



THE VIOLENCE LINK

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by Brenda Shoss

My kids thought I was a major-league nerd when I boycotted the movie "Something About Mary." But I refused to fund a flick that invited viewers to snicker over animal abuse. "It's only a movie," my husband said. "They didn't really hurt that little dog."

Maybe not, but real-life abusers do hurt animals. When Jonathan Moore and George Pettingil found a kitten in rural Arkansas, the bored twentysomethings threw the trembling calico into their back seat and later tossed her into traffic. They laughed as the bleeding kitten staggered between cars.

In Big Pine Key, Florida 18-year-old Justin Hilbish fired BB-gun pellets between the eyes of Lexus, a Labrador-Collie mix who now suffers seizures. Teenagers in Barnhart, Missouri pumped three potbellied pigs full of alcohol and bludgeoned one to death with a crowbar. A 13-year-old Lyon County, Nevada boy who carved out a dog's eyes now resides in a juvenile delinquency center. The yellow Labrador Retriever, found blind and bleeding, had to be euthanized.

"It was only an animal." Should we care about this ruthless disregard for life?

Barbara Boat, Ph.D., Director of the Program on Childhood Trauma and Maltreatment at the University of Cincinnati thinks we should. "The young men responsible for the epidemic of high-profile school shootings in Mississippi, Kentucky, Arkansas, Oregon, and Colorado all abused animals before turning their guns on fellow students." Supervisory Agent Alan Brantley of the FBI's Investigative Support Unit agrees: "You can look at cruelty to animals and to humans as a continuum. People begin to fantasize about these violent actions...The next phase is usually acting out against animals."

Violence rarely occurs in a vacuum. Roger Depue, former chief of the FBI's behavioral lab, says most of America's infamous killers, including Jeffrey Dahmer, practiced animal torture. Ted Bundy, executed in 1989 for at least 50 murders, heaped graves with animal bones. "Boston Strangler" Albert DeSalvo



ANIMAL ABUSE: A LESSON IN VIOLENCE

■ Childhood animal abuse is among the clearest and earliest diagnostic indicators of conduct disorder, often beginning as young as age six and a half. *Ascione, F. R. (2001). Animal abuse and youth violence. Juvenile Justice Bulletin.*

■ Animal abuse investigation is often a starting point of social services intervention for a troubled family. *Arkow, P. (2003). Breaking the cycles of violence: A guide to multi-disciplinary interventions. A handbook for child protection, domestic violence and animal protection agencies. Alameda, CA: Latham Foundation.*

■ Abusers kill, harm, or threaten pets to coerce children into sexual abuse or to silence them about abuse. Disturbed kids kill or torment animals to imitate their parents' behavior, to prevent the abuser from killing the pet, or to vent their hostility on another victim. *Ascione, F.R. (2005). Children and Animals: Exploring the Roots of Kindness and Cruelty. West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2005.*

■ 13% of deliberate animal abuse cases involved domestic violence. *Humane Society of the U.S., 2001.* 12 independent studies show between 18% and 48% of battered women delay leaving abusive settings due to fear for the safety of their animals. *Ascione, F. R. (2007). Emerging research on animal abuse as a risk factor for intimate partner violence. In K. Kendall-Tackett & S. Giacomoni (Eds.), Intimate partner violence (pg. 3-1 to 3-17). Kingston, NJ: Civic Research Institute.*

■ 48% of battered women state animal abuse occurred "often" during the past 12 months. Another 30% report abuse occurs "almost always." *Carlisle-Frank, P., & Flanagan, T. (2006). Silent victims: Recognizing and stopping abuse of the family pet. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.*

■ During a 2006 Animal Law Enforcement Academy workshop, San Diego, an instructor stated: 40% of persons convicted of child abuse admitted they abused animals. 30% of persons convicted of rape confessed to prior animal abuse.

■ Animal abuse is a key indicator of a seriously disturbed youth. *Ken Trump, National School Safety and Security Services.*

■ 70% of animal abusers accumulate one or more unrelated crimes and nearly 40% commit brutal crimes against people. *MSPCA-Northeastern University survey.*

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crated dogs and cats and shot arrows through the slats. Carroll Edward Cole, executed in 1985 for an alleged 35 murders, strangled a puppy before progressing to humans. Jason Massey's killing resume began with cats and dogs; at 20 he decapitated a 13-year-old girl and fatally shot her stepbrother.

Serial killers inhabit the edge of the violence spectrum. Lately, a more disturbing face appears among them. He is a young male with a history of parental neglect or abuse. Feeling powerless, he opens fire on his classroom. Nearly every young male behind the rash of high-profile shootings hurt animals before aiming weapons at students, teachers or parents. Animal abuse is often an overt clue to a troubled family. A child may harm vulnerable creatures to mimic an abusive family member. Or, struggling for control in a turbulent household, he victimizes animals to vent his anger and anxiety.

Luke Woodham, 16, mortally stabbed his mother and shot nine students. He later confessed to bludgeoning his dog Sparkle, flooding her throat with lighter fluid, and setting her neck on fire. "I made my first kill today," he wrote in his court-subpoenaed journal. "It was a loved one...I'll never forget the howl she made. It sounded almost human."

Columbine school shooter Eric Harris, 18, smashed mice with a crowbar and set them on fire. Washington D.C. serial killer Lee Boyd Malvo killed stray cats with a slingshot. Kip Kinkle, 17, bombed squirrels and burned a live cat before he shot 25 classmates and murdered his parents in Oregon. Andrew Golden and Mitchell Johnson, both 13, brutalized dogs before killing five people in an Arkansas school rampage.

In a renowned study, "Childhood Cruelty Toward Animals Among Criminals and Noncriminals," 25% of aggressive criminals confessed to five or more acts of childhood animal torture, compared to under 6% for nonaggressive criminals. Of noncriminals interviewed for the report, zero had brutalized animals.

Law enforcers typically ignore cruelty cases or treat them as secondary offenses. But the rise in adolescent crime sprees has spurred judges, prosecutors, police officers, social workers and cruelty investigators to parley reports on animal abuse, domestic violence and other crimes. Cross-disciplinary programs help authorities appraise a person's overall threat to society.

Though 43 states rate some forms of cruelty as a felony (mutilation, killing, torture, beating) — other states have no felony cruelty law or rank "lesser" crimes (first-time offense, neglect, abandonment, starvation) as misdemeanors. Officials often fail to connect cases of slain or injured animals with animal fighting, satanic practices, gang wars, or family violence. Ultimately, sentencing in animal abuse crimes may hinge upon the subjective view of judges.

For example, a Minnesota man who dumped five puppies in a trash can in below-zero weather received a \$1 fine, while a Detroit man who buried live puppies was ordered to pay \$1,800 plus court expenses, \$1,400 to the Michigan Humane Society, and \$100 to a veterinarian. He also had to undergo counseling and perform 100 hours of community service. In 1998, New York's progressive Buster's Law — named for a cat doused in kerosene and set ablaze — instituted cruelty fines as high as \$5,000 and two-year prison terms.

Psychologist Stephanie LaFarge, the nation's first expert in court-mandated animal abuse counseling, believes early intervention not only prevents animal mistreatment, but also thwarts violence against humans. Lindy Garnette, director of child/family mental health services at the National Mental Health Association contends: "Animal abuse should be universally recognized as a cry for help. Punishing a child will not stop the activity or prevent future violent behavior."

Ultimately, children learn compassion through kinship with animals. While their me-first world may not include adult-style nurturing, kids seem to have room to love animals. As a girl, I found friendship in a brown-eyed dog called Ruff. When tornado warnings forced our family into the basement, I stood guard over Jamie, my beloved guinea pig. Animals taught me commitment, empathy and trust.

When LaFarge counsels animal offenders, she brings her dog Sophie for some hands-on therapy. "We need to consider the animal's point of view," she says. "And I hope that some day, all of us will."



A LINK IN THE CHAIN OF VIOLENCE

■ The question is not WHO the victim is, but WHAT is done to him or her. Criminologists view the brutality of an act, regardless of the victim's identity, as a precursor to future violence. **Animal cruelty is a key trait in the American Psychiatric Association's criterion for conduct disorders.**

■ When the FBI profiles homicidal criminals, animal abuse is among 3 primary factors used to measure probability of a repeat offense. Serial killers and other psychopathic criminals are "the kids who never learned it's wrong to poke out a puppy's eyes." *Robert Ressler, founder of the FBI's behavioral sciences unit. Men prosecuted for animal cruelty are 5 times as likely to be arrested for other violent crimes. Prof. Frank Ascione, Utah State University.*

■ **Animal Cruelty & Arson:** "Significant predictors of violent and even homicidal behavior. The intentional burning of a live animal should be considered particularly significant as an indicator of the potential for other violent acts." *Factors in the Assessment of Dangerousness in Perpetrators of Animal Cruelty, by Randall Lockwood, Ph.D., (2006) who regularly consults for cruelty investigators, law enforcers, court officials, and mental health professionals.*

■ ASPCA's *Randall Lockwood, Ph.D.* identifies abusers who view themselves as victims and/or project blame onto others (*It was the dog's fault for bad behavior*) as "repeat offenders...resistant to intervention." Repeat occurrences within 24 hours depict predatory behavior associated with premeditated violence.

■ Violence against small, helpless or non-threatening creatures may be a precursor to assaulting children, the elderly or disabled, and other vulnerable victims. *Randall Lockwood, Ph.D., (2006).*

■ Acts of prolonged maltreatment (torture) are more indicative of a potential for repeated violence against others... Severity and intimacy of injury inflicted (e.g. stabbing, mutilating, strangling) are more significant than remote actions such as shooting or poisoning. The perpetrator views victims as objects and may torment them to exert control. *Randall Lockwood, Ph.D., (2006).*

WHAT YOU CAN DO

1.) If you witness animal abuse or neglect, call humane societies, societies for prevention of cruelty to animals (SPCAs), or animal control agencies to learn which officials enforce anti-cruelty laws. Look up your state's cruelty statutes online. Be prepared to educate law enforcers who may be unfamiliar with anti-cruelty laws.

SEARCH ANIMAL LAWS & PROPOSED LEGISLATION BY STATE:
www.animallaw.com/LawSearch.cfm

2.) Record evidence (dates and times) to present to appropriate legal authorities. If feasible, photograph abuse and gather written testimonies from witnesses. Keep copies of all documentation. Be persistent and willing to help in investigations.

3.) Animal Legal Defense Fund (ALDF), a nonprofit organization of over 700 attorneys, works to convict animal abusers with maximum penalties. Contact ALDF for support in a case: ALDF National Headquarters • website: www.aldf.org
170 East Cotati Avenue • Cotati, CA 94931 • 707-795-2533 • info@aldf.org

4.) Write state legislators and district prosecuting attorneys to demand maximum penalties for animal abusers. Your letter might begin: "As your constituent, I encourage you to vigorously enforce anti-cruelty laws in our community. In the next election, my vote will go to candidates who prosecute animal abusers to the fullest extent under the law..."