



## Tradition Gone Awry

The commercialization of an ancient ritual wreaks havoc on wildlife around the world

**As a child living in Taiwan**, Shu-Jen Chen was enthralled by the colorful “fang-sheng” celebrations where Buddhists purchased caged animals and—in a gesture of compassion to all creatures—set them free.

“It was all done so cheerfully,” says Chen. “It seemed so wonderful because we thought the animals were in pens to be killed or eaten, and they were giving these animals a better life.”

But this illusion didn’t survive into adulthood, when Chen, a campaign manager for Humane Society International, looked below the surface of modern fang-sheng ceremonies, also known as mercy releases. What she discovered—that the practice traumatizes and kills millions of animals and disrupts native ecosystems—has Chen poised to help launch an HSI campaign to stop the abuses.

The Buddhist tradition of mercy release is based on the belief that freeing a captive animal creates good karma, bringing the person and the animal good fortune in this life and better prospects for the next

incarnation. The custom began centuries ago when monks spontaneously rescued animals and their actions were memorialized in religious texts. But as early as the 16th century, critics in China complained that mercy release as practiced was a corruption of the original intent, says Wu Hung, HSI partner and founder of the Environment and Animal Society of Taiwan.

Today, mercy release is a multimillion dollar enterprise, says Hung, practiced by Buddhists around the world but bearing only a superficial resemblance to the impromptu acts of kindness its practitioners



Animals are often packed into crates for days or weeks before their release into an unfamiliar environment.

are emulating. Large temples purchase hundreds or thousands of wild animals to be “freed” in a single day, and a thriving industry has sprung up around the farming, trapping, import, and sale of the wildlife. Birds, fish, and turtles are the most commonly used animals, but a wide variety of species—native and imported—are victims of the trade.

Of the untold millions of wild animals trapped for mercy release ceremonies each year, only a fraction survive capture and transport, when they’re commonly kept in tightly packed crates for days or weeks. Those who do survive often collapse from exhaustion, illness, or injury soon after release, becoming easy targets for predators. Others die after they’re set loose in inappropriate habitats; freshwater turtles may be tossed into oceans, and saltwater fish may be placed in ponds or rivers. In some cases, says Hung, the animals’ freedom is only temporary, as hunters wait just beyond the release sites to recapture the weak and disoriented animals for consumption or resale.

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Even when animals manage to thrive after release, other creatures may suffer as a result. Animals are often freed thousands of miles from their natural ranges, in groups large enough to establish breeding populations. They can spread diseases to native species, compete for food and territory, or mate with indigenous species, threatening their survival. In Taiwan, where an estimated 200 million wild or captive-bred animals are released each year, all but two of the 51 major rivers contain alien species, while indigenous fish have nearly disappeared from some waterways, including the country's famous Sun Moon Lake.

Despite the widespread impacts, few who participate in mercy release ceremonies realize that their kind intentions can have cruel consequences—or that the animals they're ransoming from captivity were captured for the sole purpose of being released. Even when the animals flap helplessly on the ground or float belly up in the water, people believe they're doing a benevolent thing, says Chen. "There's a Chinese saying, 'Keep one eye open and the other eye shut,' and that's what they're doing with mercy release."

But Chen and Hung won't let this myopic view persist. Using video footage and investigative reports, they're already winning allies within Buddhist communities. This fall, they'll launch a campaign to educate people about the animal suffering and environmental damage caused by commercialized mercy release, and they'll lobby government bodies to ban the practice. The campaign will begin in Taiwan and then expand to other countries with large Buddhist populations, including the U.S.

Part of the campaign's strategy involves redirecting the spirit of mercy release toward practices consistent with the Buddha's teaching of respect for all living beings. After all, says Chen, with the growing numbers of animal protection and habitat preservation organizations around the world, there's no lack of opportunities for people to help animals—and perhaps earn a bit of good karma in the process.

—Julie Falconer



Former puppy mill dog Sugar Bowl has a new life with Indiana Rep. Linda Lawson's granddaughter, Genavive.

## A Fairy Tale Ending

### Legislator Gives Second Chance to a Puppy Mill Dog

**Animal lovers** descended on a Mauckport, Ind., puppy mill near the Kentucky border in early June to save 240 dogs. Among the rescue team members was someone with an unusual resumé: six terms as a legislator in the Indiana statehouse.

Wearing a yellow Animal Rescue T-shirt, Rep. Linda Lawson helped move dogs from their cages onto trucks that would take them to a nearby emergency shelter. It wasn't the first time she'd tried to alleviate animal suffering; Lawson had spent the past year fighting against puppy mills in a different arena, pushing for legislation to make it harder for these mass breeding facilities to operate in Indiana.

A 2007 recipient of The HSUS's Humane State Legislator Award, Lawson has a history of effective advocacy for animal bills, and H.E.A. 1468 was no exception. She showed pictures of puppy mill dogs on the House floor and fought hard as puppy mill interests tried to weaken the bill. Signed into law in May, the legislation took effect July 1.

"If we had anyone other than Representative Lawson as a sponsor, this all would have been dead a long time ago," says Anne Sterling, Indiana state director for The HSUS.

Soon after the victory, Lawson got a visceral reminder of why she has worked so hard to help dogs trapped in puppy mills.

When Sterling invited her to join The HSUS's convoy to southern Indiana on June 2, the legislator jumped at the chance. As she worked, Lawson saw large groups of dogs living in igloo-shaped plastic shelters with a single point of entry and breeding dogs stacked in cages kept inside the house.

One dog in particular caught her eye.



Lawson volunteers at a raid.

## A Gift That Packs a Wallop

**As deputy manager** of The HSUS's new Wilde Puppy Mill Task Force, Justin Scally has helped rescue more than 200 dogs from a Pennsylvania mass breeding facility. He has fielded calls from constituents alerting him to puppy mills in their locales. He has combed through a stack of open case files looking for the next one to investigate.

And that was just during his first week on the job—one that's going to be made more manageable thanks to a generous contribution from the Kenneth and Lillian Wilde Estate. The gift funds Scally's position as well as those of a caseworker and investigator; it also covers the costs of a national tip line.

The infusion of financial support will increase the number of puppy mill raids by using the combined resources of HSUS investigations, campaigns, and emergency services staff to galvanize the efforts of individual communities. A former animal control director who once received HSUS help in raiding a North Carolina puppy mill, Scally knows how much local rescue work



Kenneth and Lillian Wilde

can benefit from the resources of a national campaign. "It's great to be on the other side and offering that assistance to others now with their cases," he says.

For Kenneth and Lillian Wilde, who cared for many pets and strays throughout their lives, a donation was a logical next step. "They never had children, so pets were sort of where they devoted their affection," says Lynne Hook, who shared executor duties for the estate with her husband, Jack, after the two helped care for the elderly couple during their final years.

Throughout their 74 years together, the Wildes saved their money—first from a Philadelphia restaurant they owned, later from the night jobs they held for 26 years—and made a few good investments along the way to amass a small fortune. After Kenneth died in 2007, Hook helped Lillian get her affairs in order. Distressed by the plight of animals living in squalid conditions, Lillian wanted a portion of her estate to go to The HSUS as well as to groups that help at-risk children and the elderly.



Justin Scally learned of the power of The HSUS during a puppy mill bust in North Carolina this February.

"I don't think that Lillian and Kenny would have ever dreamed that their name would have been on something like that," Hook says. "They were humble, quiet people. And they would just be very pleased to see it and see how their hard work paid off."

"When you walked up to her cage with the door closed, she would be jumping and smiling and trying to get to you," Lawson says, "but when you opened the cage, she would run to the back and stand there and shake. [The dogs] thought it was feeding time. But holding on to her, she just clung to you."

Lawson held the dog, a Pomeranian, a second time later that day while her picture was taken, and she kept track of her the rest of the time she was there. Before she left, she told Sterling she would like to see her new friend go to her local shelter, the Humane Society Calumet Area in Munster.

Later that month, Lawson took her 7-year-old granddaughter to the shelter to adopt a dog. It wasn't long before Genavive spotted one she liked. The two met in a nearby room, and the dog immediately started licking Genavive's face. Memories of the Pomeranian imprisoned at the puppy mill came rushing back to Lawson.

"Genavive said, 'Grandma, I think this is the one!'" she says. "And I'm like, 'Thank you, Lord. It is the one!'"

When they were thinking of what to name the dog, Lawson

mentioned that she looked like sugar. Genavive liked the suggestion and added a unique middle name.

"I thought she was going to say Sugar Baby, or Sugar ... something. But she said Sugar Bowl," Lawson says with a laugh.

Sugar Bowl is more than 300 miles and a lifetime away from the nightmare of her earlier days. At just 2 years old, she'd already had two litters and was pregnant again when Lawson first saw her.

Now spayed, vaccinated, microchipped, and regularly groomed, Sugar Bowl wears a bejeweled pink collar and sleeps in a pink bed. And every day, instead of suffering the isolation of a cage, she shares her home with a 15-year-old dalmatian and plays with four other dogs in the neighborhood.

"This is a little girl who was afraid for you to grab her and pull her out of a cage, and [now] she just wants to be held. And she just runs around the backyard like a wild goat," says Lawson, who visits Genavive's family often.

"She's a lucky little dog, and we're lucky to have her."

— *Andy MacAlpine*



Shelter dog Popeye got a second chance after Florida veterinary students performed surgery to repair his legs.

## First, Do No Harm

HSVMA helps veterinary schools implement more humane teaching methods

**For about six weeks** this summer, students and faculty at the University of Florida’s College of Veterinary Medicine were often treated to the sight of a young pit bull named Popeye bounding through the doors with his foster owner in tow.

As the 5-month-old dog headed toward a bed set up just for him, his admirers couldn’t help but notice the progress he’d made since a local shelter employee had asked the school to help save him. Suffering from angular limb deformities that had caused both front legs to bow, Popeye was scheduled for euthanasia at just 12 weeks old.

Before last fall, there were few other choices for such dogs in a county with limited resources to care for the 8,000 animals entering shelter doors each year. But thanks to the Helping Alachua’s Animals Requiring Treatment and Surgery program launched in November, Popeye made it to the operating table—where a surgeon, assisted by a student, removed bone segments so his forearms could straighten. Once doctors give him a clean bill of health, Popeye will be put up for adoption.

“I have a soft spot in my heart for pit

bulls because we don’t do a lot of pit bull adoptions in our county,” says veterinarian Natalie Isaza, an assistant professor who oversees the program. “He’s just such a sweet, lovable, happy little dog. I can’t even imagine him being euthanized now.”

About 100 dogs have been helped so far by the Florida initiative, but those used in many other teaching programs are not so fortunate. A 2007 survey found that nearly half the nation’s 28 veterinary schools still conduct terminal surgeries, where animals are euthanized following hands-on exercises, says Pam Runquist, director of veterinary advocacy for the Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association, an affiliate of The HSUS. In some programs, animals known as colony dogs and cats live on-site, undergo multiple procedures, and are often killed when the final lesson is completed.

HAARTS offers an alternative, helping animals while also providing students with experience in everything from anesthesia and wound treatments to fracture repair and mass removal. HSVMA—formed two

years ago as a home for veterinary professionals interested in advancing the cause of animal welfare—has joined The HSUS in awarding \$30,000 in grants to fund the program.

“We are not advocating against the use of animals in training; we just are advocating for the use of animals in ways that benefit the animals,” Runquist says. Research has proven the effectiveness of teaching strategies that rely on humane alternatives, which also include the use of lifelike models, computer simulations, and cadavers. But schools can be slow to react—Florida still offers one elective that uses terminal surgeries—even as more students are speaking out in defense of the cats and dogs they work with.

Terminal surgeries in required courses have ended at Oklahoma State University, in part because of the efforts of recent graduate Sarah Gordon. Though Oklahoma State had offered an alternative when she enrolled, the option was no longer available when Gordon was ready to take the course. She was permitted to use a cadaver but had to work alongside classmates operating on animals destined to be killed. “I felt like I let those dogs down,” Gordon says. “Some of my friends were crying through their whole surgeries.”

Gordon found an influential ear in Madeleine Pickens, the wife of Texas energy tycoon and OSU alumnus T. Boone Pickens. A few months after the two met to discuss

terminal procedures, Pickens urged OSU officials to rethink their policies. The university later announced that it was implementing an alternative method: spay/neuter surgeries on shelter dogs

who will be returned for adoption following their recovery. “I’m proud of the school for the changes they’ve made,” says Gordon, who received the HSVMA’s first Veterinary Student Advocacy Award in July.

Another vet student who changed the status quo recently received an alumna-sponsored scholarship for her efforts. Nicole Putney and two classmates persuaded the



Nearly half the nation’s 28 veterinary schools still conduct terminal surgeries, according to a 2007 survey.

faculty at Washington State University to replace a third of the colony dogs in a second-year anesthesia course with shelter animals. Under the new protocol, the dogs are anesthetized, neutered by a surgical student, cared for during recovery by the anesthesia students, and returned to a local shelter for adoption. The new program worked so well that the class will use shelter animals exclusively starting this school year.

“The feeling in the lab—from just the students to the staff, [to] the technicians that help us, as well as the faculty—is much better,” says Robert Keegan, a veterinarian who has taught the class for 20 years. “You feel like, ‘OK, maybe we’re giving this animal a chance here.’ Why people are reluctant to change is they really need to be shown definitely that [the method is] as good, if not better.”



Ruth Usher

Ruth Usher has made the case for better methods at the University of Georgia since she was faced with the prospect of performing terminal surgeries as a sophomore. Now a junior, her efforts have begun to bear fruit; with some help and funding from HSVMA, Georgia is expected to institute an educational memorial program this fall, permitting people to donate the bodies of their deceased pets for medical training. Usher also helped produce a digital media library of nonterminal surgical procedures.

“There are human medical schools out there that are great examples of how to get a high-quality education without harming live patients,” says Putney, who adopted one of Washington State’s colony dogs this year. “It baffles me that veterinary medicine has not caught up to those standards yet.” — *Andy MacAlpine*

➤ **FOR MORE** information about the Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association, visit [hsvma.org](http://hsvma.org).



## Signs of More Animal-Friendly Times

**Making Ourselves Heard:** Nearly 270 million egg-laying hens in the U.S. are confined in wire battery cages so restrictive the birds can’t spread their wings. The HSUS’s Factory Farming Campaign has been combating this cruelty in courtrooms, legislatures, and corporate boardrooms. In less than five years, the campaign has racked up an impressive string of victories, including California’s voter-led ban on extreme forms of confinement in 2008. Now it’s embarking on a similar ballot initiative in Michigan. At a recent conference of the International Egg Commission, Gene Gregory, president and CEO of the United Egg Producers trade association, called The HSUS the most feared organization in the U.S., according to a *WattPoultry.com* article: “They’re coming after everybody,” he said. That’s only partly true: The HSUS isn’t coming after everybody—just those involved in practices that harm animals.

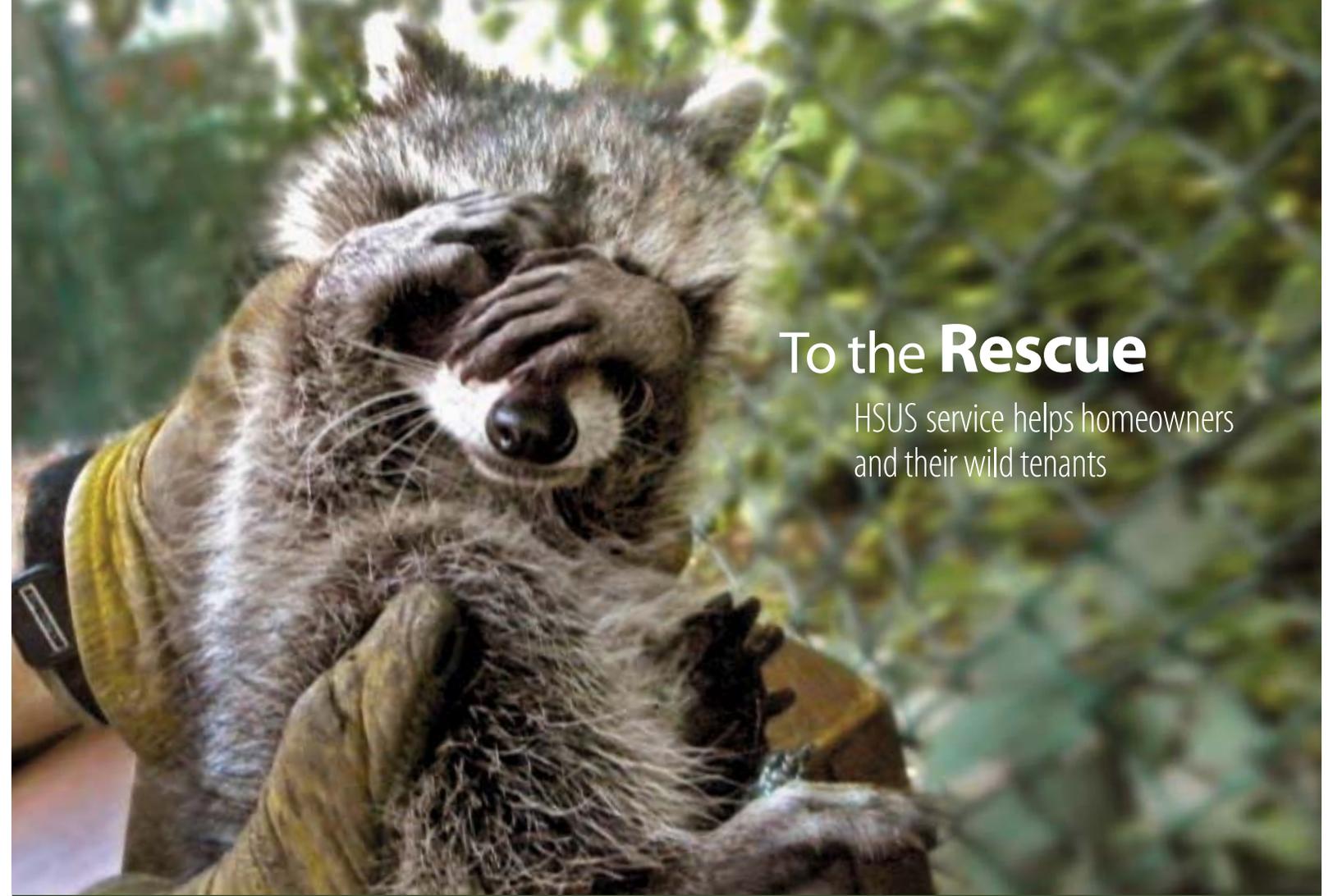
**Suitable Results:** An HSUS lawsuit has helped peel back the shroud of secrecy surrounding the use of animals in U.S. medical research facilities. The 2005 suit accused the USDA of failing to provide access to reports from animal research facilities; even those that do see the light of day are often delayed by months or years and lack significant information. Under the recent settlement, the agency is required to make the reports available on its website and in a timely manner. Greater transparency will make more aspects of research open to public scrutiny, and it will help advocates identify procedures in which animal use may be reduced, replaced, or refined to cause less suffering. To look up information about research facilities in your state, visit [humanesociety.org/researchfacilitymap](http://humanesociety.org/researchfacilitymap).

**Midwest TKO:** Organized dogfighting took a massive hit in July with the largest one-day string of animal fighting raids in U.S. history. Staff from The HSUS, federal agencies, state and local law enforcement, the Humane Society of Missouri, and other organizations combined forces to wipe out fighting operations across eight states. “We annihilated a vast network of dogfighters,” says John Goodwin, manager of animal fighting issues for The HSUS. “And we sent a clear message to animal fighters across the country: Get out of the business or else.” The raids resulted in the rescue of 450 dogs and the arrest of about 175 people. Thanks to the 2008 amendments to the federal animal fighting law, those found guilty could face up to five years in prison. The dogs are being evaluated, per HSUS policy, to determine whether they are suitable candidates for placement with rescue groups or permanent adoption.

**Stop the Presses:** In another victory against abusive blood sports, the U.S. Postal Service announced in August a proposed rule to bar shipment of publications containing ads for fighting animals and equipment used in fights. The announcement came after a federal judge ordered, in response to an HSUS lawsuit, that the USPS reexamine its policies related to the shipment of such publications. *The Feathered Warrior*, the popular magazine of the cockfighting underground, also announced earlier this summer that it will quit the battlefield and cease publication.



An HSUS lawsuit dealt another blow to cockfighting, a cruel blood sport that pits roosters against each other.



## To the **Rescue**

HSUS service helps homeowners and their wild tenants

**I can't watch!** That's what this little girl seemed to be telling HSUS rescuers who removed her from a suburban Maryland home in June. Young raccoons often shield their eyes when they feel threatened, as if to ward off the danger, says Humane Wildlife Services director John Griffin.

Summoned by new residents of the long-vacant house to investigate sounds of critter activity, Griffin and HWS wildlife biologist Lori Thiele arrived to find this juvenile and her sister. After noting their mother's failure to appear and later observing their sunken eyes—a sign of dehydration—Griffin and Thiele determined that the youngsters were orphans. Thiele rehydrated them with a Pedialyte solution and then asked licensed wildlife rehabilitator Diana Clement to care for them until they could survive on their own.

By filling a large cage on her 8-acre property with tree branches and food hidden in different spots, Clement got the girls acclimated to foraging for sustenance.

"They were old enough to be really feisty but young enough that they really couldn't take care of themselves yet," says Clement, who was also the director of Humane Society University at the time.

When the raccoons reached an appropriate weight, Clement left the cage open so they could start exploring the world—a method that allows animals to return if they want to. But these sisters were ready to roam. "They came back and got food a couple of times, but I never saw them after that," says Clement. "They wanted their freedom."

The case was an unusual one for Humane Wildlife Services, which aims to preserve family units through humane removal of animals from homes and other structures. By placing babies in a "reunion" box outside a main entry point and installing a one-way door so the mother can leave but not reenter, Griffin and Thiele encourage raccoons, squirrels, and other creatures to take up residence in alternate

nesting sites within their home range.

It's a far superior solution to the methods used by typical wildlife control operators, who often respond to homeowner complaints by trapping and killing or relocating animals—without concern for the fact that an adult mother shouldn't be separated from her nursing young or that animals plunked down in a new environment face slimmer chances of survival.

HWS has been nearly 100 percent successful, keeping an estimated 4,000 animals with their families in the two years since the program launched; thousands of homeowners have also received assistance by phone. As part of the service, Griffin and Thiele help residents seal openings, cap chimneys, and otherwise prevent further intrusions. The program provides a rare model for progressive solutions to conflicts between people and animals—one that The HSUS hopes to help seed in communities across the country. For more information, visit [humanesociety.org/hws](http://humanesociety.org/hws).

— Nancy Lawson

## Will Sing for Food

Amy Ray and Emily Saliers have long been moved to song by animals, who show up in many of their lyrics. Lately the Indigo Girls duo has also been inspired to act on behalf of their furry friends. In January, Ray's independent label sold special autographed CDs to benefit The HSUS's Foreclosure Pets Fund, which awards grants to shelters helping people hold onto their pets during the economic crisis. During this year's tour for their new album, *Poseidon and the Bitter Bug*, Ray and Saliers also combined a food drive for people with one for pets in need.

Before a June concert in which they dedicated an old favorite, *Ozilline*, to "all the dogs out there," the Girls spoke with The HSUS about their four-legged muses.



**Q: How did you become aware of the connection between the foreclosure crisis and pet relinquishment?**

**SALIERS:** Pets are an extension of families. If people can't take care of their families, they can't take care of their pets. If you look at the numbers—like 35 million Americans can't put food on their table—that's going to be 35 million Americans whose pets are in jeopardy as well.

**Q: What kind of pets do you have, and why do you adopt?**

**RAY:** I have five dogs and seven cats. They're all rescues. And I foster animals, too. I believe in breeding work dogs and dogs used for special [purposes], but I think you should have to have a serious license to do that. There should be a [breeding] moratorium. I am really reactionary about it. My friends who buy breeds are all like, "Lighten up." But there are so many dogs and cats that need homes.

**SALIERS:** I have two lovely mutts; they bring me such joy. There's just no other dog like a rescue dog. They're truly soulful creatures who are grateful for their rescue.

**Q: Your song *Ozilline* contains the lines: "I had to put the dog down/before I hit the road/I watched that sweet old life/become a bag of bones." What's the story behind that? It always makes us tear up.**

**RAY:** Me too. Unfortunately, we've been traveling all our lives, and so it's marked by going home and having your animal be sick and having to [euthanize her] before you leave for tour. It's an older song, and I've had to put a few dogs down since then, and it's awful.

**Q: You must miss them when you're on the road.**

**SALIERS:** I have a coffee mug, and I think Amy does, too, that [our guitar tech] made us that's got pictures of our animals on it, so every time I turn around and take a sip of tea, there are the animals. So they're there with us.

**Q: What would you most like to see for shelter animals?**

**SALIERS:** To be adopted into loving homes. Especially pit bulls. There are a lot of them out there that have had very, very tough lives, and my heart goes out to them.



**YOU, TOO, CAN BE A ROCK STAR FOR THE UNDERDOG.**

Homeless pets still get a bad rap, with too many people assuming there must be something "wrong" with shelter animals. But nothing could be further from the truth. Dogs and cats lose their families when human problems get in the way. Divorce, illness, death, allergies, landlord issues—you name it, and there's a pet who's been relinquished because of it.

In short, it often has nothing to do with the animals. And in shelters and rescues around the country, millions of them are just waiting for the chance to prove it.

Now they'll get that chance, thanks to the Shelter Pet Project, a massive outreach campaign targeting more than 30,000 Internet, TV, radio, print, and outdoor advertising venues. A collaborative project of the Ad Council, The HSUS, Maddie's Fund, and local organizations around the country, the new initiative—led by advertising firm Draftfcb Chicago—aims to end the euthanasia of healthy and treatable pets by showing the public the real faces behind dog and cat homelessness.

➔ TO FIND OUT HOW YOU CAN HELP, visit [theshelterpetproject.org](http://theshelterpetproject.org) and [humansociety.org/adopt](http://humansociety.org/adopt).