

A Vegan Behind the Scenes of the Envigo Beagle Rescue

From [Karen Asp, MA, CPT, VLCE, Main Street Vegan](#)

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Photo credit: Karen Asp

Remember the [historic rescue of almost 4,000 beagles from Envigo](#) last summer? I was one of the volunteers who transported some of the beagles from a future destined for a research lab to one of freedom. I can guarantee everybody involved was moved by the experience, but with my vegan lens, the rescue took on greater meaning.

The four of us on this mission from [Humane Fort Wayne](#) didn't know what to expect. All we knew was to arrive at Envigo on a Thursday morning, with no guarantee of getting any of the 25 beagles we've agreed to take. And using cameras or cell phones on the property could jeopardize everything.

That morning we parked at the end of an unidentified road amongst lush forest, with a massive grassy area surrounded by a menacing fence with "no trespassing" signs around its perimeters. If we were to drive three minutes past the fence, we would reach the plant (so says Google) where hundreds of dogs were abused, something an undercover PETA investigation exposed. While animal testing is legal in all but nine states, *Envigo* violated the Animal Welfare Act, which triggered the beagle release.

There are eight rescues here, and we are all anxious. That's somewhat quelled when the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) briefs us, noting that roughly 400 beagles are being freed today. The surprise? HSUS staff will drive our vehicles to the plant to load the beagles into crates we've set up in our vans (oh, to be a fly on the wall).

At 8 a.m., the first vehicles go back. An hour later, HSUS comes for ours.

I'm too distraught to be around anybody so I sit alone by the fence. I watch a waste management truck enter and my mind wanders to dark places. I think about the dogs who never made it out, those who are being freed, and the estimated 60,000 dogs, plus thousands of other animals in other breeding facilities and research labs. An odd mix of emotions hits me, and I don't know if I'm crying because of grief or happiness.

Forty minutes later, HSUS returns with our vans, 16 beagles in one and nine in another. We're asked to quickly leave the property, so we drive to the nearest gas station to regroup. The "packing list" reveals they're all males born between March and April 2021. Their "names" are six-letter combinations tattooed in green ink under their left ear. Each beagle has meticulous vaccine records signed by a veterinarian who obviously forgot his oath to protect animals.

When I step into the van to see them, their eyes are wide, their bodies velcroed against their crates. Many are drooling, most shivering with fear. This is their first time out of the plant, their first time in a vehicle, probably their first time in their own space, and undoubtedly their first time feeling a loving hand. I move slowly, and as I reach into their crates to stroke them, I whisper, "You're free," and I feel my soul shift.

I've been an ethical vegan for over a decade. Not only do I not eat animals, but I also avoid any form of animal exploitation and cruelty in everything I do. And although I've signed countless petitions and written about animal testing as a journalist, I have never been this close to an animal destined for the lab world. Even when our physical journey ends 14 hours later, my mental one doesn't, stemming from something that happened the day before.

As I'm driving the transport van through a small Ohio town enroute to Envigo, I came next to a truck packed with pigs. I'm sitting high enough that I can see their bodies, their snouts up. I work hard to stifle my tears when I see their eyes. I'm the only vegan in the group (not unusual in the animal rescue groups I'm in) so I can't share what's running through my head: While we're on our way to save beagles, nobody's saving these pigs, even though they're as exploited and abused as the dogs, if not more.

And I wonder: What if the beagles were in the truck going to slaughter and we were going to rescue the pigs? Would people wake up to the disconnect then?

It's a rhetorical question, of course. My hope? That the beagles serve as a conduit for more than animal testing awareness and inspire a world where cruelty-free becomes the default for everything.



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Karen Asp is an award-winning journalist, author of [Anti-Aging Hacks](#), and [Main Street Vegan Academy](#) graduate. She writes for numerous publications, including *Real Simple*, *Sentient Media*, *VegNews*, *Women's Health*, *Prevention*, *Eating Well*, *Better Homes & Gardens*, and *Forks Over Knives*.

In her spare time, she's a vegan mentor with *Vegan Outreach* and volunteers with *Humane Fort Wayne*, *Best Friends Animal Sanctuary* and [GRRACE](#), where she rescues and transports golden retrievers (often from puppy mills), fosters dogs, and serves as a foster rep. She shares her home with a rescue cat (Toby), golden retriever puppy (Ellie), and a golden/lab mix (Barney). Both dogs were foster wins through GRRACE.

Note: In case you're wondering, all 25 male beagles and another group of 25 female beagles who arrived two weeks later found loving homes through *Humane Fort Wayne*.

You can connect with Karen through her [website](#), [Twitter](#), or [Instagram](#).