

For the Love of Animals

The Story of
The National Humane Education Society

By Anna C. Briggs

As told to
Constance Clark
And Sharon Barnes

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Dedication

This book is lovingly dedicated to the memory of my husband, James P. Briggs, who joyfully devoted his life to helping “all creatures great and small.” May the work of The National Humane Education Society continue his tradition of compassion for many years to come.

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CHAPTER 1

The Importance of a Single Starfish

In a deserted alleyway, a young dog hunts for food, pawing through garbage cans for any scrap that might keep hunger—and starvation—at bay. Dropped by careless owners by the side of a highway when he became “too much trouble,” the dog is fighting to survive.

His paws bleed, scratched by shards of glass and sharp metal. He finds little to eat, only some old scraps that even a dog would not choose to eat, were there any choice.

As the night darkens, he hunts for shelter, a place where the wind might not find him. Under a car, perhaps. Or behind a row of garbage cans. There is no welcoming door to open for him, as there used to be before the day his owners loaded him in the car and left him on the side of the road.

There is nothing but fear and blackness and cold.

Chances are he will lose his battle to survive before winter is out. This beautiful creature, not much more than a puppy, will die alone, frightened, and betrayed by the humans who were responsible for him.

In a research lab, bright, highly educated young men and women are preparing to perform surgery. They will soon sedate the frisky young kitten now held in the trembling hands of a laboratory technician. Though the technician has been working here for several months, she can't get used to seeing beautiful, healthy young animals used for experiments—especially when she knows that many of these experiments are unnecessary, redundant, or not particularly accurate.

But she needs the job. And her bosses don't seem to have any qualms about what they're doing. She hands over the kitten. She knows what they will do to her.

Quietly crying, the laboratory technician leaves the room.

Trusting and playful, the kitten taps the surgeon's finger with her little paw. Then the needle enters her body, and the process begins...a process that will destroy her healthy young body...a process that will result in a life of intense pain, all in the name of science.

I am sorry to have to tell you these stories.

Unfortunately, they are true. And they happen over and over again, all across America, every day of every year.

To give you just one example of the scope of this tragedy, authorities estimate that 10 million puppies and kittens are put to death each year, simply because people do not spend the time or money to spay or neuter their animals. [Today, the estimate is

closer to 5 million. Although this figure represents progress, it is hardly a comfortable statistic for a society that wishes to consider itself humane.]

Ten million innocent, lovely animals—who did not ask to be born. And who ask only for a little love, a little caring. Yet, because their numbers are so very great, we cannot give it to them.

Then there are the animals who suffer in research labs...in the so-called “factory farms”...in cruel steel traps in the depths of our great forests...in tiny wire-mesh pens on “fur ranches,” where wild animals like fox must submit to the misery of a whole life of entrapment, just so their luxurious coats can eventually be ripped from their lifeless bodies.

It is tragic, isn't it? And the problems seem so large they're almost overwhelming.

But I refuse to allow myself to be overwhelmed. That is why I have worked to protect and save animals since I was old enough to make any difference at all. That is why I founded The National Humane Education Society (NHES). And that is why, at age 80, I have no intention of slowing down. [I am 98 years old and I continue my presence at NHES.]

Every one of us, in our own unique way, can make a difference in the lives of animals. We cannot let despair get in the way.

Please let me share with you a story that sums up my philosophy.

One day an old man was walking along the beach. It was low tide, and the sand was littered with thousands of stranded starfish that the water had carried in, then left behind. The man found himself walking carefully so as not to step on any of the beautiful creatures. Since the animals still seemed to be alive, he considered picking some of them up and putting them back in the water, where they could resume their lives.

The man knew the starfish would die if left on the beach's dry sand. He reasoned that he could not possibly help them all, so he chose to do nothing.

“That's just Nature's way,” he thought to himself a little sadly, then walked on.

Soon he came upon a little boy who was frantically throwing one starfish after another back into the sea.

The old man stopped. “Young man,” he said, “what are you doing?”

“I'm saving the starfish,” the boy said.

“Why waste your time?” the old man argued. “There are so many, you can't save them all. So what difference does it make?”

The boy stopped for just a few seconds, then bent to pick up another starfish.

“It matters to this one,” he said, and hurled the starfish into the welcoming sea.

You and I are only human. We can only do so much. And it's absolutely true that neither you nor I can save all the abandoned animals, all the animals being tortured unnecessarily in research labs, all the animals subjected to the cruelty of trappers, hunters, and factory farmers.

But we *can* help a few animals, you and I.

Maybe you can do something as small as giving a modest donation to a humane group like NHES, so we can continue to feed and care for the animals we house at our Peace Plantation facility in Walton, New York, and our Briggs Animal Adoption Center in Charles Town, West Virginia.

Or maybe you can take in a stray animal...write a letter to your Congressman...or volunteer your time at a local shelter.

Right now, I'd like to ask you to do something important for the animals by reading this book.

When you do, you will get to know the dangers facing animals today. You will understand why our work at NHES is so important, and why I've devoted my life to it. And you will be able to decide how best you might do something for the innocent animals who ask only that we allow them to live their lives unhindered by our human cruelty.

You can play a part in making the world a better place for animals. I invite you to join me on this important journey by reading this book and taking whatever steps you can take on behalf of cats and dogs, fox and rabbits, and yes, even the great wild beasts now disappearing from the face of our planet—the lions, elephants, tigers, and so many other magnificent creatures.

Does it matter? It certainly does. Even if it's only one lowly starfish.