The Human Side of Humaneness

By John A. Hoyt

From the moment I was designated president of HSUS, I have insisted that humaneness must have as its focus both man and animal. To have it otherwise is surely to fail in our efforts to prevent suffering and cruelty to our fellow creatures.

Historically, a humanitarian is one who promotes human welfare and social reform. Yet those of us who stand within the "human movement" have broadened that concern to include animals as well. In fact, our efforts have become so pervasive that the term "human movement" is generally understood to mean the animal welfare movement.

To have chosen animal welfare as our principal focus is surely defensible, for it cannot be expected that all people, or all organizations, can be all things to all people or, for that matter, to all animals. Yet humanitarians, in the animal welfare meaning of that term, have often been criticized for directing so much energy and financial resources to the prevention of cruelty to animals when there exists throughout the world so much human misery. It is a criticism we have often encountered. And, except for the fact that there are millions of persons and thousands of organizations responding to these human concerns, our efforts would indeed be quite disproportionate. Yet we are not at all isolated from these important human concerns, and I would venture that the vast majority of animal welfare people are deeply involved in human welfare issues as well.

It must surely be admitted that some humanitarians have lost sight of the human side of humaneness, albeit in a different sense. Almost daily, I am asked why HSUS does not maintain animal shelters, or wildlife preserves, or clinics and hospitals for animal treatment and care. A recent letter stated that unless "you do something to stop the cruelty and abuse to animals, I will not contribute further."

But how, finally, does one succeed in preventing cruelty and abuse to animals? By changing the nature and character of animals? Obviously not. The lot of animals in this or any society will be changed only by altering the nature and character of man. It is for this reason that HSUS has placed major emphasis upon directing its efforts and resources toward the human side of humaneness in an effort to improve conditions for all animals everywhere.

In this issue of The Humane Society News you will read of many efforts and activities directed toward people of all ages and descriptions in an attempt to improve conditions for animals. Major among these is the role we have assumed in teaching kindness and respect for life to children, the training of teachers, and the development of educational materials to undergird these efforts. You will read of seminar programs to instruct animal shelter personnel, animal control officials, and government leaders. You will read of extensive efforts to challenge and confront those persons who from neglect or ill motive permit cruelties to take place—both ordinary citizens and the leaders of our states and nation. And you will read of the very extensive efforts we are taking to inform the general public of conditions and actions affecting animals that need their response, either in support or in opposition.

All of this is being done to create a society in which man becomes a more responsible and kindly being who demonstrates respect for his fellow creatures. There can be no prevention of cruelty and abuse to animals unless man himself becomes the focus of our humanitarian efforts and endeavors.