

# On Beyond Violence

By Mary Lou Randour, Ph.D.

**R**ecently I made the seventh, and last, of a weekly 78-mile round trip from my home in Chevy Chase, Maryland to the Annapolis Police Department, located just blocks away from the State Capitol and General Assembly. Every Monday morning I had given presentations to approximately thirty police officers on the topic of animal abuse and its connection to human violence. By the seventh week, every officer on the Annapolis Police Department had received training on the “violence connection.”

Under the auspices of “Beyond Violence: The Human-Animal Connection,” a joint project of the Doris Day Animal Foundation (DDAF) and Psychologists for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PSYETA), I have been addressing a variety of audiences over the last few months – police, prosecutors, judges, animal control, domestic violence, and child protection service professionals, as well as mental health professionals – on this important topic.

*Beyond Violence: The Human-Animal Connection* has three resources that I use as I approach target audiences – the DDAF publication, *The Violence Connection*, which clearly presents the research on this topic; a 13-minute “Beyond Violence” video, accompanied by a

discussion guide, produced by PSYETA; and *The AniCare Model of Treatment for Animal Abuse*, a manual for mental health professionals, jointly produced by DDAF and PSYETA.

The primary goal of this project is to convey to law enforcement officials, mental health professionals, educators, and other relevant community groups, the crucial significance of animal abuse. This is achieved by drawing their attention to its consequences for human society. If we are successful, police officers will be more likely to notice animal abuse and neglect and vigorously and effectively investigate it. In turn, prosecutors will aggressively and effectively prosecute animal cruelty, and judges, understanding the significance of animal abuse, will impose appropriate sentences on animal abusers that sends the message that animal cruelty is a serious crime. Additionally, educators, mental health professionals, domestic violence counselors, child protective service workers, guid-



ance counselors, educators, ministers, and other community groups will be more alert to recognizing the signs of animal abuse and will swiftly report it to the appropriate agencies. As we accomplish this, more and more animals will be protected and the cycle of violence that contaminates human society also will be interrupted, allowing the potential for more peaceful human communities.

I also envision secondary, less immediate, goals for this project. By examining the words of the title of this project more closely – “Beyond Violence: The Human-Animal Connection” – we can see what those secondary goals are. Most members of human society long for a less violent world to live in. I am convinced, as many other animal activists are, that one critical element in achieving a more peaceful and just society lies in our relationship with other animals. This is not, of course, just personal opinion or fanciful thinking; increasing research points to the central role that animals play in human development. Children’s moral, social, and emotional development is influenced by their relationship with animals. “2000: Year of the Humane Child” is based on this premise.

We also now know, for example, that animals help reduce stress, lower blood pressure, improve self-esteem, alleviate depression, and offer com-

panionship to isolated individuals. In my recently released book, *Animal Grace: Entering a Spiritual Relationship with Our Fellow Creatures*, I describe the possibilities for spiritual maturation in our relationship with animals (see sidebar). By

presentations to the command staffs of the Anne Arundel and Howard County, Maryland police departments, and as noted above, I provided in-service training to the Annapolis Police Department. Many officers were sensitive to animals.

Coordinating Council of Anne Arundel County (which was my inaugural presentation of the “Beyond Violence” project). I quickly accepted it, knowing that it was an unusual opportunity to be able to speak to judges. Of all the critical players in

**“Beyond Violence: The Human-Animal Connection” will have achieved its goal when no individual or agency needs our services any longer.**



entering a reciprocal relationship with animals in which we become more aware of how our actions affect their lives, as well as how they enrich our lives, we can realize the interconnectedness of all of life. Essential and neglected parts of ourselves can come alive in the company of other animals. In direct contrast, then, to the dark side of the human-animal relationship – the “violence connection” – there also is the potential for human growth and mutual benefit in the human-animal relationship. Not abusing animals is an important goal, but we should not stop there. The secondary goal of “Beyond Violence” seeks to lay the groundwork for an expanding consciousness toward animals in which we realize our close interconnectedness with them; how we are all part of

this vast web of existence.

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ith both the primary and secondary goals of the

“Beyond Violence” project in mind, here are some concrete examples of how this work gets done. I use the word “work” but actually it doesn’t seem like work at all since the audiences I have addressed have been quite receptive to my message. For example, I have found police to be interested in hearing about this connection and willing to seriously consider its ramifications. I have made

One police officer sent me an “internet” Christmas card; with three figures holding “hands” – a dog, a cat, and a mouse – standing on the surface of a globe, with their backs toward the viewer. I don’t recall the exact piece of music that accompanied this site, but I was charmed by this endearing vision.

Another time after an in-service session, one of the officers approached me and posed the question, with thinly disguised disgust in his tone of voice, “what happens to a person who shoots his neighbor’s dog?” The answer in this case was “nothing.” The police officer had been involved in a case in which the judge made the interpretation that shooting a dog did not constitute “cruelly killing,” the wording used in the Maryland’s animal cruelty statute. Police sometimes expressed frustration with judges, feeling that they did not impose strict enough sentences on convicted defendants. (This applied not only to animal cruelty cases, but other cases as well).

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ne evening in February, I was the guest speaker at a meeting of district and circuit judges in the state of Maryland. The

Honorable Clayton Green, Jr., an administrative judge of the fifth circuit court, had issued the invitation after hearing me make a very brief address to the Criminal Justice

the animal abuse-human violence connection, apparently judges are the most difficult to gain access to.

Since it was a dinner meeting, I had an added benefit of being able to socialize with the judges before and during the dinner. Sometimes a conversation with a judge would turn to his handling of a particular animal cruelty case. One judge recalled that he had imposed a stiff sentence on one man who had been found guilty of shooting cows; later in conversation the same judge began speculating on various aspects of the human-animal relationship and revealed that he was moving toward becoming a vegetarian. A female judge remarked that she hadn’t been aware of the connection between animal abuse and domestic violence, stating she intended to give this greater consideration in the future. Other judges expressed the opinion that they had little influence in interrupting the “violence connection,” saying they played a mostly “passive” or “neutral” role. Trying to be helpful, one judge pointed me in the direction of prosecutors, thinking they were the ones who would have the most influence in reducing animal cruelty. While it is true that judges cannot be advocates, I think it is possible that some judges may need to be encouraged to see the significance of their role in this process.

Recently a judge in Maryland sentenced a defendant to a weekend in jail for participation in a dog-fight.

When the judge did not levy the maximum penalty of a \$1,000 fine and a 90-day jail sentence (already a light penalty), he missed an important opportunity to use his office to reduce the violence in our society.

We need to educate more on the

**A**t times the audiences I address are a mix of police, counselors, prosecutors, animal control officers, social workers, mental health professionals, and domestic vio-

Making a presentation before one audience often produces an invitation for another one. At the Frederick meeting, professionals working in the area of domestic violence and child advocacy approached us about offering training to mental



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significance of animal cruelty and how it relates to violence in general. I believe that most judges are open to this message and I hope to have the chance to share it with judges in the future. In March of 2001 we will be taking the message of “Beyond Violence” to the annual conference of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges in Reno. We also hope to be a part of the program of the annual educational conferences of Maryland district and circuit court judges.

lence workers, reflecting the many different professionals who have a part to play in addressing “the violence connection.” The most diverse audience I faced to date was the meeting arranged under the auspices of the Frederick County Animal Control, headed by Mary Ellen Poole, the Executive Director, who is ably assisted by Penny Misner. At the Frederick meeting the audiences included all of these professions as well as a housing inspector and child advocates.

health professionals on the *AniCare* approach to treatment of animal abuse. Individuals who work in domestic violence – both with the survivors and the perpetrators – recognize the value of the *AniCare* approach, as it was developed on a model of treatment for batterers. We enthusiastically agreed to provide instruction for the mental health professionals of Frederick County on

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## *Animal Grace: Entering a Spiritual Relationship with Our Fellow Creatures*



Written by Mary Lou Randour, Published by New World Library

As a psychologist, Mary Lou Randour explored a variety of theories and practices in her search for meaning. But it was her awakening to the animal lives around her that enabled her to experience the possibilities of transformation. In this powerful and moving book, Randour urges us to build a mature relationship with animals based on two basic commitments, “to expand awareness and take compassionate action.” *Animal Grace* looks beyond what animals can offer us and examines the possibility of entering a spiritual relationship with them.

Randour shows how animals, both domestic and wild, can help us heal our illnesses, cope with death, learn to love, and expand our consciousness. Then, rooting her vibrant exploration in teachings from Christianity, Judaism, and the East, she demonstrates how our responsible action can help both animals and ourselves.

We must move beyond idle contemplation, Randour believes, toward bold action on behalf of suffering animals. She calls for re-examining our everyday lives, showing in one gripping chapter the myriad ways each of us influences the lives of other species. Most of all, Randour demonstrates the power of compassion. In a journey through spiritual tradition and story, she lovingly reveals what animals can bring to us and, ultimately, what we can bring them in return.

Two well-known figures in the animal advocacy movement – Jane Goodall and Howard Lyman—have said the following about *Animal Grace*:

*With her call to develop our awareness and compassion, Mary Lou Randour invites us to open our hearts and minds to the animal lives all around us. She shows us —with powerful storytelling and compelling scholarship—that by serving the crucial cause of animals we can also enrich our spiritual lives immeasurably. That is a message I heartily endorse and join with her in making.*

—Dr. Jane Goodall

*Animal Grace has the potential to do for animals what the hymn “Amazing Grace” did for slavery. I read it. I loved it.*

— Howard Lyman, author *Mad Cowboy*

*Animal Grace* is available at bookstores, as well as amazon.com, bn.com, and borders.com. 🐾

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AniCare and they are arranging the training, which will be conducted in May. We will be offering AniCare workshops on a national basis; beginning with training sessions in Aurora, Colorado, then moving to California, Maine, and other states.

*Beyond Violence: The Human-Animal Connection* will have achieved its goal when no individual or agency needs our services any longer. That ideal time will be when animals are not mistreated and exploited by the human species and everyone recognizes the value of all life, not just human life. That is a goal that is important to maintain although we all recognize it can never be fully achieved. Whatever reduction in animal cruelty we can influence, with the

accompanying reduction in human violence, will be a victory. While "Beyond Violence" may never realize its final goal, as more professionals recognize the significant links between animal abuse and human violence, it can make a real difference in the lives of countless animals for generations to come. 🐾

*About the Author: Mary Lou Randour, Ph.D., is a professional psychologist and director of "Beyond Violence: The Human-Animal Connection" a joint project of the Doris Day Animal Foundation and Psychologists for the Ethical Treatment of Animals. After sixteen years in private practice, she now devotes herself to the animal advocacy movement. She is the author of Women's Psyche, Women's Spirit: The Reality of Relationships and edi-*

*tor of Exploring Sacred Landscapes, both published by Columbia U. Press. Mary Lou lives with her husband, Sam Black, and her two beloved canine companions, Toshi and Sophie, in Chevy Chase, Maryland.*