

THE EXTREMIST

The woman behind the most successful radical group in America.

BY MICHAEL SPECTER

Each year, Victoria's Secret puts on a show in which two dozen of the world's most alluring models stroll down the runway dressed in nothing but stilettos and lingerie. Last November, the spectacle was held at New York City's Lexington Avenue Armory, and scalpers were selling tickets for five hundred dollars. Celebrities like Donald Trump, Susan Lucci, and Woody Harrelson were there that night, and eleven million people watched on network television. Security was unusually tight: New York City police were on hand in large numbers, as were many private bodyguards, along with a highly experienced team hired by Victoria's Secret. To enter the armory, guests had to wait half an hour, then file through a checkpoint where their bodies were scanned and their bags searched with great care.

None of that prevented four members of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals from infiltrating the audience. As the Brazilian model Gisele Bündchen made her way down the catwalk, dressed in a beaded bra and black panties, the women leaped onto the stage, unfurling signs that said "Gisele: Fur Scum." The women from PETA, as the animal-rights organization is always called, were gone in less than thirty seconds—dragged off the runway, then arrested, arraigned, and deposited in the Tombs. Gisele, the world's most highly paid model, and the current face of the Blackglama fur ad—"What becomes a legend most?"—seemed unfazed by the commotion; CBS shot the segment again, and the show went on. But film clips and news stories about the attack appeared throughout the world, dominating coverage of the show and infuriating Victoria's Secret.

It was not the first such event that PETA had disrupted, of course. There have been hundreds—in the United States, Europe, once even in Beijing.

PETA activists have crawled through the streets of Paris with leg-hold traps around their feet; they have dumped buckets of money soaked in fake blood on audiences at the International Fur Fair. Recently, the group ran ads comparing the deaths of women murdered and dismembered by a serial killer to those of animals killed for meat. Officially, PETA does not engage in violence, but its leaders wholeheartedly defend and encourage guerrilla groups like the Animal Liberation Front. In fact, Bruce Friedrich, one of PETA's most prominent leaders, says in a speech that is readily available on the Internet, "I think it would be a great thing if, you know, all these fast food outlets and these slaughterhouses and these laboratories and the banks that fund them exploded tomorrow."

One of PETA's best-known slogans is "I'd rather go naked than wear fur," and the group has made good publicly on that promise so many times that the fashion community has come to expect it. Not long after the Victoria's Secret show, I called Gisele's manager, to ask about the episode. She told me that it was important to know that "in real life Gisele doesn't wear fur. It's just not who she is. You will never run into her on the street in fox or mink. Never.

"Gisele did the Blackglama ad because of its history," she continued. "She saw Marlene Dietrich and Bette Davis and Maria Callas, and they were legends. And that is the motto. Gisele saw it that way and so did I. We did not see this as a product." (Neither Blackglama nor Victoria's Secret was willing to talk about the show, PETA, the unwanted publicity, or the ads.)

A few days later, *Us Weekly* reported that Ben Affleck had bought a chinchilla coat in Las Vegas for Jennifer Lopez. PETA's special-projects coordinator, Carrie Beckwith, immediately sent Affleck a letter in which she noted

that it takes as many as a hundred chinchillas to make such a coat, and she described the process. "The preferred method of killing chinchillas is by genital electrocution: a method whereby the handler attaches an alligator clamp to the animal's ear and another to her genitalia and flips a switch, sending a jolt of electricity through her skin down the length of her body. The electrical current causes unbearable muscle pain, at the same time working as a paralyzing agent, preventing the animal from screaming or fighting.

"You've been so good to animals in the past," the letter stated. "Now more than ever they need you on their side." To help make her point, she included a graphic video. Affleck replied at once. "You have opened my eyes to a particularly cruel and barbaric treatment of animals," he wrote. "I can assure you I do not endorse such treatment and will not do anything in the future that supports it. . . . I thank you for your letter. . . . A contribution to your organization is forthcoming."

Neither Gisele Bündchen nor Ben Affleck is likely soon to forget their experiences with fur—and that is exactly what PETA had in mind. "There is no secret about why we attacked those people," Ingrid Newkirk, who is PETA's leader, told me later. Newkirk is a fifty-three-year-old woman with sharp blue eyes, an oval face, and a bowl of tidy hair that has recently begun to gray. She often wears sporty, casual clothes, and at first glance looks more like a soccer mom than one of the country's more widely reviled political activists. Newkirk founded PETA two decades ago out of a room in her suburban Maryland home, and it has remained very much under her control as it has grown into the world's largest and best-known animal-rights organization.

"Gisele is a famous, beautiful model," she continued. "Ben is one of the most



popular movie stars alive. People pay attention to them and want to be like them. So they needed to be reminded that if they make horrible, cruel decisions there will be unpleasant consequences. Humans need to know that. They need to understand that if they support the torture and misuse of other animals they will be made to pay. The animals are defenseless. They can't talk back, and they can't fight back. But we can. And, no matter what it takes, we always will."

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals describes itself as an "abolitionist organization," and its thirteen-word mission statement, while simple, is breathtaking in its ambition: "Animals are not ours to eat, wear, experiment on or use for entertainment." PETA believes that animals—and by this it means all animals, from crustaceans to chimpanzees—are on earth to occupy themselves and for no other reason. That humans take advantage of other animals in any way, simply because we are stronger or smarter, PETA sees as the abiding moral outrage of our time. The organization has offended so many people in the two decades since it was founded, by Newkirk and a former colleague, Alex Pacheco, that just to hear the word PETA is enough to make many people shudder—from fear, disgust, or simply weariness.

The group's tactics are often repulsive, but it has a Barnum-like genius for attracting attention. To protest the use of fur in the pages of *Vogue*, PETA once deposited a dead raccoon on the plate of Anna Wintour, the magazine's editor, while she was eating lunch at the Four Seasons in Manhattan. It deployed its own version of the well-known dairy-industry slogan "Got Milk?" to suggest—without a bit of evidence—that the fat in milk somehow caused Rudy Giuliani's cancer. ("Got prostate cancer?" said the billboard, which also had a picture of Giuliani wearing a milk mustache. "Drinking milk contributes to prostate cancer.") Recently, the organization used a similar approach to appeal to a much younger crowd: "Got Beer?" ads have run in many college newspapers throughout the country. ("Better than milk. Find out more at milk-sucks.com.")

Nutritionally, PETA has a point. Yet alcohol abuse has become such a serious problem on college campuses that the ad enraged thousands of people. "It's an irresponsible, recycled publicity stunt that literally puts cows before kids. It's appalling," Wendy Hamilton, the president of Mothers Against Drunk Driving, said. "For Christ's sake, lighten up," Newkirk replied, when I asked her about the campaign. "We simply said that milk is so pathetic that there are even more nutrients in beer. MADD should be happy—they got more press than they ever could have hoped for. We didn't know they would come after us, but I am glad they did. We are always disappointed when people don't come after us."

That is rarely a problem. PETA's publicity formula—eighty per cent outrage, ten per cent each of celebrity and truth—insures that everything it does offends someone. At the end of February, the group began travelling with what may be its most vilified exhibit yet. "Holocaust on Your Plate" compares in great detail what humans routinely do to other animals to Hitler's systematic annihilation of six million Jews. By the end of the first week, the Holocaust Memorial Museum demanded that PETA stop using its photographs; the Anti-Defamation League and hundreds of others denounced it. The exhibit has been vandalized, and PETA members in charge of it have been assaulted. (Like most of PETA's material, the display can be found on-line, at masskilling.com.)

There is never a shortage of stars willing to lend their names to the cause: Alicia Silverstone, Alec Baldwin, Drew Barrymore, and Bill Maher have all appeared in PETA ads. So has Stella McCartney, the only major designer to re-

ject both fur and leather completely. Sir John Gielgud once made a public-service announcement condemning foie gras just by explaining, in powerful detail and at great length, how it is made. (Metal tubes are shoved down the throats of millions of male ducks and geese; they are then force-fed until their livers swell to at least four times their normal size. At that point, the tubes are withdrawn, the birds are killed, and the livers are on their way to the table.)

Naked women also play a central role in PETA's demonstrations and advertisements, and if a political organization can be said to have a muse, then the actress Pamela Anderson is PETA's. In March, she appeared on a gigantic new billboard in Times Square, wearing three strategically placed lettuce leaves. ("People enjoy sex," Newkirk explained. "It's a big part of human nature. So we appeal to that as often as we can. And who could ask for anyone better than Pam? People drool when they look at her. Why wouldn't we use that? We need all the drooling we can get.") In February, Anderson travelled to Vienna, where she had been invited to the annual Opera Ball. When the matrons of Viennese society learned that Anderson's date for the evening would be Dan Mathews, PETA's vice-president of campaigns, they suddenly began cancelling their reservations, fearing what he might do to their furs. The situation got so bad that Mathews, who had taken dance lessons to prepare for the ball, had to fax the organizers to assure them he had no intention of throwing red paint—or anything else—on their clothing. "I plan to use waltzing as a weapon to charm the women out of their furs," Mathews, who functions as the PETA ambassador to the glamour crowd, said. "Special occasions require special tactics."

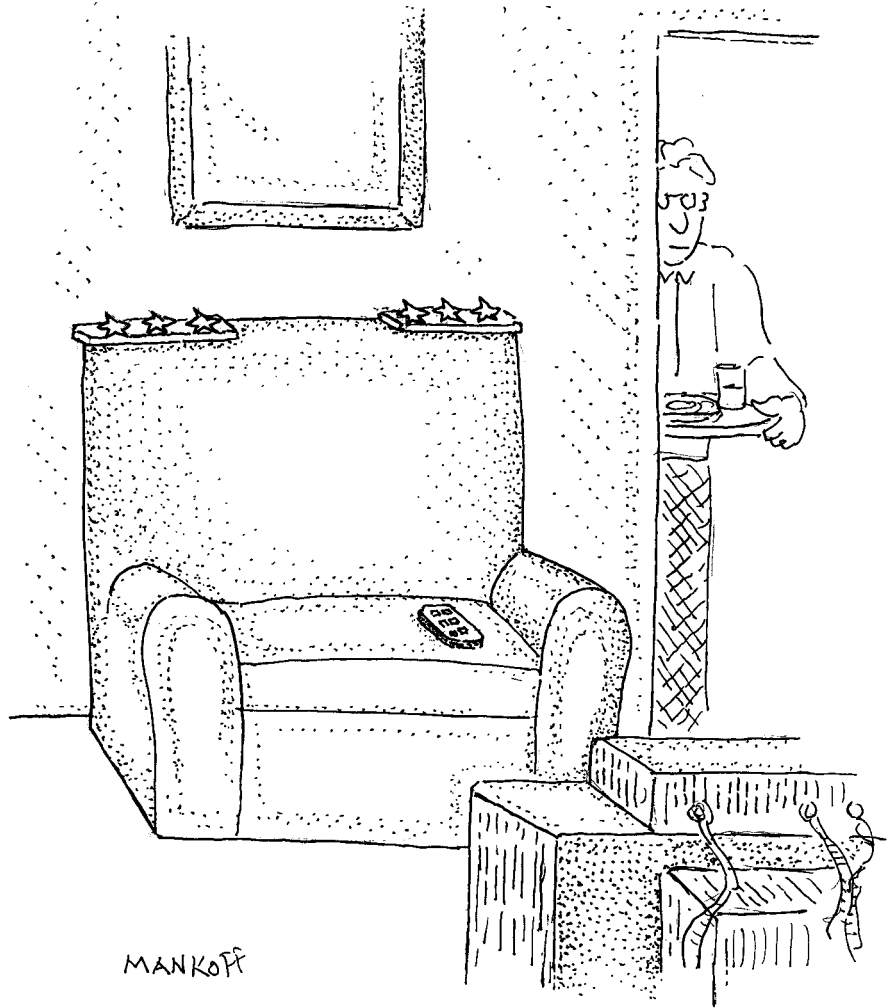
PETA owns a seemingly limitless supply of Web sites, and none of them are subtle. Scientists who experiment on animals have come under particular attack (marchofcrimes.com, stopanimaltests.com), and, throughout America, at least in part thanks to PETA, most investigators who work with animals in the laboratory—and there are thousands—are now reluctant even to discuss their work in public. "PETA and the other extremists in the animal-liberation move-



ment believe they have to do spectacular things to gain attention,” Donald Kennedy, a former commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration and a retired president of Stanford University, told me. “I am sympathetic to that as a philosophy, and certainly we are all more sophisticated about our use of animals than we were twenty years ago. But they are simply wrong when they say you don’t ever need to use an animal to develop a drug, design therapies, or study the course of disease. They have harassed legitimate scientists, frightened them, even driven people from the field. Does that really further their cause?”

PETA objects not only to the use of animals in science, and to anything having to do with fur (furismurder.com, furshame.com), but also to zoos (wildlifepimps.com), fishing (fishinghurts.com, lobsterlib.com), and tobacco companies that still test their products on animals (smokinganimals.com). These days, the PETA leadership devotes much of its energy to the issue that it sees as responsible for the most abuse of animals by far: the way American corporations turn billions of cows, pigs, and chickens into meat each year. (kentuckyfriedcruelty.com and murderking.com are just two of many examples; there are also wickedwendys.com and shame-way.com.)

Because circuses appeal so widely to the young, they arouse PETA’s particular wrath (circuswatch.com). One night in December, I stood in front of the Savannah Civic Center when the Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus came to town. Newkirk and several colleagues were there, and they spent the evening bearing placards, dodging police, and hectoring scores of families who were entering the coliseum with young children. (“Elephants are mammals!” they shouted. “Mammals have hair. Do you know how trainers remove that hair so the elephants will look good for you tonight? They burn it off with blowtorches. Please make this your last visit to the circus.”) The PETA video truck was parked nearby. With elegiac music playing in the background, a continuous loop of clandestinely shot footage ran on the truck’s two giant screens, each showing trainers beating, shocking, whipping, and even shooting



elephants. The children who saw the video were horrified, and their parents were furious.

In 1972, Ingrid Newkirk was twenty-two years old, living in Poolesville, Maryland, and studying to become a stockbroker. Her favorite food was liver. One day, her next-door neighbor moved away and abandoned nearly a dozen cats. “They were coming onto my property and having kittens,” Newkirk told me during one of our many conversations over the past six months. She looked in the Yellow Pages for the address of the nearest animal shelter, then gathered up the cats and drove over. “When I arrived at the shelter, the woman said, ‘Come in the back and we will just put them down there,’” she said. Newkirk was born in England and reared mostly in India. She had only recently moved to the United States, and the phrase “put them down” meant nothing to her.

“I thought, How nice—you will set them up with a place to live. So I waited out front for a while, and then I asked if I could go back and see them, and the woman just looked at me and said, ‘What are you talking about? They are all dead.’”

“I just snapped when I heard those kittens were dead,” Newkirk told me. “The woman was so rude. The place was a junk heap in the middle of nowhere. It couldn’t have been more horrible. For some reason, and even now I don’t know what it was, I decided I needed to do something about it. So I thought, I’m going to work here. I went to see the manager, and he said, ‘We have one opening in the kennel.’ I asked to have it. He said, ‘What have you been doing?’ and I said, ‘Well, actually, I am studying for the brokerage.’” He laughed and told her she was perhaps a bit overqualified, but she begged him to let her try, and, reluctantly, he agreed. The following day,



"Supposedly he's some kind of person in his own right."

Newkirk gave notice at the brokerage and started a new career.

What she saw at the shelter affected her profoundly. "I went to the front office all the time, and I would say, 'John is kicking the dogs and putting them into freezers.' Or I would say, 'They are stepping on the animals, crushing them like grapes, and they don't care.' In the end, I would go to work early, before anyone got there, and I would just kill the animals myself. Because I couldn't stand to let them go through that. I must have killed a thousand of them, sometimes dozens every day. Some of those people would take pleasure in making them suffer. Driving home every night, I would cry just thinking about it. And I just felt, to my bones, this cannot be right. I hadn't thought about animal rights in the broader sense. Not then, or even for a while after. But working at that shelter I just said to myself, 'What is wrong with human beings that we can act this way?'"

For many years, while her father worked in New Delhi as a navigational engineer, Newkirk attended convent boarding schools. "It was the done thing for a British girl in India," she said. "But I was the only British girl in this school. I was hit constantly by nuns, starved by nuns. The whole God thing was shoved right down my throat." When she was eighteen, with the Vietnam War raging,

her father was seconded to the United States Air Force and moved to Florida, where he helped design bombing systems for airplanes and ships.

Ingrid went along with him, and it was there that she met her husband, Steve Newkirk, while pursuing her hobby of auto racing, which remains one of her few genuine passions (sumo wrestling is another). Steve took her to Watkins Glen and introduced her to the baroque world of Formula One; Newkirk has been a fanatic ever since. (The two were divorced in 1980 but are still friendly.) Newkirk thinks nothing of staying up half the night to watch races in Australia or Malaysia. Her office floor, in addition to being covered with welcome mats for cats, and with magazines like *Animal Times* and *Meat & Poultry News*, is strewn with the latest issues of *Car & Driver* and *AutoWeek*.

Ingrid Newkirk is the only person I have ever met—and quite possibly the least likely—to have asked me "Do you know Monte Carlo?" She has been there during racing season, and there is a picture of her hero, the German champion Michael Schumacher, prominently displayed in her office. "I can still remember the smell of the first trip to Watkins Glen," she told me over lunch one day, with a gleam of pure pleasure in her eyes. "At that time you had to use Castrol

motor oil. And the smell of that oil was just divine. They don't use that formula anymore. But I wish they did." I asked her what, exactly, she found so exciting about auto racing. She stared at me as if I were out of my mind. "It's sex," she said. "The first time you hear them rev their engines, my God! That noise goes straight up my spine. It's so electrifyingly glorious."

Newkirk and her husband moved to Maryland in 1970, and after her brief time at the shelter she became a deputy sheriff who focussed on animal-cruelty cases for Montgomery County. By 1976, she had been placed in charge of the animal-disease-control division of the District of Columbia Commission on Public Health. "I loved meat, liver above all," she told me. If liver were somehow morally permissible, I asked her, would she eat it again? "My God, I would eat it tomorrow. Now. I would eat roadkill if I could.

"I'd eat burgers, steak, anything. I love car racing and meat. I am a boy at heart, I am my father's son. When I worked at the Washington humane society, I stayed upstairs, slept in my clothes with my shoes on, after working my day job at the sheriff's office, and then I would be on call at night. On my way down into the District, I would stop in Potomac and pick up triple-ground prime meat. In my refrigerator I had ketchup, Worcestershire sauce, and I would keep eggs. I would break a raw egg and take onions and capers and I would mix it all, and I would go about checking on the animals while eating this raw food right out of my hand.

"I am just a raw-oyster, raw-meat-eating person who happened to find out what happened in the meat industry, and I just can't support it," she continued. "It's so ghastly. So vast and wrong and ghastly."

It was at about this time that Newkirk decided that it was morally impossible to draw a distinction between mistreating a pet and mistreating a pig or a chicken that we will never see until it appears on our plate. By 1980, she had come to believe that it wasn't enough merely to empathize with animals; she had decided that it was unacceptable for humans to use them in any way. From the start, PETA was more radical than

any of the established animal-welfare organizations. In 1981, the group's investigation of the treatment of experimental monkeys in a Maryland laboratory, carried out by Alex Pacheco with walkie-talkies and hidden cameras, resulted in the first police raid of any American research laboratory on suspicion of animal cruelty. The Silver Spring Monkeys, as the case came to be called, made headlines throughout the country.

Newkirk loved the notoriety, and still does; jousting with the media thrills her. "We are complete press sluts," she told me. "It is our obligation. We would be worthless if we were just polite and didn't make any waves." On several occasions during our interviews, she asked if I was looking for any particular kind of quote or theme. I didn't understand what she meant, so she explained: "Well, you know, that Reuters reporter was so thrilled when I told him my position on hoof-and-mouth disease. Don't you need something like that, too?" (Two years ago, when an epidemic of hoof-and-mouth disease terrified Europe and forced farmers to kill millions of animals, Newkirk made no effort to hide her delight. "I openly hope that it comes here," she said. "It wouldn't be any more hideous for the animals—they are all bound for a ghastly death anyway. . . . It will bring economic harm only for those who profit from giving people heart attacks and giving animals a concentration-camp-like existence.")

Newkirk is well read, and she can be witty. When she is not proselytizing, denouncing, or attacking the ninety-nine per cent of humanity that sees the world differently from the way she does, she is good company. After years of detestable public behavior, however, she has the popular image of a monster. Whenever I mentioned her name to friends, they would recoil. And she becomes more disliked with every PETA stunt; she can't walk through an airport without accosting any woman who is wearing fur. She no longer takes vacations in tropical or poor countries like Mexico, because "I spend the whole time rescuing animals from their horrid owners." Some of her actions seem like "Saturday Night Live" skits. On January 26th, for instance, a bomb—dispatched by Palestinian terrorists—exploded on the road between Jerusalem and the West Bank settlement

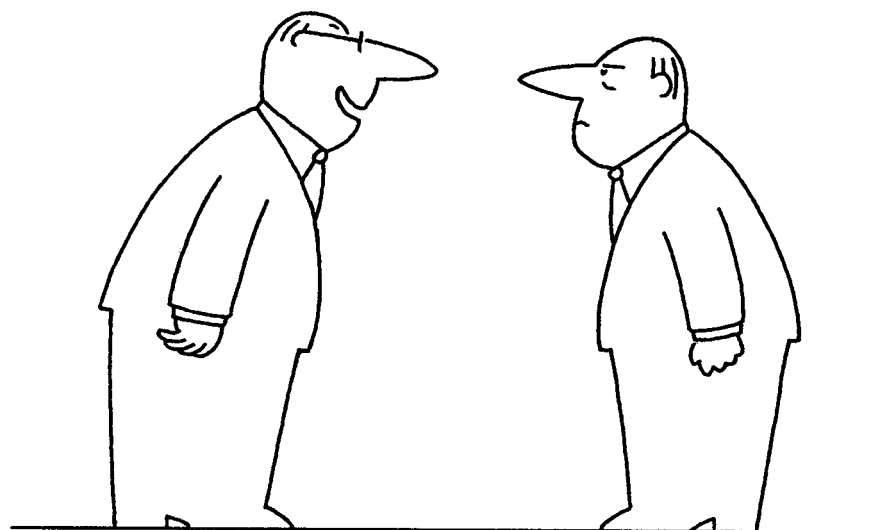
of Gush Etzion. Nobody was seriously injured, but the explosives were strapped onto a donkey and detonated remotely. The donkey was killed. The following week, Newkirk wrote to Yasir Arafat.

"Your Excellency," the letter began. "All nations behave abominably in many ways when they are fighting their enemies, and animals are always caught in the crossfire. The U.S. Army abandoned thousands of loyal service dogs in Vietnam. Al-Qaeda and the British government have both used animals in hideously cruel biological weaponry tests. We watched on television as stray cats in your own compound fled as best they could from the Israeli bulldozers." Newkirk ended the letter by asking Arafat to leave the animals out of the conflict. She made no mention of the vast human toll the violence in the Middle East has taken. "We are named People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals," she told me when I asked about it. "There are plenty of other groups that worry about the humans." A couple of days later, Newkirk sent me a satirical story that ran in the *Onion* headlined, "HEROIC PETA COMMANDOS KILL 49, SAVE RABBIT." She thought it was hilarious.

In her idiosyncratic way, Ingrid Newkirk is a perfectly logical woman: when I asked her about the dangers associated with the rapid proliferation of deer in American suburbs, and suggested that surely their enormous population needed to be culled, she replied by saying, "Deer are native Americans. We are not." She

regards the use of Seeing Eye dogs as an abdication of human responsibility and, because they live as "servants" and are denied the companionship of other dogs, she is wholly opposed to their use. She has had at least one dog taken from its owner. Among her most frequently cited statements is: "When it comes to feelings like hunger, pain, and thirst, a rat is a pig is a dog is a boy." Once, after an hour of frustrating debate on the morality and merit of using animals in scientific research, I asked whether she would remain opposed to experiments on, say, five thousand rats, or even five thousand chimpanzees, if it was required to cure AIDS. "Would you be opposed to experiments on your daughter if you knew it would save fifty million people?" she replied. Medical progress in scores of areas—vaccine development, cancer treatment, genetics, and AIDS, among others—would stop if we began to equate the lives of rats with those of humans. Newkirk doesn't care. "For you this is just a passing issue, a story," she said. "For me it's real. It's a horror I live with every day."

Since November, I have received hundreds of e-mails from Newkirk. Many are informational, some chatty, and others simply absurd. More than a few, though, are heartfelt attempts to explain her particularly bleak view of the universe. When we were in Savannah, she told me, in the most unequivocal terms, that the world would be an infi-



C. Barretti

"That's the game, Whitlock—somebody gets emasculated."

nately better place without humans in it at all. I must have shown my astonishment, because by the time I got back to New York, later that day, she had already written thousands of words to me, of which this is only a sample:

There are a billion mean tricks of Nature. And human beings, who aren't "a thing apart" but part of nature, are cruel, out of sheer obliviousness if nothing else, but often out of malice or selfishness. A few clothes and a Jag and being able to read the NYT don't separate "us" from or elevate "us" above the other species! . . . Why does feeling superior mean being able to treat those "beneath us" with contempt? That's what the Nazis did, isn't it? Treated those "others" they thought subhuman by making them lab subjects and so on. Even the Nazis didn't eat the objects of their derision.

The first time we met, I told Newkirk that I was not a vegetarian and not likely to become one. She made it one of her goals not only to change that but to transform me into a vegan. (A vegan does not use, wear, or eat animal products of any kind: no leather shoes, no milk, no eggs—not even honey. Newkirk has had vegan meals from New York City's Candle Café delivered to my office, and she even had a mock beef Wellington FedExed to me.) When I was with Newkirk, I usually ate what she ate—often a delicious mixture of highly spiced vegetables and tofu. Once or twice, however, I transgressed; tears filled her eyes the day I ordered a Cobb salad for lunch. "What does it take, tell me, what does it take to get somebody like you on our side?" she said to me later that afternoon. "I am asking you. This is my chance. You fancy yourself as a decent, socially conscious, well-educated, literate person. How can I reach you? Where am I going wrong?"

PETA is not an easy place to work—Newkirk often starts before dawn, and when she returns home, late, she fires off e-mails for hours. She demands nearly as much from her colleagues. Newkirk is not merely the boss; since 1999, when Pacheco decided to leave to pursue other goals, she has been the monarch. PETA has a board, but only because its tax-exempt status requires one; the board does whatever Newkirk tells it to do. "This is not a democratic organization," she said. "I never pretended that it was. I don't know where exactly it would go if it were a democracy. And I am not willing to give it a try."

Most of the people who work at PETA see Newkirk as flexible and open to suggestions. From time to time, she will even approve actions and campaigns she herself would never undertake. Yet her singular reign has led many in the animal-welfare movement, including former employees, to refer to PETA as Ingrid Newkirk's cult. When I asked her about this, she went white. "That's a very nasty and bad word and it shouldn't be in the article. I can't stand to hear that word. If you put that cult stuff in, nobody will take what we do seriously." She sat silent for a few moments, visibly disturbed. "I am just trying to make the best possible case for the animals. That is clearly what I have been put on earth to do. Even after I am gone I will try to continue." A few days later, she sent me a copy of her will—which previously she had shown only to her attorney. Like nearly everything else Newkirk does, it contains an element of shameless hucksterism, a lot that is hard to take seriously, and a hint, perhaps, of something significant:

While the final decision as to the use of my body remains with PETA, I make the following suggested directions:

a. That the "meat" of my body, or a portion thereof, be used for a human barbecue, to remind the world that the meat of a corpse is all flesh, regardless of whether it comes from a human being or another animal and that fleshfoods are not needed;

b. That my skin, or a portion thereof, be removed and made into leather products, such as purses, to remind the world that human skin and the skin of other animals is the same and that neither is "fabric" or needed;

c. That my feet be removed and umbrella stands or other ornamentation be made from them, as a reminder of the depravity of killing innocent animals, such as elephants, in order that we might use their body parts for household items and decorations;

d. That my eyes be removed, mounted and delivered to the administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency as a reminder that PETA will continue to be watching the agency until it stops poisoning and torturing animals in useless and cruel experiments;

e. That my pointing finger be delivered to Kenneth Feld [the owner of Ringling Brothers] or to a circus museum, to stand as the "Greatest Accusation on Earth" on behalf of the countless animals who have been deprived of all that is natural and pleasant to them, abused and forced into involuntary servitude for the sake of cheap entertainment.

In 1996, Newkirk moved PETA from the Maryland suburbs to Norfolk, Virginia, principally because it's a cheap place to live. Norfolk is the home of the Atlantic Fleet and not exactly a hotbed

of animal activism, but for two million dollars the group acquired a big building on the Elizabeth River, and more than a hundred people work there. The waterfront is dotted with shipyards, and the shimmering metal-and-glass offices are only a ten-minute walk from the Hampton Roads Naval Historical Museum and the battleship Wisconsin. The place has a Northern European feel to it: steely and gray but soothing, too, with the sun bouncing off the water and onto the building at strange angles. The day I arrived, I watched as a series of the Navy's amphibious assault ships, filled with sailors and marines headed for the Persian Gulf, edged out into the mouth of Chesapeake Bay.

Inside, the building could have been designed by Dr. Doolittle. There is a quotation from Leonardo da Vinci chiselled into the lintel above the reception area: "The day will come when men such as I will look upon the murder of animals the way they now look upon the murder of men." Dogs and cats roam the halls. There are cat ladders throughout the offices, and animals are constantly leaping on and off them. At lunch, dozens of employees slip out to spend some time with their companion animals. (Nobody at PETA would ever use the word "pet.")

Besides Newkirk, the best-known members of the group are Bruce Friedrich and Dan Mathews. It would be hard to find three people who seem to have less in common. Newkirk considers herself a feminist and an atheist. Friedrich, whose title at PETA is director of vegan outreach, functions to some degree as the organization's chief ideologist. He is a soft-spoken man, who, Newkirk once told me, "lives like Christ"; he spent years working in soup kitchens in Washington, where, most of the time, he lives. Friedrich is a devout, even militant, Catholic, who gives twenty per cent of his meagre income to the Church and other charities and is as comfortable marching in an anti-abortion rally as Newkirk is talking about why, at the age of twenty-two, she was sterilized. ("I am not only uninterested in having children. I am opposed to having children. Having a purebred human baby is like having a purebred dog; it is nothing but vanity, human vanity.")

Mathews, the third member of the

CLOUD CHART



LONERS

Single clouds that like to hang out in an otherwise cloudless sky.



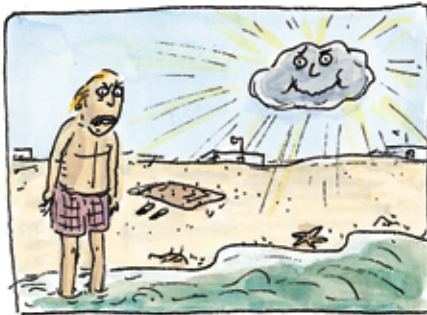
SHEEP

Little clouds that always appear in bunches.



SPEEDY GONZALI

Clouds in a huge hurry to get to the next sky.



BLOCKERS

Mischievous clouds with a fondness for popping up just as one decides to go in the ocean.



GRAY BLANKET

One vast gray cloud that usually covers several states at once.



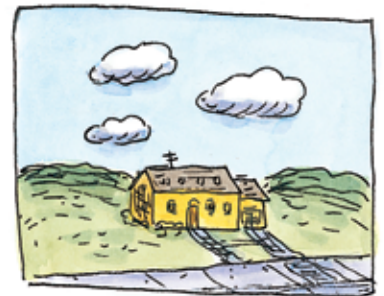
INDUSTRIOS

Beautiful clouds that are most often seen over large manufacturing plants.



SIGMUNDS

Clouds with an uncanny ability to make you feel anxious or depressed.



DUHS

No-name, generic clouds having no meteorological significance whatsoever.

R. Chw

triumvirate, is openly gay. He was raised in California's Orange County, where, as a fat gay boy, he decided that being detested by most people around him wasn't as painful as living a lie. Mathews is six feet five, and zips around Norfolk in a green Suzuki sidekick that he bought used, from a sailor. These days, he looks more like a male model than the chubby teen-ager he once was. Mathews is often Pamela Anderson's "date," and while many of his colleagues live rather ascetic lives, he is just as likely to turn up at a club in Paris or New York as in Norfolk.

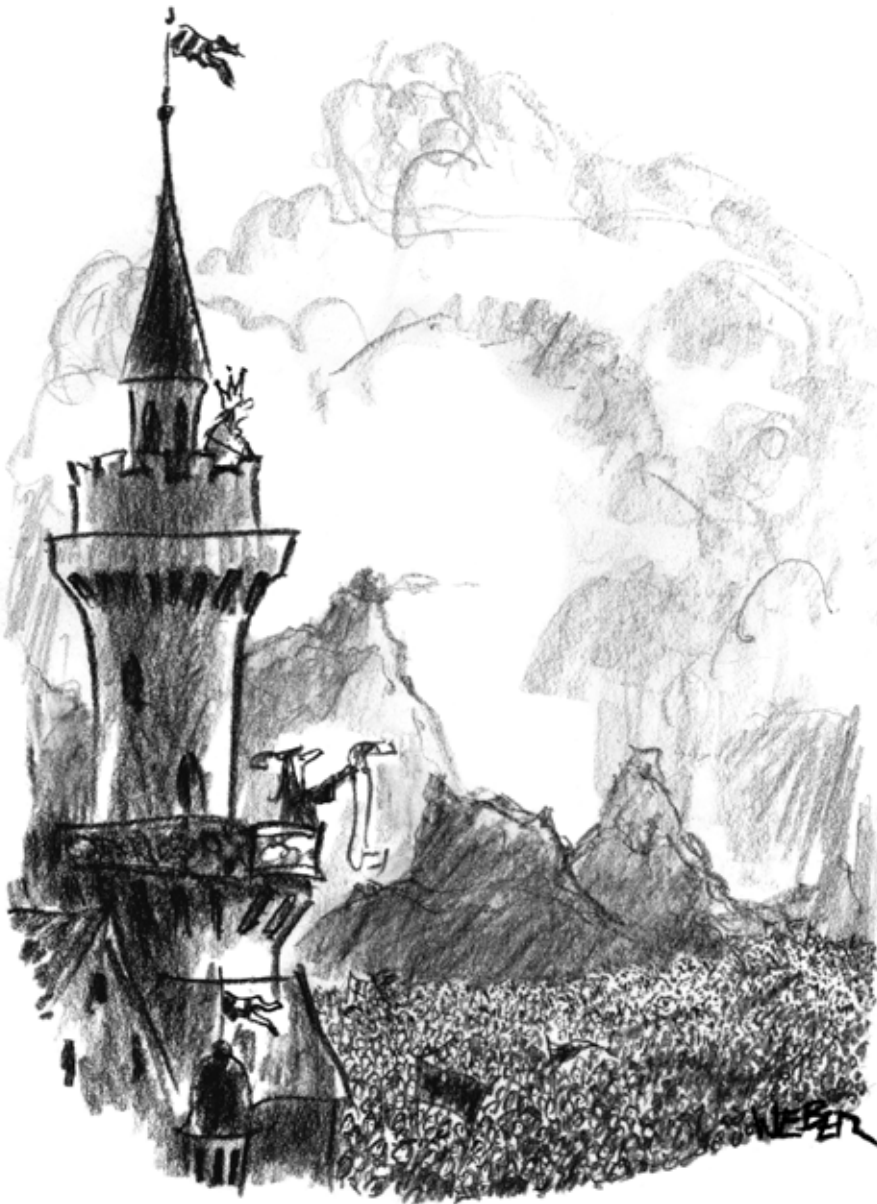
PETA is by far the most successful radical organization in America, raising more than fifteen million dollars

a year, most of it in small contributions from its seven hundred and fifty thousand members and supporters. Newkirk believes in spending as much of that as she can. There are departments devoted to wildlife, companion animals, investigations, advertising, and, particularly lately, kids, who are more susceptible to the message—that vegetarianism makes sense on nutritional and ecological grounds. For the most part, children do not hold PETA in the same negative regard as do many of their parents. (One of the most heavily visited PETA Web sites, peta2.com, is dedicated to youngsters.) The network of eight thousand activists between the ages of thirteen and twenty-four has message boards,

contests, and games. It is run by Marci Hansen, an eager and articulate thirty-four-year-old woman whose last job was as a marketing manager at Amazon.com. Hansen can talk endlessly about skateboarders, snowboarders, Pink, and surfing publications. "We are after the kids who are looking and searching for something," she told me. "Teens want the truth. We walk the talk. You cannot call us hypocrites."

It has been argued many times that in any social movement there has to be somebody radical enough to alienate the mainstream—and to permit more moderate influences to prevail. For every Malcolm X there is a Martin Luther King, Jr., and for every Andrea Dworkin there is a Gloria Steinem. Newkirk and PETA provide a similar dynamic for groups like the Humane Society of the United States, which is the biggest animal-welfare organization in the country and far more moderate than PETA. When I asked Newkirk why she didn't enter political campaigns for animal action and lobby more vigorously on Capitol Hill for her positions, she laughed: "Are you kidding? Dear boy, we are the kiss of death. If we are involved, the legislation is automatically dead. We have members yelling at us, 'Why are you not working on these issues?' But activists just beg us to stay the hell out."

That raises the question of whether PETA's shock tactics and abrasiveness might be so unsavory that they offend many of the very people the group wishes to attract. One day, I put that question to the philosopher Peter Singer, whose book "Animal Liberation" (1975) is often credited with inspiring the modern animal-rights movement; Newkirk told me that it persuaded her to start PETA. "Publicity is a tactic that has worked well for them," Singer said. "Ingrid constantly risks offense, but she seems to feel it does more good than harm." In fact, Newkirk seems openly to court the anger even of people who share her views. "I know feminists hate the naked displays," she told me. "I lose members every time I do it. But my job isn't to hold on to members, as much as I'd like to—it's to get people who just don't give a damn about this issue to look twice." The truth is that ex-



"The clerk will call the roll."

tremism and outrage provide the fundamental fuel for many special-interest groups. Nobody ever stopped hunting because the National Rifle Association supports assault weapons; many of those who oppose abortion are appalled that people in their movement commit acts of violence, yet they are not appalled enough to support abortion. The same is true with PETA, and Newkirk knows it; a vegan isn't going to start eating meat or wearing fur simply because she disapproves of a naked calendar.

Each week, Newkirk holds a kind of war council: she gathers two dozen of her top strategists around a square table in the second-floor conference room to plot their next moves, and while I was in Norfolk she invited me to join them. Jason Baker, who runs the PETA operation in Hong Kong (there are also offices in England, Germany, Holland, and India), presented a slide of a new advertisement he was preparing for the Asian market to publicize the plight of elephants. It is a picture of a naked woman, shackled and in chains. (The woman, Imogen Bailey, was recently voted Australia's sexiest model.) "We are going to put whip marks on her back," Baker explained to approving mutters, "and, if it works visually, tears in her eyes." Newkirk stared at the picture for a minute and then shook her head. "She looks like she's pouting," she said. "It's too sexy. We need to make her look terrified." Baker promised to take care of it.

Next on the agenda: the case of Charlton Heston. Heston has fallen ill with Alzheimer's, a disease with symptoms that can resemble those of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, or CJD, the human form of mad-cow disease. Deer have a chronic wasting syndrome similar to that found in cattle, and, tenuous though it is, the link presents PETA with an opportunity to, as Newkirk put it, "toy with the idea that both Alzheimer's and CJD are related to meat consumption."

"We can flaunt the idea that his disease is from deer meat!" somebody shouted. "He has to hunt. He's a gun freak," another person said. The group started to talk about his famous relationship with the National Rifle Association and complain about the gun lobby,



"I'm looking for a tie that says I'm not afraid to ride the subway."

but Newkirk cut them off. "We are not anti-gun, we are pro animals. Don't lose the thread, people." She then suggested renting billboards that would display a large picture of a gaunt Charlton Heston foaming at the mouth. Most of the people in the room were thrilled by the idea. But Joe Haptas, a campaign coordinator, was not among them. "Are you kidding?" he shouted. "That is just mean-spirited. He is an American icon. You can't do this." Newkirk snapped back: "Who said you can't pick on an icon? He is like Anita Bryant. He is pro hunting. He has made his own bed."

Haptas was horrified: "My God, you are talking about Moses. We are going to pick on Moses? It will alienate half our members and most of the known world." Newkirk rolled her eyes and whispered, in a way meant for everyone in the room to hear, "So what?"

The PETA strategy session resembled the pitch meeting of a very bizarre Madison Avenue advertising agency. Nothing was too kooky or unkind to think about. "Should we put somebody on the Atkins cruise?" one person wondered. The Atkins Diet, which is perhaps the most heavily meat-based meal plan in America, was sponsoring a cruise; it would be a meat-eater's paradise, and the idea of crashing it seemed like mischievous fun. But Tracy Rei-

man, who is in charge of international campaigns, quickly brought the group to its senses: "Some people are paying thousands of dollars to go on the cruise. Do you really think we are going to win even one of them over? It would be a waste of time. And, by the way, it would be horrible for whoever gets stuck on that boat with those people. Can you imagine it? They would probably be thrown overboard." The idea was abandoned.

Then it was on to an action planned for one of the Nordstrom department stores. "You know they have a policy where they will take anything back for any reason," Reiman said. "One of our people in Seattle is going to return a dead fox." After that, the eternal question arose: How do you deal with the running of the bulls at Pamplona? PETA, of course, is opposed to it, as it is to bullfighting. So it has decided to sponsor a giant naked race two days before the running of the bulls, in the hope that it will compete for attention (runningofthenudes.com).

PETA's big foray into the world of high fashion came next: the New York collections were coming up, and the group was sponsoring a show by Gaelyn and Cianfarani, who design clothes made from natural fibres, recycled bicycle inner tubes, and sheets of latex. The



"You're right—I'm not listening to you—I'm reading the crawl on the bottom of your screen."

• •

sponsors agreed to give PETA space in the main exhibition tents during Fashion Week, but there was a price: the group was expected to leave everyone else alone. "We just did the Gisele thing, and now we have to behave ourselves," Mathews announced sternly. "That's the deal we made. Agreed?"

The group devoted the biggest block of time to its most important current action: the campaign against KFC. According to the company's Web site, last year the chain served seven hundred and thirty-six million chickens. If the chickens served in its restaurants in 2002 were laid head to claw, they would circle the equator more than eight times. Somebody suggested making Colonel Sanders action figures, or having people go to Louisville basketball games dressed only in a bucket. Another person said that perhaps they

ought to commit civil disobedience at KFC restaurants; getting arrested is always good for the cause. Newkirk quickly rejected that idea. "No," she said. "Once you start, you have to continue, and I don't think we have the resources or the support yet." Everyone agreed that they had to attack the image of the Colonel. "He is loved in Louisville, and he is buried there," someone said. Newkirk's eyes lit up. "Why not find out when his birthday is, call the newspapers, and go dance on his grave?" she said. Then Dan Mathews spoke up again. "I have some great news," he said. "Do you know that fat little guy from 'Seinfeld'? He has become the main pitchman for KFC. Jason Alexander. And beginning in May he is going to star in the West Coast production of 'The Producers.' It's made for us. We can be slamming

him as the play opens. If we do this properly, he will wish he never saw a chicken."

When you drive south along the flats of the Eastern Shore of the Delmarva Peninsula, past Salisbury, Maryland, and down Route 413 or any of the back roads near Crisfield, there are stretches where you will see almost nothing but series of low sheds, each about three hundred yards long. This is poultry country, and it is where many of the chickens we eat spend their lives. I went there for a couple of days this winter, hoping to meet some farmers and visit a processing plant. It wasn't as easy as I had expected. For one thing, nobody was home at most of the places that I visited. Few of those who are under contract to raise chickens can live solely on what they make from the big

poultry concerns like Perdue and Tyson, so, during the day, most of the workers are out at other jobs.

Except for the low hum of a ventilation system, the sheds that I approached were quiet. Every window was covered with thick blackout curtains, and it seemed as if nothing at all were inside. After a few stops without finding a farmer at home, I decided to try one of the doors. It wasn't locked, so I unfastened the latch, swung it open, and walked inside. I was almost knocked to the ground by the overpowering smell of feces and ammonia. My eyes burned and so did my lungs, and I could neither see nor breathe. I put my arm across my mouth and immediately moved back toward the door, where I saw a dimmer switch. I turned it up.

There must have been thirty thousand chickens sitting silently on the floor in front of me. They didn't move, didn't cluck. They were almost like statues of chickens, living in nearly total darkness, and they would spend every minute of their six-week lives that way. Despite the ventilation system, there wasn't much air in the room, and I fled quickly. I drove down Route 13, past trailer homes and one-room shacks, each of which seemed to have a dog chained to a stake in the ground. Eventually, I came upon a nice-looking farm, with a couple of big chicken sheds. There was a slightly incongruous sign out front that said "Marshall's Seafood." Phillip Marshall was sitting on his Bobcat cleaning out a chicken shed—a crop had just been taken to market. On top of the dirt pile, about to be dropped into a Dumpster, a six-week-old chicken was writhing, its head mangled and its bones visibly crushed. But its vastly oversized chest was heaving up and down and its beak dug slowly at the dirt. After a few minutes, Marshall dumped the load and I introduced myself.

Marshall is a plain, soft-spoken man who has spent his entire life on the Delmarva Peninsula, and for thirty years he has been raising chickens, as his father did before him. For a long time he was under contract to Perdue, but now he works with Mountaire. "It's getting harder and harder to make a living," he told me. The company had just come to collect fifty thousand or so chickens, and he was expecting a deliv-

ery of new chicks within the week. The poultry manufacturers provide everything: the chicks, the food, the antibiotics, and all the information required to raise the chickens properly. "It's a formula," Marshall told me. "And these days you really have to stick to it or get out of the business."

Obviously, you can't raise eight billion chickens a year in the quaint pastoral farming system that most Americans still have in their mind's eye. There aren't many places today where cows roam free and chickens lay eggs on a haystack. Less than two per cent of the American population is involved in producing food. American agricultural technology has managed to transform farms into factories, and animals are, as Wayne Pacelle, a senior vice-president of the Humane Society of the United States, put it in an op-ed piece that appeared recently in the *Los Angeles Times*, really nothing more than incredibly efficient "meat-, milk- and egg-producing machines." The only encounters many of us have with animals are when they appear on our plate. Most of these animals never see a day of natural light or spend even an hour free with other members of their species. Chickens live in a constant state of dismal twilight; the darkness makes them logy and encourages them to eat more and move less, both of which help them to grow more rapidly. "That's what the companies call feed conversion," Marshall told me. "It's the amount of feed you need for the weight gain you want. Obviously, you look to use as little food as you can. That's why you don't want them moving around. It just wastes a bunch of calories."

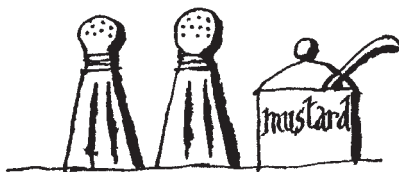
Marshall took me to a nearby plot of land where he maintains more chicken sheds; they were occupied. He pointed out the computer system that regulates the levels of heat, oxygen, and the nutrients in the food. "We have to pay for it, and it's a major expense," he told me. "But the companies push you to do it—because it's better for them, more efficient, and it really turns raising these

chickens into an assembly-line process. We can program it for everything."

Thin metal pipes that look like sprinkler valves run the length of each chicken shed. When the chickens are thirsty, they can drink from these "water nipples." "It's a revolutionary thing," Marshall said. "You used to have to use a trough, and every other day you were in there for hours cleaning them. They would get stopped up, and you would have to fix them or the chickens would die of thirst." We went into one of the sheds—again, the smell was overpowering—and he explained that when the time comes to send the chickens to the factory, crews consisting of eight men show up with big trucks and tons of cages. They drive the trucks right into the shed and put the cages on a forklift. Then they begin to herd, collect, and throw the chickens into the cages. "They can get to throwing those birds around a bit," Marshall said. "It's a tough job." I asked him if he misses the old days on chicken farms. "Personally, of course I do. It was nicer. But as a business it's hard to argue. Factories are what work best in this country. It's sad that you can't see chickens running around in the yard laying eggs. We could raise them free range, but the mortality would be higher, and if you have more than two per cent mortality you lose money. And nobody wants that."

American meat producers have become remarkably specialized and economically adept. Since the animals are seen as widgets, their welfare has never been much of a priority. The guiding imperative is efficiency and economy, and of course you can raise many more chickens, pigs, and cows if you cram them into an aluminum shed or a crate rather than let them wander around the farm. A pig living in a concrete crate that is two feet wide can't move, and that's the point. In 1994, according to the United States Department of Agriculture, seventy-three per cent of the pigs raised in America were on small farms and twenty-seven per cent were on large industrial farms; by 2001, those figures had been reversed.

Litters are bigger and more frequent now, so industrial farms have to pack the animals in as tightly as possible. Pigs



have a four-month gestation period. Before giving birth, the sows are moved from the gestation crates to farrowing crates, which have just enough extra room for the piglets to emerge. When they are taken from the mothers—after three weeks—the sows are immediately impregnated again (through artificial insemination) and returned to their gestation crates. On factory farms, any sow that isn't pregnant or lactating isn't doing her job.

Calves are usually taken from their mothers the day they are born. The females are raised to replace dairy cows, and the males, since they can never produce milk, are raised for meat. Most are killed for beef, but about a million are used for veal in the United States every year. (The veal industry was created solely to take advantage of the large supply of unwanted male calves.) Farmers pack them into crates so small that sometimes they can neither lie down nor turn around. The calves are fed a milk substitute that is deficient in

iron and fibre and is designed to make them anemic. It is the anemia that produces the light-colored flesh for which veal is so highly prized.

Raising meat in America has become such an exact science that, through genetic selection and better knowledge of nutrition, researchers have been able to alter the physical composition of most of the animals we eat. Poultry companies, for example, have reduced the time it takes a chicken to reach its final four-to-five-pound weight from seventeen weeks, in the nineteen-fifties, to six weeks today.

There used to be only one type of chicken in America. Now there are two: egg layers and broilers (the ones we eat). Broiler chickens came into being only in the nineteen-fifties, and over the years they have been genetically selected so that they grow rapidly. The economic success of the system is hard to dispute. The people at Perdue, which has its headquarters in Salisbury, told me with a great deal of pride that their

chickens have "a higher meat to bone ratio than any other in the industry." I asked Joy Mench, a professor in the Department of Animal Sciences at the University of California at Davis, if that was entirely a good thing. Her particular area of research focusses on the effects that leg deformities have on the birds. "The chickens we eat today have been genetically selected for fast growth," she said. "And the skeleton quickly bends and sometimes breaks under the weight of the muscle mass. The way they are raised, in those crowded conditions with no exercise, makes it worse."

Whereas pigs are acknowledged to be smart and social animals capable of making decisions and performing complicated tasks, it is often asserted that chickens are stupid; that if they do feel pain, it is not in any of the ways we would understand, because their brains are not complex enough. Studies have demonstrated that none of that is true. "Chickens show sophisticated social behavior," Mench told me. "That's what a pecking order is all about. They can recognize more than a hundred other chickens and remember them. They have more than thirty types of vocalizations." They also, quite obviously, know all about pain. Scientists have carried out a variety of studies to see whether a chicken will alter its behavior to avoid or alleviate pain. In one such study, at Bristol University, in England, chickens with leg problems were offered two feeders containing identical amounts of the same food. One of the feeders, however, included an analgesic. It didn't take long for the birds to understand their choices. "The chickens will take the analgesic every time," Mench said. "They will do what they can to lessen their pain."

Ingrid Newkirk once told me, with genuine conviction, that McDonald's—which feeds hamburgers and chicken nuggets to twenty million people a day in the United States alone—would stop serving meat in her lifetime. Americans kill nine billion animals each year, mostly for food, so her assessment seemed unrealistic, to say the least. After all, we routinely starve, force-feed, and mutilate animals in order to enjoy a more pleasant, afford-

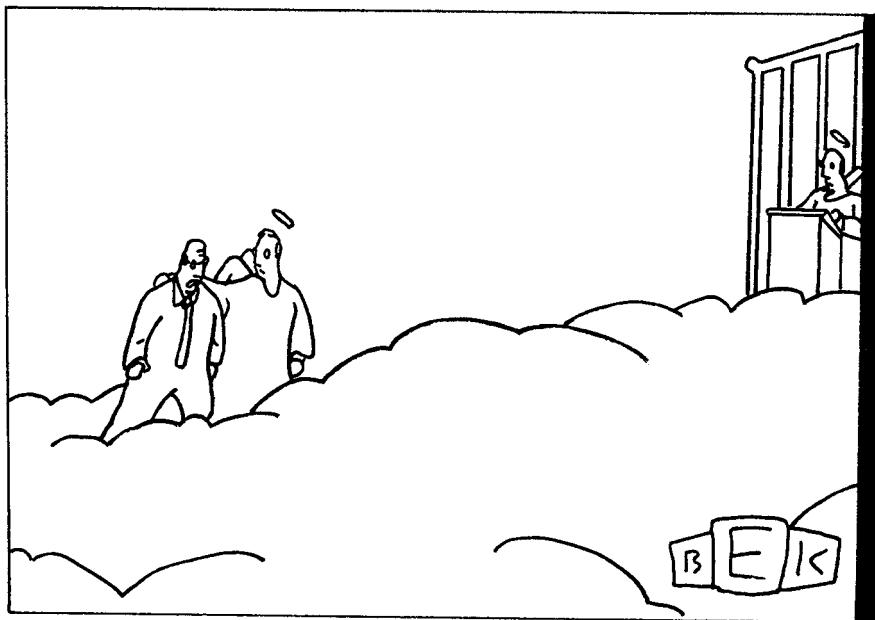


"Can I call you back? I'm having sex."

able, or exotic meal. Humans wear the skin of other animals in every possible configuration—and on every part of their bodies. Animal experiments, with everything from macaques to mice, which are manufactured by the million and sold like commodities, are carried out at nearly every major university and scientific institution. And, largely for fun, millions of Americans train shotguns, rifles, and arrows on tens of millions of birds, deer, elk, and rabbits each year, and sportsmen go after lions, elephants, and other big game. For that matter, what child doesn't love to see a bear riding a bicycle or a monkey dressed in a miniature tuxedo at the circus?

After looking at the lives of farm animals and watching PETA work for a while, it seemed to me that the animal-rights movement was going nowhere; it was certainly a long way from the finish line. One day, I asked Bruce Friedrich how he manages to stay undeterred by facts he faces each day. "I do get dispirited at times," Friedrich said. "But let's think historically for a minute. Just a hundred and fifty years ago, many people still owned other people in this country. We didn't even have any child-abuse laws. And it wasn't until 1920, after a vigorous debate in the United States Congress, that the country went about giving those irrational creatures called women the right to vote. And now look around. Women and blacks live in a vastly different world. We all do. There are child-protective services in every county in America. There has just been a sea change in our consciousness about how other people should be treated. Every assumption about human beings has changed.

"So the challenge for us," he continued, "is never to look back and say, 'What are the wrongheaded things that happened a hundred years ago?' It is to say, 'What will society look back upon a hundred or so years from now and think of with equal horror to the way blacks were treated until the middle of the nineteenth century?' In that context, I would have to say we have made remarkable moral progress. In fact, the advances of just the last few years have been staggering. So I don't think it is at all unlikely to conceive of a time when people will recognize that other animals



"Well, so much for antioxidants."

simply do not deserve the treatment they are getting from us."

Could that time be closer than it seems? Between 1940 and 1990, just one animal-protection measure was passed in the United States, but today it is illegal almost everywhere to abuse dogs or cats in any way; people have gone to jail for it. Several cities, including Boulder and San Francisco, have even adopted laws that changed people from pet "owners" into pet "guardians."

Twenty years ago, few Americans knew a vegetarian. American children today are the first generation to live in a culture where vegetarianism is common. By most counts, as many as twenty per cent of all college students identify themselves as vegetarians—and in almost any city one can now find a vegetarian restaurant, or at least eat a decent vegetarian meal. So many teen-agers have given up meat—the number is often put at a million, with one in four teen-agers saying that vegetarianism is "cool"—that the National Cattlemen's Beef Association recently felt compelled to launch a Web site to appeal directly to young girls, who are becoming vegetarians in the greatest numbers (cool-2b-real.com). "Real girls are 'keepin' it real' by building strong bodies and strong minds . . . and they're feeling great about themselves!" the site

proclaims. The implication is simple enough: the girls are keeping it real by eating plenty of meat.

For animals, the biggest changes by far have come from corporate America. In August, 2000, after a withering publicity campaign by PETA, McDonald's became the first major company in the history of the United States to require that all its suppliers meet a set of minimum standards for treating hens. The company said it would no longer work with producers who cut or seared the beaks off chickens (a common practice among farmers trying to keep the hens they cram together in tiny cages from pecking each other to death). McDonald's serves hundreds of millions of eggs each year, and it no longer buys them from suppliers who starve their hens. This practice, called forced molting, shocks the hens into laying extra eggs; it has been standard at thousands of farms. More important, though, McDonald's decided to audit each of the slaughterhouses that supply its food, and the company has walked away from suppliers who failed to live up to the new demands.

Finally, last November, after a campaign led by the Humane Society of the United States, voters in Florida altered the state constitution to forbid

people who raise sows from confining them in concrete or metal gestation crates. The crates are so cramped that, throughout the entire course of their lives, millions of pigs are never able to turn around or even nuzzle their young. It was the first such measure in America to address the means of confinement for animals on farms, and many in the animal-welfare movement have seized on it as a turning point in the long effort—put perhaps most compellingly more than two hundred years ago by the utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham—to recognize that animals are, perhaps, not as different from us as we try to pretend they are:

It may come one day to be recognized that the number of the legs, the villosity of the skin, or the termination of the *os sacrum*, are reasons insufficient for abandoning a sensitive being to the caprice of a tormentor. What else is it that should trace the insuperable line? Is it the faculty of reason, or perhaps the faculty of discourse? But a full-grown horse or dog is beyond comparison a more rational, as well as a more conversable animal, than an infant of a day, a week, or even a month old. But suppose the case were otherwise, what would it avail? The question is not, Can they reason? nor, can they speak? but, can they suffer?

Early on the morning of February 27th, in the Regency Ballroom of the Crown Hyatt in Kansas City, the many members of the American Meat Institute Foundation gathered for an extraordinary two-day session. The institute invited groups like the National Council of Chain Restaurants, the National Chicken Council, the National Pork Board, and the Milk Producers Federation to help sponsor the meeting. All the big fast-food restaurants like McDonald's, Burger King, KFC, and Wendy's buy their food from institute members—in other words, everyone in America who raises, butchers, sells, or serves meat was represented there. The occasion was the group's Animal Care and Handling Conference, and the reason for the overflow audience was simply that, as the institute put it, "over the last twelve months issues related to the humane care and handling of livestock and poultry intended for food have moved to center stage." There was a clear understanding that everyone from McDonald's to the United States government was now beginning to take animal welfare more seriously.

STOLEN

Please go on being yourself.

—From my last letter from William Maxwell, July 28, 2000.

What is it like, to be a stolen painting—to be Rembrandt's "Storm on the Sea of Galilee" or "The Concert," by Vermeer, both burglarized, along with "Chez Tortoni" by Manet, and some Degases, from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, in Boston, twelve years ago?

Think of how bored they get, stacked in the warehouse somewhere, say in Mattapan, gazing at the back of the butcher paper they are wrapped in, instead of at the rapt glad faces of those who love art.

Only criminals know where they are. The gloom of criminality enshrouds them. Why have we been stolen? they ask themselves. Who has benefitted? Or do they hang admired in some sheikh's sandy palace, or the vault of a mad Manila tycoon?

In their captivity, they may dream of rescue but cannot cry for help. Their paint is inert and crackled, their linen friable. They have one stratagem, the same old one: to be themselves, on and on.

The boat tilts frozen on the storm's wild wave. The concert has halted between two notes. An interregnum, sufficiently extended, becomes an absence. When wise and kindly men die, who will restore disappeared excellence to its throne?

—John Updike

There were geneticists in the audience, as well as breeders, kill supervisors, quality-assurance managers, auditors, economists, harvest directors, engineers, physiologists, and several slaughter-floor group leaders. They came to hear talks like "Customer Attitudes and Expectations About Animal Welfare" and "Creating an Animal Welfare Mindset in Your Company." The focus on improving the lives of the animals we eat was evident.

But why all the fuss? Data presented at the meeting showed that most Americans still don't pay much attention to how their meat lives, is raised, or dies. As

one speaker said, "the disconnect between an animal in the farmland and the cellophane at the grocery store is nearly complete." Many reasons were offered for the increased interest in animal welfare. But Adele Douglass, who delivered the keynote address, told me that it is really simple. "The activists are beginning to win," she said. "And these guys know it." Douglass is the executive director of Humane Farm Animal Care. She began her speech with the formation of the A.S.P.C.A., in 1866—at the time, it protected children as well as animals—and recounted how horses, the trucks of the nineteenth century, were

constantly whipped and starved. She noted that by 1877 animals were being shipped by rail, but species were mixed together in open cattle cars; many turned on each other or froze to death. She ended with the creation of PETA, in 1980, and she said, to a silent audience, "Come on, we have to give them a little credit for all this."

The comments hung over the group like a leaden cloud. As Douglass said to me later, "Ingrid is the Devil to these people. She is what they dream about when they have nightmares." It can't be all that easy for a company that makes meat, and has been boycotted, assaulted, and denigrated in every way, to give credit to such implacable foes. "Good animal treatment is a basic value," Bob Langert, who is the senior director for social responsibility at McDonald's, told me. "There is more to life than just the products we use and buy. People want to know they are visiting a company that stands for something, that cares about the world. . . . And standards of decency matter." He and his company certainly have put a lot of money and effort behind those sentiments. When I asked him whether he felt that PETA had anything to do with this shift in priorities, he declined to say. Langert is a particularly open and forthcoming man, yet he couldn't bring himself to utter the name of the group at all.

Still, as I watched three hundred and fifty of America's leading meat manufacturers wander around the Hyatt, gobbling hors d'oeuvres while getting their first look at the latest advance in animal-stunning technology—the Jarvis pneumatic stunner, which promises "better stunning for improved meat quality"—it was pretty clear that something had changed. And it would be hard to attribute that shift solely to the desire of large corporations to treat animals more gently during their brief, fully programmed lives.

"If you had told me ten years ago that any of this would happen, I would have laughed in your face," Temple Grandin told me. Grandin has spent decades attempting to improve animal welfare at slaughterhouses and processing plants. She is without question the most influential person in the American meat industry today. Grandin gave several pre-

sentations in Kansas City, including one entitled "Inside the Mind of a Steer," in which she got down on all fours, in front of the leaders of the beef industry, and told them they would never understand what might frighten an animal unless they went through the slaughter chutes on their hands and knees and saw it for themselves.

"Since 1999, I have seen more change in the way animals are treated in this country than I did in the previous thirty," Grandin, who is not a vegetarian, told me at the meeting. "McDonald's is the symbol of food in America. For them to have done what they did has changed everything in every way." In fact, since McDonald's adopted its new standards, so have Burger King, Safeway, and Wendy's. Burger King now even offers veggie burgers at each of its eight thousand restaurants in the United States. And in New York, as well as in many other markets, so does McDonald's. PETA, which once picketed Burger King, has actually given the company a pop-up ad on its Web site. Grandin has designed what most people regard as the best slaughterhouses in the world—places where the animals are not bored or beaten, and where they never know they are dying until it's too late to be frightened. Ingrid Newkirk once told me, "Temple Grandin has done more to reduce suffering in the

world than any other person who has ever lived." It was a remarkable comment coming from a prophet of absolutism. There is no nuance about her position: as PETA sees it, animals have rights just as we do, and that is why they should not be harmed, imposed upon, or used in any way. Newkirk certainly can see that easing suffering is a worthy objective, but it is never her goal—just a stop along the way. Grandin has a completely different view. After all, she designs death camps for cattle. But, like Jeremy Bentham, Peter Singer, and millions of others, she strives for a way to eliminate needless suffering.

Lately, however, Newkirk seems to understand, and even welcome, compromise. How else could she say nice things about Burger King only because it serves *one* sandwich that isn't based on meat? Why did PETA participate in Fashion Week instead of trying to disrupt it? I asked Newkirk if it was possible that she was softening or changing her approach. She shook her head twice and laughed. But then she said, "You can't pave the road. You have to put down a little gravel. Then somebody else comes and puts down some more gravel. And one day, someday, you have a paved road." She smiled slyly. "In the meantime, it doesn't mean you shouldn't be the biggest nag on earth." ♦



"So—how go the formative years?"