out, dignified, loving, respectful actions that are open, honest, and non-violent. Yes, I believe that such non-violent actions will speed the animals to the permanent victories they need. But ultimately, *we can do no greater a betrayal toward our fellow creatures than to witness their suffering and do nothing to try and stop it.*

So please take a few moments right now, and make a promise to the animals that you will continue to act as their voice and their advocate. Thank you.



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