

Brenda Shoss
“MOMMY’S A WHAAT?”

In the eyes of the government and some conservative watchdog groups-- Mommy is potential terrorist material. Please don't tell my family. They'll be very upset. Yet even under oath, I'm sure they would profess: "Yes, she can mouth-off. No, she is not a threat to homeland security."

Obsessive. Fanatic. Wacko. The ambush of adjectives against animal rights activists is old news. But a new brand of anti-AR soldier has risen from the ashes of 9/11 to tackle perceived dissent. With G.I. Joe ferocity, anti-terrorist task forces comb the countryside in search of animal rights "terrorists." According to Bob Kane of Sportsmen's and Animal Owners' Voting Alliance (SAOVA), the AR/Eco terrorists are set to abolish your right to "Enjoy a steak dinner, hunt and fish, and pet your favorite cat or dog."

Doomsday discourse is the byline of far-right groups such as SAOVA, Center for Consumer Freedom, Foundation for Biomedical Research, and National Animal Interest Alliance (NAIA)--whose members represent National Cattlemen, Rodeo, Fur Commission USA, Pharmaceuticals and others with a financial stake in animal usage. But when the respected hate-group monitor Southern Poverty Law Center issues an in-depth Intelligence Report listing my colleagues as thugs, I am compelled to ask: What is going on here?

It's beginning to look a lot like McCarthyism. Law enforcers now treat animal advocates with strategies previously set aside for drug dealers, gangsters, and violent fundamentalist sects. AR activist J. Johnson, 19, discovered his status as "Member of Terrorist Organization" when a friendly Illinois cop providing roadside assistance offered to run Johnson's license to demonstrate police technology. To the surprise of both, a screen flashed Johnson's home address and photo along with "Animal Rights Extremist" and "Domestic Terrorist."

In December 2002 the website AnimalRights.Net (subtitle: Debunking the animal rights movement) briefly posted my name and address with directions to "Please call and demonstrate against these nuts." My fellow nuts included Kevin Jonas of Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty (SHAC) and a third woman with no ties to the AR movement.

Earlier that month, Kevin and I joined 300 activists in East Millstone, New Jersey to protest Huntingdon Life Sciences, a contract laboratory that conducts animal tests to screen household cleaners, food additives, dyes, pesticides/herbicides, adhesives, and assorted pharmaceutical goods. As a speaker invited to solemnize Huntingdon's 50th Anniversary and the death of 9 million animals over half a century, I discussed the despair activists feel when they take in HLS undercover videos and journals.

The debunkers, who likely saw my biography on SHAC's website, paint a skewed portrait that vilifies the messenger rather than the message. It makes far sexier press to pit activists against "a company that uses animals to find cures for deadly diseases" (as noted in the Waterbury Republican-

American's Animal-Rights Terrorists, a report that presumably equates soap and bug spray with life-saving science) than to examine verified evidence against HLS.

In fact, HLS has acquired 32 violations of the Federal Animal Welfare Act, 16 violations of Good Laboratory Practice in England, a \$50,000 payoff to the U.S. Agriculture Department for inept record keeping, and documented animal abuse/scientific fraud in five undercover investigations.

What you won't see on the evening news is the videotape of an HLS tech who repeatedly punches a squealing beagle puppy in the face. You won't read about the noxious materials pumped into each animal's stomach for toxicity tests "only reliable 5-25% of the time," as stated in one HLS record. You won't hear about the animals who return to barren cages to seize, vomit and collapse unattended.

One former HLS employee claims animals are never anesthetized or euthanized correctly.

"[I] saw a beagle on the necropsy table. The vivisector put a knife into the animal, who threw his head back and howled... His last howls were when the leg muscles were severed."

If comparable violence were perpetrated against people or family pets, it would be classified as terrorism. But the media and anti-AR contingent rarely look inside the necropsy room or animal ward. Critics such as Wesley J. Smith of National Review Online look at the message-bearers and proclaim: "They have crossed to the dark side--animal rights terrorism."

Granted, some radical animal activists have committed serious acts of vandalism and other crimes. But the wrath isn't directed solely at them, writer Steven Zak (Who Are You Calling A Terrorist?) argues.

"Mr. Smith, for instance, condemns groups like People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals and even the moderate Humane Society of the United States."

When PETA, Physician's Committee For Responsible Medicine and Protect Our Earth's Treasures (POET) exposed veterinarian Michael Podell's botched attempt to emulate amphetamine abuse in HIV-positive drug users by pumping speed into cats infected with feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV), Dr. Steven L. Teitlebaum, president of the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology, lumped law-abiding activists into a "violent segment of the animal rights movement, whose harassment campaigns include personal attacks and death threats against scientists and their families."

AIDS and FIV have dissimilar cellular processes that render approximation to the human species baseless. Many scientists object to the use of FIV as a model for HIV. Yet Podell's \$1.68 million study for Ohio State University wasted three years subjecting cats to painful spinal taps, precarious stunts, brain probing, death and dissection.

After Podell's eventual resignation, POET searched for proof of AR violence against the vivisector. Podell had filed no police reports. When asked to authenticate "almost a dozen" death threats, he came up with one vaguely threatening email from an activist in England.

POET exercised legal tactics to reveal fraud within the tax-funded animal experimentation system. Most AR activists utilize letter campaigns, literature, media exposure and lawful protest to convey their message.

"The majority are ordinary people with families to care for and bills to pay. We are acutely aware of the unnecessary, inexcusable suffering of other species on a daily basis and we have made a commitment to help alleviate that suffering," asserts The Animal Spirit's Shell Sullivan in Rights For Animals? "I talk to people who will listen and I protest against what I believe to be wrong."

Sullivan may soon find her free-speech privileges choreographed to conform with the narrowing scope of civil-rights liberties. The courts increasingly ban demonstrations and judges reject bail money for activists. SHAC claims FBI agents allegedly threatened the life of an activist who refused to divulge information. Others have been offered cash to become informants.

Robin Webb, British press officer for the Animal Liberation Front, was arrested at the HLS demo in New Jersey for violating an injunction that ordered activists to assemble in 50-count groups. Bail was initially set at an unprecedented \$50,000 for the 57-year-old's "crime" of dashing across the grass to become person #51 outside HLS.

Such scare tactics not only stifle free speech, they are also disproportionate to the crime. At worst, AR vandalism and property damage do not rank as terrorist offenses. By equating the two, reactionaries "trivialize the real thing and insult its victims," Zak contends.

Personally, I am a mom who wishes to see her two-year-old son inhabit a more compassionate world where he is free to question the status quo. I want him to know that every political and ethical advance throughout history evolved from the unpopular few willing to take a stand.

The German activist Helmut Kaplan wrote: "Our grandchildren will ask us one day: Where were you during the Holocaust of the animals? What did

you do against these horrifying crimes? We won't be able to offer the same excuse for the second time--that we didn't know."

Just as my mother gave me the wisdom and fortitude to speak for the voiceless, I give my son the eyes to see and the words to fight back.

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