

GRETCHEN WYLER

The Fund For Animals
Los Angeles, California



I would definitely label myself a convert to the animal welfare movement. As a child, I had no interest in the occasional family dog, remembering neither their names nor their breeds. I had my tutus and toe shoes, and that was all that mattered. As a star of Broadway musicals in the fifties and early sixties, I draped myself in the most luxurious furs, believing that was the best way to show success.

In 1961, I purchased my first pet, after having attended an all-breed dog show, and "selecting" the breed that caught my eye--a Great Dane. This dog, CH. GRETCHEN'S KHAN OF MOUNIDANTA, became a show dog, completed his championship and was finally a Best In Show winner. For the succeeding few years, I was a stage-mother, "standing in the wings" as my prize dogs were shown. And this was my introduction to the dog world. I knew nothing about stray dogs or licensing dogs or trapping fur animals or clubbing baby harp seals. I was rather sophisticated and worldly, and yet the immense spectrum of cruelty to animals had escaped me somehow.

Then, in 1966, while shopping at a market in Warwick, New York (where I maintained a home), a woman approached me and said, "You love animals, don't you? Can't you please do something about our dog pound?" I didn't even know there was a dog pound in Warwick. But that day I visited the facility, which was located on the village dump, and found a medieval dungeon with no heat, no water, and no electricity. I was "hooked"--and immediately vowed to do something, to become "involved," to accept an unfamiliar and overwhelming challenge. I put out of my mind the show ribbons, the trophies, the red velvet mats, and entered into the frustrating and often discouraged world of animal welfare.

I perceived that the problem in Warwick was hardly unique! Like in thousands of other areas across the country, "the town"

was at fault for having failed to provide for its furry citizenry. And the people of Warwick, like people everywhere, didn't care, because they didn't know! In taking up the fight with "City Hall," I solicited help from the local humane society, which had done little over the years except to pay the local veterinarian to humanely destroy stray cats. I went to the press and media, arranged for shelter plans to be drawn, called a Town Meeting of interested people, and spoke before the town government, to make the people aware of the existing situation and to endeavor to convince them that good animal control is part of the responsibility of every good community. Finally, on October 13, 1968, the new Warwick Animal Shelter admitted its first charge!

In 1971, my horizons were broadened. The A.S.P.C.A. in New York City was being accused of mismanagement and cruelty to animals. Cleveland Amory asked me to join a coalition being organized to fight for reform of the A.S.P.C.A. A year later, in an attempt to "cool" the opposition, I was invited to sit on the A.S.P.C.A. Board of Directors--the first woman in its 106 year history--and the first member ever to be dropped! That action was precipitated by a lawsuit I had filed against my fellow board members in 1975, charging them with corporate waste and indifference to animal suffering. The litigation lasted for twenty months, at the end of which time the matter was settled out of court, to the satisfaction of the plaintiffs. Subsequently, many reforms were instituted.

In 1972, I was invited by Cleveland Amory to join the Board of Directors of The



AUTO- BIOGRAPHY

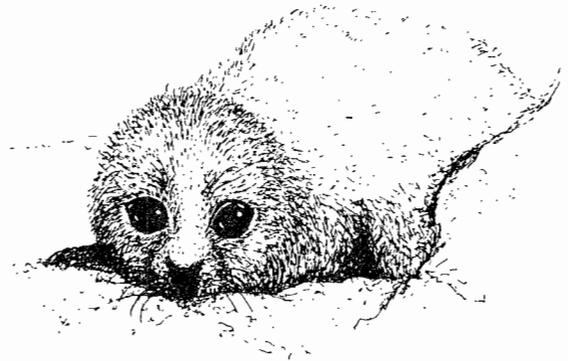
Fund For Animals, and for many years have served as the Vice Chairman of this worthy organization. New York Attorney General Louis Lefkowitz solicited me to become a member of his Advisory Committee on Animal Welfare legislation. I served in that capacity from 1974 to 1977, during which time I lobbied heavily for the New York State Dog Law which was enacted in 1980. As a direct result of this involvement, I was appointed by the Commissioner of Agriculture to serve on his department's Advisory Committee, which I did until moving to California in 1978.

One year after moving to California, I initiated work on a Resolution of Animal Rights for the State of California. Senator David Roberti introduced the Resolution and, along with other theatrical personalities, I spent many hours in Sacramento lobbying for its passage. It passed both houses of the legislature in September, 1979, and California became the first state in the world to have a resolution recognizing the rights of animals. I was honored for my work on the Resolution by being awarded the International League for Animal Rights ORDER OF NATURE AWARD on October 4, 1980.

That same year, under my stewardship, The Fund For Animals was the prime sponsor of California legislation which would permit senior citizens in public housing to retain their companion animals. The legislation was victorious. In 1981, I became actively involved in an effort which successfully repealed pound seizure in the City of Los Angeles, and then carried the fight to the state level. The Fund For Animals was prime sponsor of a California State Senate bill which would have prohibited the sale of unclaimed and unadopted pet animals from shelters for laboratory research. Despite an enormous statewide campaign, the bill was defeated in the spring of 1984.

In November of 1982, I represented the Animal Welfare Institute at the first INSTITUT JURIDIQUE POUR LA PROTECTION DES ANIMAUX in Bourdeaux, France, and in 1983, I delivered the keynote speech at the annual conference of THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION AGAINST PAINFUL EXPERIMENTS ON ANIMALS in Copenhagen, Denmark. That same year, I was honored with the HUMANITARIAN AWARD from the Los Angeles Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, as well as the VEGETARIAN ETHIC AWARD from the Vegetarian Information Service. On July 6, 1984, I was presented

the ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI AWARD for 1983 by Los Angeles City Mayor Tom Bradley. In the letter announcing my selection for the award, I was cited for "outstanding work and devotion in the field of humane treatment of animals."



I continue to serve as Vice Chairman of The Fund For Animals and, in addition, as Vice President of Beauty Without Cruelty. I also serve on the Boards of Directors of R.O.A.R. (Respect Our Animals Rights), PawPac (Political Animal Welfare Political Action Committee), American Fund for Alternatives to Animals in Research, the New York Humane Association, the Warwick Valley Humane Society, the Animal Reform Fund, the Winley Foundation, and The Elsa Wild Animal Appeal.

One doesn't rationally or intellectually select a cause. It finds you. I was shopping for dog food that December day in 1966--not for a cause. But what I found has dramatically changed my life. Show business is still what I do "for a living," but the animal rights business is what I do for my soul. From the glitter and glamour of the theatrical world to the anguish and frustration of this accelerating movement, my life is filled with challenges. At least I'll never be bored! As a veteran of eight Broadway shows, two television series, films, and countless television guest spots, the rewards have been money and applause. As one of the leading players in the intense drama to end animal abuse and exploitation, I believe there is promise of even greater rewards. We are attracting new public and media attention. The eminent cast of characters in this fight may not see total abolition of cruelty in our lifetimes, but we are setting the stage, perfecting the script and preparing to brave many critical reviews. Our show must go on--for the audience, for ourselves, and for those who inspired our drama--the animals.