a letter from the future

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I want to share with you a letter that has fallen into my hands. It was written fifteen years in the future by a person who is totally ignorant of the changes that have gone on in those fifteen years—to a person equally uninformed.

(Editor's note: This letter was read by Professor Gearhart at an animal rights rally held on the University of California, Berkeley, campus in April, 1984)

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(To my friend Mabel in the Tibetan monastery, from Edith on leave from the monastery to travel and learn.)

Well Mabel,

You won't believe it. The whole world is transformed. I came immediately from Tibet to what I thought was the Primate Center at Davis, California, to attend what I knew would be World Day for Laboratory Animals. After all, it was April 24, wasn't it? And had we ever failed to have a rally on April 24?

But what did I find? Did I find the Primate Center? No! No Primate Center. Not even the ruins of a Primate Center. In fact, I didn't even find Davis, California. Only a big spread of adolescent trees that they now call the Sacramento Forest—a Restored Natural Habitat for Animals that stretches the width and length of the valley.

Well, right away I determined to get to the bottom of this; so, I set out for Berkeley, hoping to find some of our old Animal Rights Activists. And, indeed, I did find Eric Mills, right there in the Life Sciences Building on the U.C. campus, the one built in 1986. He was running the child-care center there (which takes up the whole ground floor of the building). All the rest of the building is devoted to a national center for the development and maintenance of animal-free methods of scientific research. It seems that when Berkeley took the big step back in 1984 and decided to go the route of "alternatives," that sort of gave permission to all the other universities across the nation to do the same thing. "You won't find a lab animal anywhere in the United States," Eric assured me.

The Life Sciences Building, by the way, is outfitted in its fundamental alternative equipment by millionaire Charles Rivers, who used to make big bucks breeding lab animals. Rivers, right after his conversion, donated from his own pocket all the equipment.

As we walked by Sproul Plaza, I was astounded to see a twenty-foot high statue of a white rat, so lifelike that I had to stop and stare. It has a wonderful plaque attached that talks about how this is a monument to all the millions of rats who have been sacrificed in the name of the Behavioral Sciences. (And another nice note: apparently, after 1990 all the Ph.D. degrees that had ever been granted for experimental work done with rats, mice, or guinea pigs in the fields of psychology were automatically revoked. Their holders have had to return to graduate school to earn their degrees all over again in more legitimate investigations of knowledge.)

Next, Eric took me across Giannelli Square to meet—you'll never guess!—Harry Harlow! Dr. Harlow, you remember, is the guy who isolated and battered all the baby monkeys just to prove that baby monkeys love their mothers. Well, there was Harlow, a completely changed man. He moved to Berkeley right after this enlightenment, and he and Dr. Edward Taub (also totally changed) are

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still raising money for restored habitats by
crawling on their hands and knees coast-to-
coast every year in penance for the suffering
they caused primates. They give speeches in
every major U.S. city. Taub has two little
rhesus monkeys that travel on his shoulders.
They won't leave him. We're not sure whether
they actually love him or are just keeping
him in line.

Then I flew to Washington, D.C., to
interview Gretchen Wyler, whose offices are
in the old Pentagon Building. What you and I
 hadn't realized is that since the U.S. De-
partment of Defense was phased out, the Pen-
tagon has been converted into the home of the
new Environmental Protection Agency, which
Gretchen heads. She is undoubtedly the most
influential of all of President Jesse
Jackson's cabinet members. Well, anyway, I
interviewed Gretchen to find out how all
these changes have taken place. She told me
with all her characteristic verve.

It all began, really, just after you and
I went to Tibet, and it's all due to a pheno-
menon called "The Big Grab." Apparently,
some fairy godmother late in 1984 decided to
give to all Animal Rights Activists the Power
of the Irresistible Hug, quite natural for
them, actually, probably because of their
frequent association with loving animals.

This meant that fighters for animal rights
became especially good at going up to stran-
gers, flinging open their arms, and embracing
them. And miraculously, everybody they em-
braced became a staunch advocate of animal
rights! Well, it didn't take our folks long
to realize what a politically powerful tool
this was, and there soon developed the "Hug-
a-Researcher" program, whereby instead of
arguing with the research establishment, our
folks just set out to corner and hug each
scientist and lab worker. Of course, some of
the scientists resisted and even ran at the
sight of an ever-loving Animal Rights Acti-
vist. You can understand why they might run,
Mabel, because by that time our folks had
begun to develop a little "Arf! Arf!" that
went along with each hug.

But nobody could escape us for long,
because we simply infiltrated their AAAS
meetings and their AMA conventions. Rumor
has it that it was our fearless leader her-
self, Virginia Handley, who finally cornered
and hugged Dr. Phyllis Dolhinow.

For a long time, of course, there was no
one who would volunteer to hug Dr. Russel De-
Valois, and they thought they might have to
pay someone to do it. But once again, Gladys
Sargent came to the rescue. She cornered him
behind his bin of dying cats and dogs,
dragged him out, and gave him not only a hug
but a huge kiss, as well. He was transformed
immediately, they say, and did his penance
for the next ten years on Greenpeace's Rain-
bow Warrior, sailing under the orders of
Captain Betsy Swart.

Well, the letter to Mabel goes on,
drawing the picture of a near-perfect world.
It's a wonderful fantasy. But we haven't yet

got the fairy godmother to give us that magic
to our hugs. (I do think, however, that we
ought to keep practicing our hugs, anyway, in
case something magical should happen!)

All we've got is what we've always had:
our rage, our reverence, our compassion, and
our commitment. I remind myself: ONE DOES
NOT NEED HOPE TO UNDERTAKE OR SUCCESS TO
PERSIST.

Even if we had no hope, which we cer-
tainly do, even if we had no success, which
we most certainly have had, will have, still
we'll undertake, still we'll persist. The
process is vital in itself—it sends energy
to the animals (I do believe that), and,
almost as important, it is vital because of
what it does for us, for our integrity.

We fight not just for animals and for
the world but for each one of our individual
selves, as well, for our own good conscience,
so that we can go to sleep at night, so we
can look ourselves in the mirror the next
day.

So, let us undertake, and let us per-
sist. On all levels, national, state, and
local, to close down these atrocities, these
blights on the conscience of the human race.

We'll be persisting all this next year,
all the rest of our lives. So, you can look
for us. We'll be coming to your door, with
big smiles, lots of buttons, and lots of
literature. And if you open your door wide
enough, with a big hug.