

The Short Life and Tragic Death of Bowie
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January 2023

Animals killed by Los Angeles County pound despite rescue interest



Bowie

On November 10, 2022, a little 10-pound terrier named Bowie was surrendered to the Los Angeles County Department of Animal Care & Control (LACDACC), the pound run by Marcia Mayeda. The family informed staff that they could not keep him because of their landlord's no-pet policies.

Bowie was terrified, but while he sat at the shelter for over three weeks in one of the country's wealthiest and most cosmopolitan communities, no one on staff socialized him. No staff member tried to get him out of his shell. No one showed him the compassion and kindness that studies prove make a life-and-death difference for fearful dogs, like Bowie. According to a LACDACC insider who spoke to me on condition of anonymity,

People here don't do the things they are supposed to do, like make sure animals who need it get their medication or follow up with people calling to adopt. They will not do things they do not have to, like work with scared dogs to get them ready for adoption. It is just easier to kill them.

Bowie sat in Building 3, locked away from public view, in a cage by himself. Still, Bowie had an out. A rescue group came forward to give Bowie what staff at LACDACC would not: safe harbor and time — time to abandon fear, to forget a haunted past, and to learn that humans can be trusted after all. Most importantly, they offered to provide him with a loving home. It would be of no use. The same day that rescuers expressed interest in Bowie, LACDACC had killed him without warning.

Instead of a new beginning, the little dog who should have had his whole life ahead of him, who posed no threat to anyone, was injected with an overdose of poison and turned to ash. He was barely 15 weeks old.

Knowing and deliberate



When community outrage erupted over Bowie's killing, Mayeda and her team tried to assure the public that they "deeply regret[ted]" the puppy's death. Maria Rosales, the manager of LACDACC's Baldwin Park facility, which killed Bowie, called it a mistake. It was a lie.

Records obtained under the Freedom of Information Act show that two staff members knowingly and deliberately scheduled Bowie to be killed by claiming that he was dangerous — each of them writing, "I have personally verified and therefore, recommend based on the criteria stated in OPK 120, that this animal is eligible for PTS."

PTS — meaning "Put to Sleep" — is a euphemism for killing. OPK 120 is the policy that authorizes the killing of animals alleged to have "a behavioral or temperamental defect that could pose a health or safety risk or otherwise make them unsuitable for placement as a pet." According to Mayeda, policy dictates that animals be killed for the following criteria: "severe injury, untreatable illness, or dangerous/wild temperament."

According to his records, Bowie was neither injured nor ill. Instead, he was deemed dangerous. A prior whistleblower told me that mislabeling like this "happens a lot," something confirmed by the current LACDACC insider: "[OPK 120] is not used to save animals as [LACDACC] pretends. It is the excuse used to kill them." In other words, killing Bowie was *intentional*. And it is nothing new.

Under Mayeda, LACDACC has been rampant with neglect, abuse, and systematic killing. Animals have been starved to death, cats have contracted panleukopenia because they were not given an examination, treatment, or vaccinations on intake, animals have been left with torn ears and gouged eyes without rehabilitative care, and animals have been warehoused in filthy conditions. There's more: staff physically assaulting animals and staff clocking in and then going home, getting paid for sleeping on the clock, while animals are left in need.

Same outcome, different animal

Indeed, not long ago, Mr. Pickles was likewise surrendered by his family to LACDACC. He, too, was a baby: only 1½ years old. Although initially scared, Mr. Pickles turned out to be very sweet, rubbing up against the bars of his cage when volunteers or staff walked by and calling out to them with a soft meow. He was so pliable that a volunteer put Mr. Potato Head glasses on him, caressed his soft orange face, and snapped his photo to show others how cute he was.



Mr. Pickles

A volunteer also took a video of Mr. Pickles meowing for attention and rubbing against the bars of his cage. She saw that despite being labeled “feral” — a death sentence because LACDACC does not have a community cat sterilization program — Mr. Pickles was social with people, as if the colorful collar and little orange bell that he was surrendered with weren’t enough of a giveaway. She had hoped the video would get him moved to the adoption room. Others did, too; one of them writing in large block letters on his cage card: VERY SWEET CAT. It, too, would be of no use.

Like Bowie, Mr. Pickles was killed. And like Bowie, he was labeled “unadoptable.”

Using *identical* language to Bowie, staff wrote: “I have personally verified and therefore, recommend based on the criteria in OPK 120, that this animal is eligible for PTS.” *Cut, paste, and poison.*

From bad to worse



Zephyr arrived healthy at LACDACC



At LACDACC, Zephyr became sick, stopped eating, and lost significant weight. Although antibiotics were prescribed, none were given, and staff claimed not to notice she stopped eating, even though her food remained untouched for several weeks.



*Zephyr was found dead in her kennel **by a rescuer**. A necropsy revealed she died of pneumonia and marked emaciation.*

Despite inquiries into the killing of Mr. Pickles, Bowie's subsequent death proves nothing changed. Indeed, Mr. Pickles' killing occurred after prior Board of Supervisors inquiries into other scandals, including, for example, Zephyr, a 10-month-old puppy who died while in the custody of LACDACC.

A necropsy revealed the cause of Zephyr's death as pneumonia, with "marked emaciation" (starvation). Zephyr was not given medication for her illness, and staff claimed no one noticed that she was not eating (as she was housed alone, the food bowls would have been untouched). Although she entered the facility healthy, she died in her filthy kennel, on a cold, concrete floor where she was found *by a rescuer*.

And so, despite yet another Board of Supervisors inquiry demanding answers for Bowie, nothing will change now either. In fact, things are getting worse. With the blessing of the Board of Supervisors, Mayeda has enacted three policies to allow staff neglect and abuse to remain unchecked and to allow the killing of more animals.

First, LACDACC decided it would kill dogs, like Bowie, under OPK 120 for behavior, even in those cases where rescue groups are willing to save and rehabilitate them, a policy that is illegal, being challenged, and making its way through the court system.

Second, except for very limited hours in the afternoon, LACDACC does not allow the public to visit county shelters to look for and reclaim lost pets, adopt new ones, rescue them from death, or play with the animals unless those individuals have scheduled an appointment to do so. (Tragically, LACDACC has been given political cover to do this by Best Friends Animal Society and the ASPCA, which are encouraging other shelters to adopt similar policies.)

For animals, visitors mean stimulation, walks, protection from abuse, and finding homes. At the same time, the "appointment only" policy reduces their chance of being adopted, which is a death sentence in a regressive shelter like LACDACC. According to a shelter watchdog and critic of the new policy, "At Los Angeles County Animal Care and Control, numerous people complained about the shelter not returning their calls when they tried to make adoption 'appointments.'"

Third, LACDACC implemented Human Animal Support Services. Under HASS, shelters leave lost, abandoned, and stray animals on the streets to whatever fate might befall them. Because they don't enter the shelter, staff do not have to care for them or find them homes. The purpose is to inflate placement rates, even though the result across the country is that kittens have been left on sidewalks and dogs have been found dead in alleyways.

Inquiries but no solutions

As long as Mayeda remains at the helm and staff are not held accountable for results, this kind of malfeasance will continue. And members of the Board of Supervisors know it. And they know it because despite the endless cycle of neglect, abuse, and killing, followed by community outrage and Board inquiries, it *has* continued.



A rabbit furiously tries to drink water from an empty container at LACDACC. Several years ago, a volunteer found a rabbit in a back room outside of public view with an exposed spine being cannibalized by other rabbits. Also discovered in the cage was a dead rabbit, his decomposing body covered with flies, and another rabbit with an eye popping out of his socket being attacked by the others. None of these animals had food or water. “Shelter” employees claimed to be unaware of these conditions, even though they were required to clean the cages daily.

That doesn't mean things can't change. It doesn't mean that cats like Mr. Pickles, dogs like Bowie and Zephyr, and all the other animals abused and killed by Mayeda's team — such as the rabbits who starved to the point of cannibalizing one another because staff “forgot” to feed them — can't be treated with compassion, provided hygienic environments, given nutritious food, clean water, prompt and necessary veterinary care, socialization and, most important of all, new homes instead of lethal injections.

They can.

And I do not doubt that, eventually, they will. When?

When the Board of Supervisors fires Mayeda and her managers and passes a law making the alternative illegal.