

PROFILE: Sue Pressman

In South Africa, Sue Pressman witnessed the slaughter of the seals.



The HSUS has action programs and action people working to alleviate animals suffering whenever and wherever it is found. One such action person is Sue Pressman. Mrs. Pressman is HSUS's Director of Wildlife Protection. But her title doesn't really describe her job. Pressman is active in eliminating cruelty in the movies, in zoos, wildlife refuges, seal colonies, and other places.

Sue is part investigator, part wildlife expert, part undercover agent, and full time humanitarian. Her educational background includes a B.A. in Science from Cornell University and a Master's Degree in Biology from Davis University. Her book knowledge has been invaluable in her multi-faceted position along with her practical common-sense judgement approach and previous experience. After being an attendant in the San Diego Children's Zoo hospital and later in the zoo nursery, Pressman knows instinctively when an animal is in pain, and wastes no time in alleviating its suffering.

During the past five years, The HSUS has sent Sue to zoos, movie lots, seal colonies, and wildlife refuges—wherever she could assist animals in trouble. Her expertise has been tapped by government officials, private businessmen and concerned individuals wishing to correct inhumane situations. Twice she has been asked to give testimony regarding the clubbing of seals. As a witness of the cruel

clubbing of seals in South Africa last year, her job, unfortunately, was not to decide if the seals should be killed but rather, The Department of Commerce wanted to know if it was done humanely. Clearly, she told them "No."

This year Pressman has again been asked to testify regarding the planned clubbing of harbor seals in Alaska. "The method as it stands is totally unsatisfactory from a humane and efficient standpoint," she said. In her testimony on the return of management of these marine mammals to Alaska, Sue plans to object to the clubbing.

No stranger to tough animal problems, Pressman's fierce determination to counter animal cruelty has taken her into battle against the movie industry and especially its animal trainers. As reported in the *News* (Autumn, 1975), Pressman had gone undercover to inspect the living quarters of film animals; checking the conditions of the animals; observing methods used to get the animals to perform, and questioning trainers. She was shocked by the conditions and practices she found. "In 99.44% of all cases, the film animals are badly trained, badly cared for, or badly housed. Unfortunately, some are mistreated on all three counts," she said. When learning of her efforts Rep. Dingell (Mich.) decided to amend his animal control bill, H.R. 6631, to include protection of animals in captivity. The amendment provides the same care for film and zoo animals. The recognition of film animals in

Means Business!

"I firmly believe all wildlife has its own saturation point . . . no one has to control anything."



During her undercover investigation Sue manned a camera. She was successful in infiltrating the ranks of the trainers.

need of protection was in itself a major step forward. While Congress has not yet considered the bill, Dingell plans to reintroduce the bill when the new Congress reconvenes in January. Naturally, HSUS membership appeal to their representatives will be most worthwhile.

Currently, Sue Pressman is implementing her second plan of attack on the movie industry. "HSUS is concerned with the quality of life," Pressman said. "We're really dealing with a three-pronged dilemma focusing first on trainers, now the industry and then the public. First we went after the animal trainers. When I infiltrated their ranks and found their methods cruel and unacceptable, they complained that even if they were humane, the industry's demands couldn't be met." Having heard trainers' complaints that the extreme pressure of the movie industry necessitated "whatever it takes to get the job done" or else the trainer is out of a job and another less-caring trainer is called in, Pressman is now focusing her activities on the methods and tactics employed by the industry. Assisting her are many top box office stars, as well as other stars, producers, stagehands, cameramen, directors, and extras. They are all reporting to Pressman any incidents of cruelty they witness. Sue is thoroughly investigating every report and gathering proper data. Quoted in *Variety*, film industry's trade paper, she reported "the number of HSUS informants within the movie

industry is growing as word spreads about HSUS's determination to prevent cruelty to acting animals."

It can be done. Stanley Kramer, well known producer and director, said: "That scene does not exist which cannot be shot without cruelty—if the director is either so inclined or so mandated by law."

Cognizant that HSUS has employed movie-industry volunteers to join a behind the scenes network of informants on the lookout for animal abuse, Jack Valenti, president of the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) has forwarded a memo to MPAA associates noting "the extent to which The Humane Society . . . is checking through undercover agents on instances of such cruelty." Valenti warned, "The Society is turning to the law for prosecution and enforcement."

The third prong of the dilemma concerns the public and their education. Pressman said, "The public must demand better pictures from the industry. They must make it clear the current interest in violence is *not* what they wish to see on the screen." Naturally, if she succeeds in getting film animals protected by legislation, persuading industry to hire only qualified trainers, and educating the public to voice their demands loud and clear, the three-pronged dilemma will be solved once and for all. Unfortunately, the road to such success is long

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and fraught with many problems Pressman deals with daily.

Some days simply do not provide enough hours for Sue to handle as many situations as she would like to. Since 1971, Pressman's daily responsibilities have grown tremendously. One situation she untiringly attends to, is her ongoing program concerning zoos. While only mild progress overall has been seen, she feels HSUS has put a huge spotlight on all zoos which in turn has helped the public better understand zoos and their problems. Often her visits throughout the country inspecting zoos are followed with much public interest. This in itself is a good sign.

In September, Sue made a follow-up visit to the Central Park Zoo in New York. She was still upset by their lack of a complete reorganization of both the physical plant and the kind of program offered. In a strongly worded letter to Martin Lang, New York's Commissioner of Parks, Pressman asked for immediate relief for the animals as well as a long range plan to make it a good zoo and not only a well-repaired facility. "We feel no delay can be permitted by the City to allow a zoo that has fallen behind in techniques of display and can only be considered a ghetto for animals, with no theme, education, conservation, or any purpose to justify the containment of animals to continue. The HSUS cannot permit this."

Pressman also asked for the removal of Patty Cake, a lone subadult gorilla, within 14 days from the receipt of her letter. "We feel that to merely contain this youthful gorilla, preventing

her from the social contact she requires, not only deprives the animal but indeed the people who come to the zoo to see what a gorilla is. At present she can only be an imprisoned animal unable to experience her true activities and social system." HSUS has suggested a radical plan for either a phasing out of the Central Park Zoo or its total revamping with a non-profit organization assuming control. HSUS has given the zoo until January 1, 1977 to put into effect various programs toward its becoming an acceptable institution for wildlife.

One zoo which followed Mrs. Pressman's suggestions and implemented her requests is the Pittsburgh zoo. Her scathing report on conditions of the zoo last year caused officials to make vast improvements. During a visit this fall, Pressman was delighted with the changes. She continues to work with officials regarding the relocation of some animals she feels might be better housed elsewhere.

Surely, Pressman is one of the busiest people on The HSUS staff. In the past year, Sue Pressman has been to South Africa to observe (and condemn) the so-called seal "harvest." She's been to Hollywood to work with the movie industry to put an end to many of the continuing celluloid cruelties. She has gone to the Carribean to save sea turtles. And, she's been to dozens of U.S. zoos, helping some to create better conditions for their animals, and attacking others for their lack of proper care.

Sue Pressman is living proof that HSUS means business!

Sue Pressman assists three elephants stranded by a traveling circus in Akron, Ohio. Sue, called in this fall by Northeastern Ohio Animal Services, secured proper shelter and food for the animals until new homes were arranged.

