



Correspondence between Barbara Axel of NCRAOA and Shannon Johnstone, "Landfill Dogs" Photographer, Author

For years dog enthusiasts and purebred breeders have been on the receiving end of what seems to be a diatribe of hate. The vitriol has become more shrill every year. Recently, what had previously been a statewide photo-op, had become by this CNN interview, national. I could not allow the commonly stated falsehoods to continue, so I wrote to Shannon requesting documentation of her statements and she answered. I ask the indulgence of all for the publication of my personal views.

The CNN published interview and my correspondence with Shannon Johnstone follow:

Landfill Dogs

By **Michelle Cohan**, CNN updated 8:57 PM EST, Sun November 23, 2014

(CNN) -- Tails wagging wildly, tongues panting heavily, ears -- soft as felt -- flapping around as if they were wings propelling them against gravity.

These canines are getting some much-needed freedom from their leash, running, leaping and rolling on a field at a landfill in North Carolina.

But this is no normal walk in the park for these dogs, as it might be their last.

Homeless and ownerless, these shelter dogs have almost maxed their shelf life in the local pound, and they could end up in the landfill buried with everything else people have discarded.

This is the sad reality of a pet overpopulation problem that photographer Shannon Johnstone wishes to change through her wide lens and huge heart.

As a last-ditch effort to save these dogs from euthanasia, her "Landfill Dogs" project has already changed the metaphorical landscape: Of the 127 dogs she has photographed on these symbolic grounds, 108 have gotten homes.

But it's more than just finding owners for the animals. She hopes to change the physical landscape as well and open the conversation about how to save these animals from a fate six feet under.

"Throwing bodies into landfill after being injected with a barbiturate isn't good for the environment," Johnstone said. "My hope is that underlying that, we can figure out what to do to curb overpopulation from starting in first place."

Johnstone knew nothing about homeless dogs until she adopted one of her own after completing graduate school.

Her journey to shoot "Landfill Dogs" started with a forgotten crate and a neighbor nice enough to return it. The two spoke for a while about rescue animals and led Johnstone to start volunteering at the local shelter in Raleigh, North Carolina.

"I was awestruck by how many animals there were and how quick the turnover was," Johnstone said.

The Wake County Animal Shelter houses animals as long as possible before they run out of room or resources to take care of them.

Social media

Follow [@CNNPhotos](#) on [Twitter](#) to join the conversation about photography.

"The saddest thing is there is no alternative for animal overpopulation other than euthanasia, no other tool in their arsenal," Johnstone said.

Her first project on the shelter in 2009, titled "Breeding Ignorance," depicted the lethal injection process. She wanted to show people what happens when the animals are not adopted, and she wanted to show how hard the animal shelters work as "first responders" to "discarded property," she said.

Years went by before she approached the subject again, but this time she took a different, more positive angle.

Instead of showing the "doom and gloom," she wanted to show that animals could be helped out before it was too late. The former director of the Wake County Animal Shelter asked her to come out to a landfill that he ! was turning into a public park.

She paused and thought, "Why is he involved in both waste and animals?"

The county animal shelter falls under the same management as the landfill. By law, pets are property.

"If you don't want your property anymore, that's what the animal shelter is for. And most of the time, they then end up in landfill," she said.

Thus, "Landfill Dogs" was born to give man's best friend the chance to be seen for their beauty --! and to be saved, like the wasteland-turned-park that they play on.

Shannon Johnstone is an American photographer based in North Carolina. You can follow the "Landfill Dogs" project on Facebook.

<http://www.cnn.com/2014/11/23/living/cnnphotos-landfill-dogs/>

My letter sent on Tue, Nov 25, 2014

Dear Shannon Johnstone,

As a purebred breeder of decades, though I have only two elderly dogs at home now, and as someone who has worked in the field of dog law since 1971 I represent thousands of concerned citizens who would like to be privy to the documentation that lists numbers of dogs that have been surgically sterilized as opposed to the dogs who are intact who have been euthanized by facilities because there was no room. How many of the dogs are mismanaged mixed breeds as opposed to purpose bred purebreds? How many of the animals killed are feral cats? Back in the 70's there definitely was a dog overpopulation problem. However for the past 20 years that has not been the case. AKC registrations, for instance, have declined precipitously, even though about 30 new breeds have been added to the registry.

What we have found is that the dogs getting dumped are not 5 to 8 weeks that would document a dog overpopulation problem, but are usually 9 months through adult that would speak to an owner retention problem.

By continuing to broadcast the misperceptions we are not going to solve the problems of surrendering dogs to facilities or actually dumping them far away from home.

The problem of producing unwanted pups is not by inflicting lifelong, damaging major surgery on pediatric dogs, but by education on the responsibilities of ownership, supervision of dogs outside and inside the household, and the very simple and benign population control device called a leash.

Let us identify the problem in order to seek a solution.

Barbara Axel

Shannon Johnstone replied and sent these urls as documenting her beliefs.

While I am not going to print her letter in its entirety, I will list the urls she used to prove her case.

http://www.humanesociety.org/issues/pet_overpopulation/facts/pet_ownership_statistics.html;http://www.humanesociety.org/assets/pdfs/pets/puppy_mills/puppy-mills-facts-figures.pdf;

<http://ncagr.gov/vet/aws/fix/documents/ShelterReport2013Updated8-4-14;.pdf>

<http://www.sog.unc.edu/sites/www.sog.unc.edu/files/FinalReportPierceReed.pdf>

In every case the "facts" used to provide documentation seem to be flawed, incomplete, or out of date.

I summarized the essence of Shannon Johnstone's letter in reply to me in these points:

- 1.) There is no difference between an owner retention problem or irresponsible owners allowing their dogs to run free and uncontrolled, and that both planned and unplanned litters contribute to the animal overpopulation that fills a facility.
- 2.) That there is no current legislation that would address the problem of overpopulation since the (N.C.) Puppy Mill Bill failed.
- 3.) In addition, we breeders, unlike Shannon Johnstone, see mixed breed dogs as not deserving of life and we don't seem to care how many mismanaged mixed breeds are euthanized and are thrown in landfills.
- 4.) Breeders, unlike Ms. Johnstone, see dogs as commodities rather than as companions.
- 5.) Regardless of the reasons, the facilities are full and laws should be passed that restrict breeding to reduce animal overpopulation even if it makes it harder for a breeder to make a profit.
- 6.) Spay and neuter surgery is a small price to pay if it means thousands of animals will not have to be killed.

Her biased attack was ideological, personal, and in my opinion unfair, so rather than taking it on the chin once again, I wrote a rebuttal not only for myself, but for all of us who have been blamed for animals that populate municipal and private facilities. Below is my reply:

Dear Shannon Johnstone,

Thank you for your reply and for your viewpoint. Here's mine.

When I attended elementary and high school I was taught about our Revolutionary War, learned the names of our heroes and was proud of the valor of these fighters for Independence and the formation of our government. It was not till I attended a history course in college and the required reading included a book that focused on the same period, but written and first published in Britain that I learned there was another point of view. What an eye opener.

So too do you write a one-sided viewpoint assuming you already know my motives without even meeting me or attempting to find out who I really am, so please allow me to introduce myself.

I am a breeder of purpose-bred purebreds, but also an individual who may represent thousands you have discounted, whose passion for responsible pet ownership of all dogs and other pets mirrors yours. Your comment that I do not care for and respect the lives of all pets is really unfair. So is your opinion that someone waiting for more than a year to own one of my carefully bred and raised dogs, knowing ahead of time what to expect from a pup born in my home in terms of health, conformation and temperament, should be made to feel guilty for their choice. You claim that unless purchasing a pet from a facility instead of from me both my puppy buyers and I are irresponsible, unfeeling, and adding to the problem of unwanted dogs. You point at me as profit motivated, and that I should feel ashamed of whelping pups while there remains even one dog in a facility. Though I agree that all lives are precious I am very proud of my breeding and careful placement of pets born in my home. Not one of my dogs has ever contributed to the problem of unwanted dogs that are filling facilities. People who waited to obtain a specific pup from me would not have gone to a facility as an alternative in any case.

You are pictured with a healthy and happy appearing dog who resembles a pit bull. He looks like a young dog in your photograph. Is he your first? You obviously are not aware that I in concert with other advocates have been fighting for decades for your right to own that dog of your choice, and for his right to live without fear of harassment, confiscation, torture, and euthanization because of his looks. Is it possible that I have been working toward this end well before you were alive?

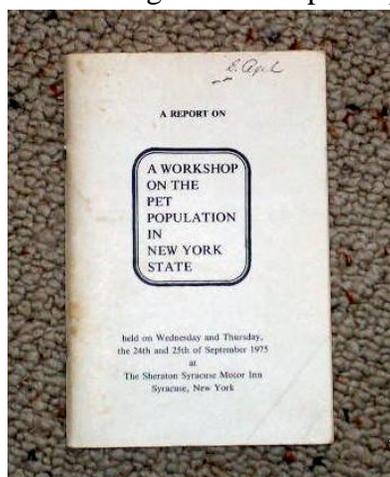
Here is the URL to a more recent passionate endorsement I authored, for your right to choose and own that dog safely. In return you have demonized me.

http://www.ncraoa.com/newsletter/2010/NCRAOA_NewsOctober2010.pdf

I am now a retired breeder, having owned one breed since 1957. My first litter was born in 1971, my final one in 1998. I've whelped about a dozen litters, often kept multiple pups from each litter, and tried to keep in touch with the owners of those pups we sold for their lifetime. My husband and I carefully raised pups according to Scott and Fuller's research on *The Critical Stages of Puppyhood*. We accumulated hands-on knowledge of animal husbandry as we whelped and raised litters. Our dogs were socialized, loved people, earned titles in conformation, obedience, tracking, field, plus temperament test certifications, and schutzhund degrees. They took part in lure coursing, agility, field and earth dog events. Several were registered therapy dogs. My dogs from every generation accompanied me as we volunteered over the years, providing entertainment and education to groups of all ages, appearing at least once a month at scheduled events.

While I concentrated on my homebreds I also volunteered at times to take care of other dogs, including mixed breeds. My most recent adventure in rescue was with a Treeing Walker Coonhound, an adult, who seems to have been dumped. I kept him at my home for months while conducting a fruitless search for his previous owners, nurturing this sweet, initially frightened dog, seeing him grow in confidence and personality, then nursing him through a heartworm infestation treatment, after which we found him a loving family when he regained good health. Today, a half decade later, he is a well loved and important member of his new family who visit me periodically.

How long have I been actively working as a volunteer to enhance the lives of all dogs? Since about 1970. I was a delegate to and participant in the multi-organization New York State Workshop on Pet Population in



1975. As a result the Long Island Council on Pet Education(C.O.P.E.) was formed by some LI attendees: veterinarians, municipal and private shelter personnel, hobby breeders and dog show exhibitors. All of us were volunteers, digging deep into our own pockets to fund broadcasting the message of responsible pet ownership by publication, and in person holding programs in libraries and school assemblies, and clubs for children and adults and families. We contacted legislators and spoke by invitation at hearings. We were consulted concerning other municipal problems about pets. Before email was even thought of our group devised a way to help the average dog owner by formulating and distributing signs that stated "Dog Problems Hounding You? We can help you C.O.P.E." to stores and supermarkets throughout Long Island. Each sign held a number of tear-off postcards that when mailed to us were answered promptly. While none of us were paid, C.O.P.E. was funded by

donations from private parties and was the recipient of grants from the Long Island Veterinary Association.

I never profited from being a hobby breeder. The sale of some pups from litters born once every few years could not possibly fund my hobby. My professional status that did provide an income was as an obedience instructor. I taught owners of all types of dogs, purebred and mixed breed in groups and individually, from beginner training to the highest level of obedience competition, and conducted seminars on responsible ownership for clubs and groups all over the United States and abroad. My goal: to improve interaction and understanding between two species, no matter whether the dogs were purpose bred purebred, crossbred or the mixed breed result of "oops" conceptions. All were deserving of safety and happiness.

It was a pleasure to hear from former students who told me that they were able to turn their lives around after attending my courses.

There was also a downside and despair when hearing about former students who too easily discarded their once beloved pets when they had a baby, their dog grew too big, did not match the new color scheme, when they got tired of picking up after him, moved to a new home that did not accept pets, when he became redundant after they found another "forever" dog they thought they might like better, got a divorce and neither party wanted that pet any longer, suddenly developed an allergy etc. They, after knowing they were making a commitment for at least a decade, decided flippantly they no longer wanted a dog. The result was that they walked away after bringing the dog to a facility, or even worse, dumping their bewildered, frightened pet by the side of the road to fend for itself. This had and has nothing to do with the current myth of overpopulation. It is instead the fault of a society that has a "paper plate" mentality with built in obsolescence as a guideline. A decade or longer has

become instead, "as long as I feel like it." You are right. A living, feeling being deserves better. Too many people spend more time researching a new auto than the pet they claim they will not be able to live without. Have I profited by my accumulation of dog knowledge and hands on animal husbandry? You bet, but not as a breeder. Have you profited from your "Landfill Dogs" photography? Probably more than I ever have from my dozen litters over 50 years. That does not make our passion, yours and mine, any less valid. What is unfortunate is that your short term knowledge and vision have left you vulnerable to the one sided propaganda from the only people with whom you are acquainted; those who are really making the big bucks from their involvement with animals. For example, ask Wayne Pacelle of HSUS what his salary is, and do include his well paid staff, including the regional lobbyists. Animal rights groups are well organized, and wealthy, but in spite of their names are not humane, and most do not spend the donations they receive on hands-on rescue. They are not at all interested in animal welfare. Their real goal that they are achieving in increments is to indoctrinate new people to promote their cause, and to ultimately eliminate all interaction between animals and people.

You exemplify in a few of your URLs some happenings local to me. I was active in Asheville Kennel Club in 2003, the year of the passage of the MSN ordinance in Buncombe County.

I also know of the activities of the Humane Alliance. The Humane Alliance would be defunct if they had restricted their activities solely to Asheville where they began. Instead their staff of veterinarians who concentrate in performing hysterectomies and castrations have had to travel further and further afield to support mass assembly line major surgery on pups, and in heat females. With little thought to the permanent long term outcome on a dam, they perform abortions of pregnant females at the same time as hysterectomies in their attempt to rid the nation of pups. Within a few hours after operating, they enable the transport of post surgical patients they do not know and have commonly seen only under anesthesia, back to their original location with the advice that those responsible for the dogs must now seek help from a primary veterinarian. Who really are the ones who do not care about the well being and long life of our pets?

In the '70's there actually was an overpopulation problem that concerned us and was addressed by organizations working together. We convinced the public of the benefits of spaying and neutering, with the result that population of both purebred and mixed breed dogs across the United States has been declining. There is a reason that your outdated statistics show Buncombe County's pet population has gone down, and it is not because of an MSN ordinance that is so ineffective it has stopped being enforced. Canine population, both mixed breed and purebred, has dropped across the much of the United States. The multi-organizational work we started in 1970's is paying off. Even purebred registrations have precipitously dropped. For instance the numbers of purebred dogs registered with AKC in 1992 was 1,528,392, but though many new breeds have been added and registered since that date, the annual AKC registration in 2013 was 479,404.

The best method of birth control, is not mandatory pediatric surgical hysterectomy or castration that has been found by recent research to inflict long term harm to dogs and often shortens lives. It is called a leash, attached to a dog collar at one end and a human at the other. Leash laws are the preferred way to promote responsibility that can be enacted and enforced.

I have been a cat owner as well so I also have experienced the hapless destiny of so many excess cats. Why has the TNR program not been more widely practiced? While I chose my dogs, my cats were strays that chose me. I've owned about a half dozen felines over the years, all of whom have been abandoned or abused or have known the feral way of life. My most recent, a petite 4.5 pounder with a personality larger than her size, and an even larger voice, was an adult when she decided to cast her lot with us. She began as a feral who grew to become a loving and loved house pet. She died in my arms last year at the age of 21 years.

I don't like to be demonized any more than do you. From a half century's experience I've learned that there are diverse viewpoints and it is only by walking in one another's moccasins that we can learn to understand and appreciate each other.

Sincerely,
Barbara Axel

To date I have not received an answer.

Pawtucket, RI Pit Bull Dogs Win Fight for Freedom

PAWTUCKET, R.I. — Dozens of pit bull owners paraded with their dogs in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, to celebrate their legal victory that overturned its decade-long ban on pit bulls. About 40 dogs and their owners on Sunday celebrated a Superior Court judge's Nov. 18 ruling overturning the ban.

Ann Clark of Pit Bulls for PTSD, which organized the parade, said it was a celebration that "all dogs are free in Pawtucket."

Pawtucket Police Chief Paul Kelly said the city imposed the ban in 2004 to try to curtail the number of pit bull attacks. At the time, Kelly said local drug dealers were using pit bulls to prevent police from house raids. The state last year barred cities from banning specific breeds. Dog owners say authorities should "punish the deed, not the breed."

Study of the effect on shelter cat intakes and euthanasia from a shelter neuter return project of 10,080 cats from March 2010 to June 2014

Copyright © Johnson and Cicirelli <http://dx.doi.org/10.7717/peerj.646>

Karen L. Johnson¹, Jon Cicirelli² Published October 30, 2014 PubMed 25374785

Abstract

Cat impoundments were increasing at the municipal San Jose animal shelter in 2009, despite long-term successful low cost sterilization programs and attempts to lower the euthanasia rate of treatable-rehabilitatable impounds beginning in 2008. San Jose Animal Care and Services implemented a new strategy designed to control overall feral cat reproduction by altering and returning feral cats entering the shelter system, rather than euthanizing the cats. The purpose of this case study was to determine how the program affected the shelter cat intakes over time. In just over four years, 10,080 individual healthy adult feral cats, out of 11,423 impounded at the shelter during this time frame, were altered and returned to their site of capture. Included in the 11,423 cats were 862 cats impounded from one to four additional times for a total of 958 (9.5%) recaptures of the previously altered 10,080 cats. The remaining 385 healthy feral cats were euthanized at the shelter from March 2010 to June 2014. Four years into the program, researchers observed cat and kitten impounds decreased 29.1%; euthanasia decreased from over 70% of intakes in 2009, to 23% in 2014. Euthanasia in the shelter for Upper Respiratory Disease decreased 99%; dead cat pick up off the streets declined 20%. Dog impounds did not similarly decline over the four years. No other laws or program changes were implemented since the beginning of the program.



New NCRAOA Newsletter Publishing Schedule

In 2015 NCRAOA is planning to publish the Newsletter quarterly, with special editions if there is significant breaking news. Your next Newsletter should be published in March, 2015.

Our entire Board of Directors and members wish everybody happy holidays, and a bright and healthful New Year.

North Carolina Responsible Animal Owners Alliance, Inc. (NCRAOA) is a statewide organization of animal owners and professionals dedicated to animal welfare, responsible animal ownership, and maintaining the rights of responsible citizens to breed and own animals. NCRAOA, a 501(c)3 organization, provides education and information to the public and supports reasonable and humane animal welfare laws. Permission granted to copy and distribute NCRAOA News and Views in its entirety as is.

NCRAOA • PO Box 455, Stem NC 27581 • ncraoa@yahoo.com