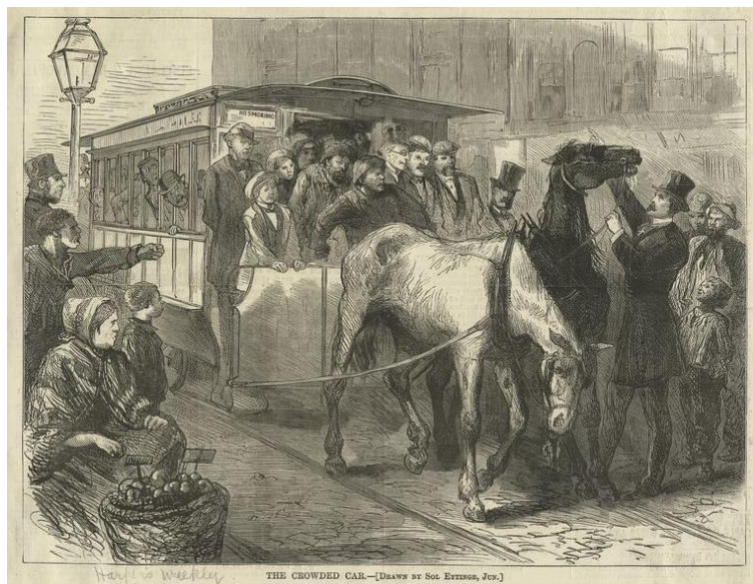


Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow: Animal Sheltering in the United States

Nathan Winograd

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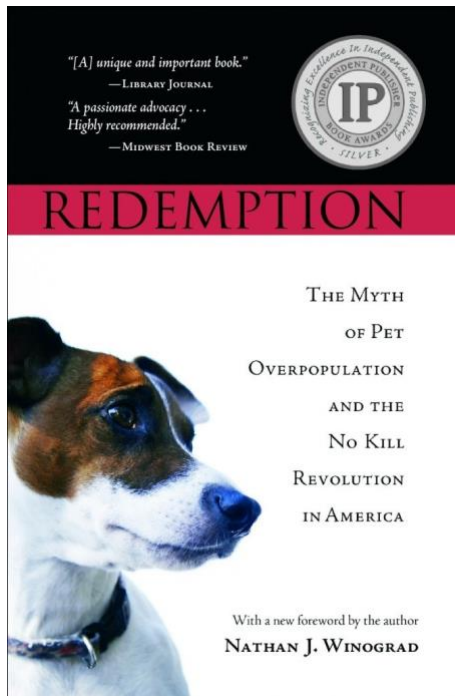
Part 1: Regarding Henry. The birth and betrayal of the humane movement in America.



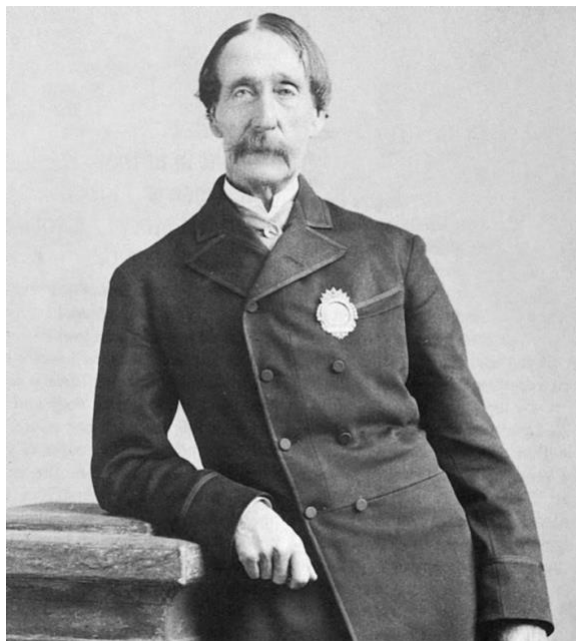
I recently published several articles and podcasts about [how some groups have abandoned their No Kill mission](#) and are now successfully [encouraging others to do the same](#). Concerned about the increasing betrayal of No Kill ideals by organizations that grew influential and wealthy by championing that very cause, this is part one of a series that will serve both as a refresher on the history and principles of No Kill, as well as provide a roadmap for the future.

Although a tremendous amount of progress has been made since the publication, 13 years ago, of my first book, [Redemption: The Myth of Pet Overpopulation and the No Kill Revolution in America](#), and though millions of animals who would have once faced death when entering their local shelter now find instead a helping hand and a new beginning, our work is far from over. In fact, at the very moment we have achieved unprecedented progress — an achievement that has been called “the single biggest success of the modern animal protection movement” — there are those who would have us abandon the very means that have proven so transformative in shelter after shelter in America, rather than double down on those efforts until every single animal in every single shelter is guaranteed the same.

Explaining how this tragic crossroads has come to pass, what we can do to stop this backsliding, and what future we should be striving for are the goals of this series of podcasts; a series that starts with a story, as I explained in *Redemption*, that should serve as our movement's true North: the founding of the American animal protection movement in the second half of the 19th century by the late, great, visionary Henry Bergh.



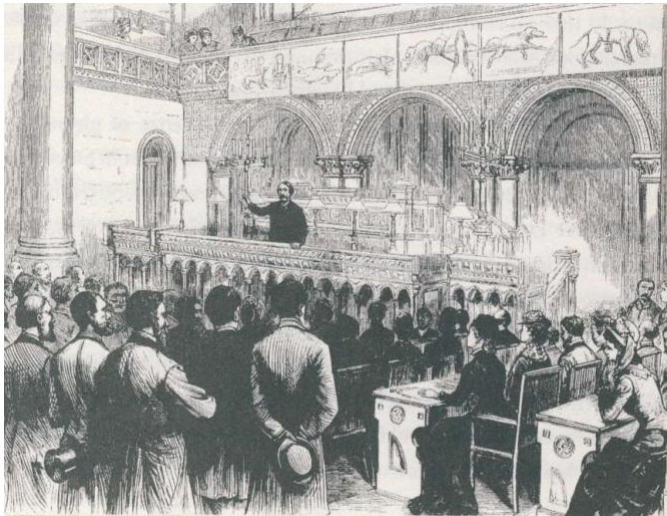
To those who read *Redemption* or seen [the documentary based on the book](#), Henry Bergh needs no introduction. To those who haven't, Henry Bergh launched the humane movement in North America.



After he succeeded in chartering the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals — the nation's first SPCA — in 1866 and then passing an anti-cruelty law shortly thereafter, he put a copy in his pocket, and took to the streets *that very night* — and every single night thereafter for the remainder of his life — to help animals and punish violators. The annals of the ASPCA describe the first such encounter:

The driver of a cart laden with coal is whipping his horse. Passersby on the New York City street stop to gawk not so much at the weak, emaciated equine, but at the tall man, elegant in top hat and spats, who is explaining to the driver that it is now against the law to beat one's animal.

Whether fighting for the rights of horses, opposing hunting, trying to clean up slaughterhouses, or protecting stray dogs, Bergh's ASPCA grew in both scope and influence. In a very short period of time, cities across North America had used the ASPCA as a model for their own, independent humane societies and SPCAs, and the numbers continued to grow.



Although he is not a very well-known figure, we and the animals owe him a great deal. Every humane society that stands up for animals; every animal protection group that gives voice to the voiceless; and the millions of animals who have been saved thanks to the efforts of activists and advocates, are a living legacy to his life. Bergh was one of the first Americans to begin weaving the ideals of animal protection into our jurisprudence, the American psyche, and the fabric of American life.

His influence cannot be overstated, but even during the course of his life, Bergh saw trouble ahead. Indeed, Bergh often worried about the future of the ASPCA, stating, "I hate to think what will befall this Society when I am gone." It didn't take long for Bergh's worst fears to come true. Shortly after his death, and against his express instructions, the ASPCA traded in its mission of protecting animals from harm for the role of killing them by agreeing to run the dog pound — something that Bergh rejected during his lifetime: "This Society," he once wrote, "could not stultify its principles so far as to encourage the tortures which the proposed give rise to."

In fact, Bergh's answer was the opposite: "Let us abolish the pound!" But after his death, the ASPCA capitulated and took over the pound, becoming New York City's leading killer of dogs and cats. It was a terrible mistake, one emulated by humane societies and SPCAs nationwide, with devastating results.

Unwilling to harm the animals they were supposed to be protecting, animal lovers fled these groups, and bureaucrats and opportunists with no passion for animals or for saving their lives took them over, paving the way for the crisis of uncaring and killing that would define these organizations for well over a century. What began as a nationwide network of animal protection groups devolved into dog and cat pounds whose primary purpose became, and in too many communities remains, killing animals, even when those animals are not suffering. And the mighty ASPCA, once a stalwart defender of animals,

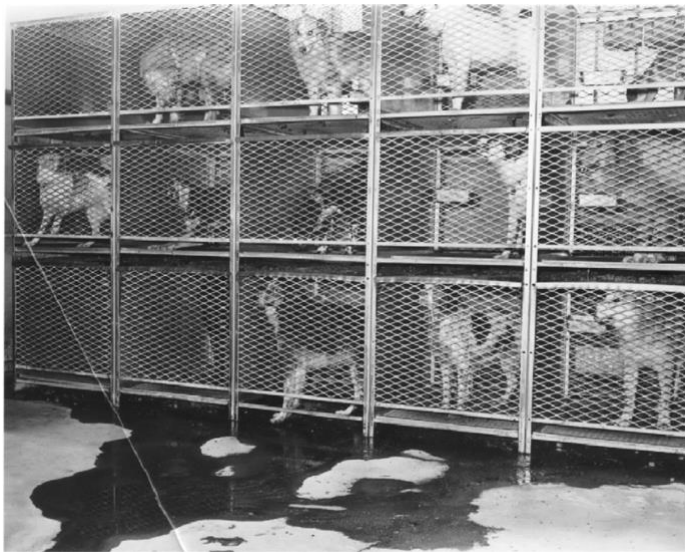
became a stalwart defender of killing them, beholden not to animals or furthering their best interest, but to a ruthless fundraising machine enriching itself and its leadership at the expense of its founding mission.

When the early founders of the animal protection movement died and their organizations took over the job of killing those they had been formed to protect, a fiery zeal was replaced with a smoldering ember that gave little light or warmth and the humane movement went to sleep. People like the tirelessly devoted Henry Bergh were replaced with individuals who care so little for animals as to allow tremendous cruelty and killing to continue unabated, even when they could use the power their positions afford, and the tremendous wealth of their organizations, to stop it.

But after over 100 years of this antiquated and deadly paradigm, the grassroots of the animal protection movement finally woke up and fought back, demanding and winning No Kill solutions, a topic we will turn to in part two of this series.

Part 2: A House of Cards Divided: The fight for the heart and soul of America's animal shelters.

I recently published several articles and podcasts about how some groups have abandoned their No Kill mission and are now successfully encouraging others to do the same. Concerned about the increasing betrayal of No Kill ideals by organizations that grew influential and wealthy by championing that very cause, I have embarked on a podcast series that will serve both as a refresher on the history and principles of No Kill, as well as provide a roadmap for the future.



In part one, Jennifer and I recount the 1866 founding of the American animal protection movement in New York City by Henry Bergh, who incorporated the nation's first SPCA. We discuss the values that compelled him to advocate for *all* animals regardless of species or regardless of who was responsible for inflicting harm to them. Beneficiaries of Bergh's compassion and determination included working dogs and horses, animals killed for sport or exploited for entertainment, animals in slaughterhouses, animals tortured for medical experimentation, and frequently, the city's cruel dogcatchers.

At the end of that podcast, we recount how the ASPCA took over the pound contract in New York City following Henry Bergh's death and against his wishes. As a result, it began a century of squandering not

only his life work, but more significantly, the ASPCA's vast potential. As other SPCAs and humane societies followed suit, Bergh's ideal of a humane agency founded to save the lives of animals was replaced with shelters across the country whose primary purpose was killing animals, whether or not they are suffering. Within a very short period of time, they collectively became the leading killers of dogs and cats in America.

How was it that organizations focused on the rights of all animals became some of the largest inflictors of harm to them?

In part two, we discuss how these organizations tried to reconcile this contradiction by creating the fiction that killing by shelter employees was not just a unique exception to the rule that animals should not be subjected to violence, but even more disturbing, that shelter killing was itself a form of animal advocacy; a kindness.

We explain how illogical and therefore vulnerable to scrutiny this tenet actually was, likening it to a house of cards that would fracture under the various stressors that would repeatedly test its moral and structural integrity throughout the coming century.

The first test came to a head in the 1950s when the battle over pound seizure (sending animals from pounds to animal research laboratories) exposed the degree to which many of those working at these so-called "animal protection" organizations had become so divorced from their founding missions that they were willing to sell animals to be tortured for profit.



The second occurred in the 1970s, when cultural headwinds transformed dogs and cats into beloved family members, requiring additional and equally absurd philosophical scaffolding to obfuscate their betrayals from an increasingly concerned American public.

And the third occurred in the 1990s when The San Francisco SPCA embraced common-sense alternatives to pound killing and brought the death rate to the lowest of any urban community in the U.S., launching the modern No Kill movement and provoking a backlash from the traditional sheltering establishment that was threatened by that success.



As young, 20-something animal rights advocates working and volunteering at several Bay Area animal protection organizations in the 1990s, Jennifer and I ran head long into the serious dysfunction that had come to dominate animal sheltering, and the animal protection movement as a whole.

Those experiences would come to influence the course of our personal and professional lives to this very day, including the fight to protect cats in California that brought us together. They would also ultimately set the stage for moving our kids, dogs, and over 20 cats across the country to create the nation's first No Kill community.

Part 3 — All of Them: No Kill moves from the theoretical to the real.

This is Part 3 of what is shaping up to be a 5-part series Jennifer and I call, “Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow.” In it, we’ve done a sweep of animal sheltering in the United States, starting with Part 1: the movement’s founding by the late, great Henry Bergh and the betrayal of his animal rights vision.

In Part 2, we discuss a series of internal conflicts that occurred in the 20th century and led to a highly dysfunctional series of pounds we euphemistically called “animal shelters” but which were little more than slaughterhouses. That’s the broken system Jennifer and I inherited and began to challenge when we joined the animal protection movement in the 1990s.



Nathan Winograd, as director of the Tompkins County, NY, shelter, with feline friend (2001).

We were inspired by the great success The San Francisco SPCA was having with a new and revolutionary approach to animal sheltering that brought deaths in the city to all-time lows. Sadly, when the city was but a whisper away from achieving the nation's first No Kill community, [new leadership at The SF/SPCA began to dismantle the programs and services that made its success possible](#), causing me to leave the organization in search of a different community upon which that honor could be bestowed.



Buildings do not create No Kill communities; programs do. The nation's first No Kill community had an animal shelter that was little more than a converted house. After it was successful, it built a state-of-the-art adoption center.

In Part 3, we tell the story of the creation of that first No Kill community in Tompkins County, New York, after I was hired to lead the local SPCA. We discuss the subsequent founding of [The No Kill Advocacy Center](#), our organization, the publication of [Redemption](#), my book and [later film](#) and the resulting [national tours for both](#). Finally, we conclude with the national No Kill Conference that brought

together thousands of rescuers, volunteers, attorneys, directors, veterinarians, legislators, and reform activists from across the country.

These efforts seeded the [No Kill Equation model of sheltering](#) nationwide — efforts that would result in the explosion of No Kill communities throughout the nation, saving millions of lives in the process.



This podcast is much more personal than the others given our intimate involvement in spreading the model, but one anecdote captures it best.

When I ran the Tompkins County shelter, I had a love-hate relationship with empty cages. Love; because it meant animals were getting adopted and I had a place to put animals as they came in. Hate; because an empty cage meant a lost opportunity to rescue an animal from another shelter that did not embrace the No Kill philosophy like we did.

Although I once called a kill shelter in a neighboring county and told them they could bring me cats — 20 or 30 of them — no one working there was willing to make the drive. We were told “it was too far.” Tragically, it wasn’t “too far” for the chair of the shelter’s Board of Directors who did make the drive to ask me in person to stop promoting our shelter as No Kill because it was making them look bad. It was so much easier just to kill them.

When they refused to bring cats, I sent my staff to go and get them. While it was gratifying to save those cats, it was often difficult for my staff to leave some cats behind, knowing what their fate would be. So one day, my manager stopped leaving cats behind. When the van pulled into our parking lot and the intake team went out to retrieve the cats, I asked her how many cats she took from the shelter.

“All of them,” she said.

With time, a curious and beautiful thing happened to that shelter. The pressure they were under as a result of our success meant that eventually, instead of us taking their cats, they took our staff. My shelter manager and dog behaviorist went to work for them and some of our volunteers did, too. They became the second No Kill community in the region.

This is one of many such stories we share in this podcast — stories which not only show the strength of love and compassion that exists for animals in every community, but how profound and rapid change can occur when shelters truly commit themselves to their mission statement through concrete action.



Riley, our daughter, helped Jennifer and I socialize some of the 49 foster kittens I brought home from the shelter my first summer in Tompkins County (2001).

Part 4 — A glass half full and half empty: we’ve made tremendous progress but we still have a long way to go.



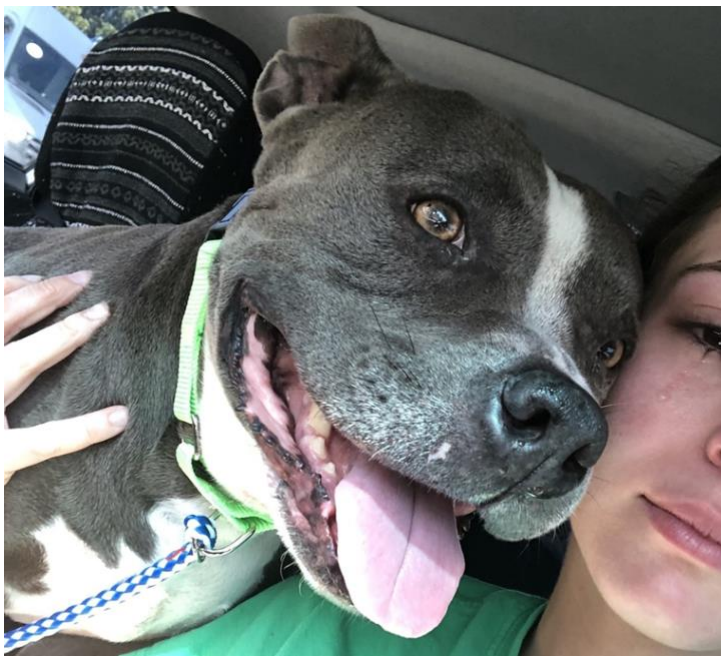
In Part 1, we discussed the founding of our movement in the mid-19th century by Henry Bergh who incorporated the first SPCA and how his vision of a society dedicated to animals — *all animals* — gave way to a network of humane societies who became the leading killers of dogs and cats in America to the detriment of every other part of their platforms. It was the movement's original sin, a great betrayal which continues to reverberate to this day.

In Part 2, we discussed the internal battles that occurred throughout the 20th century between those who wanted to hold these organizations to a larger animal rights/animal protection mission – goals that included keeping animals in these pounds from ending up in laboratories to be experimented on – and those who viewed the animals in their pounds as a source of desired revenue. By the time Jennifer and I entered the movement in the 1990s, the regressive forces thoroughly won out. But there was hope, as one city recaptured its roots.

In Part 3, we discussed how we moved our family from the San Francisco Bay Area to Western New York so that I could take over as director of an animal control shelter, creating the first No Kill community in the U.S. We then discussed efforts to spread that model nationwide with the founding of [The No Kill Advocacy Center](#).

This is where we find ourselves, as we take stock of where we are now: deaths are at an all-time low, more people are turning to adoption and rescue, older animals in the twilight of their lives are the fastest growing pet demographic in America, geriatric veterinary medicine is extending both the quantity and quality of pet lives, and collectively we're spending \$100B every year on their care. That's the good news. But, unfortunately, it is not the only news.

As our movement has become more successful, it is also facing increasing threats from vested interests, from corrupting influences, and from pedestrian flaws of human nature. What those threats are and how we can overcome them is the topic to which we turn to in Part 4, but here is just one example. When a Good Samaritan found a dog tied up and abandoned, she tried to take the dog to the Miami-Dade shelter. Pound staff, however, told her to [“put \[him\] back where you found it, and hopefully it'll go back home.”](#)



“How am I gonna just put [him] back in the middle of the street? I’m not gonna do that. I was sobbing because I didn’t know where to take this dog.”

The City pound “confirms that the shelter has instructed people who find stray animals on the streets to leave them in the area where they discovered them.” They are following the advice of Austin Pets Alive model provides very little support to people who find stray dogs. Sometimes it also goes by the

name [“community sheltering”](#) but that, too, is a euphemism for [“no sheltering,”](#) putting the onus on others to do the job they already pay animal shelters to do. Instead, the APA program encourages shelters to close their doors to stray and owner-relinquished animals – or, [in their own words](#), “Intakes of healthy strays and owner surrenders doesn’t exist anymore” and there is “No kennel space for rehoming, stray hold or intake.”

And that is what Miami Dade Animal Services did.

That is also what El Paso Animal Services did with a little dog named Nesa. Following the advice of Austin Pets Alive, the El Paso pound turned the Good Samaritan who found her away and told him to release her back on the street. He did. It turned out she had a microchip and had the pound done its job and offered her safe haven, she would have been reclaimed from the shelter. In response to Nesa’s killing, the city of [El Paso canceled the HASS program](#) and Austin Pets Alive quietly scrubbed their name as a partner from their website.



Nesa was found dead on an El Paso, TX, street, but her death had its genesis over 500 miles away at the headquarters of Austin Pets Alive.

Nesa cannot be rendered invisible. She cannot be thought of as faceless. And she cannot be forgotten because she mattered. And she is not alone – others will share her fate because it is not surprising (indeed it is entirely predictable) that those embracing HASS are some of the most regressive pounds in the country: Miami-Dade, Memphis, and Los Angeles among them.

And why wouldn't they? Austin Pets Alive’s program is not just a dangerous bait and switch, but an existential threat to the No Kill movement and even animal sheltering itself. It is a cynical ploy meant to redefine failure and the abandonment of animals as success and to defy the public’s humane expectation that their tax and philanthropically-funded animal shelters have a moral duty to provide care for the neediest and most vulnerable dogs, cats, and other animal companions in our communities.

As to the dog in Miami, through tears, the finder said, “How am I gonna just put [him] back in the middle of the street? I'm not gonna do that.” Had she followed the cruel tenet of the HASS program he might have shared Nesa’s fate.

We have indeed come so far, but we still have a long way to go.