

Because that's where animals are killed

From [Nathan J. Winograd](#)

September 2022



*Four puppies killed by Waycross, GA, animal control despite rescue groups ready, willing, able, and begging to save them. A staff member bragged that staff collect surrender fees and then “stick em all with a needle.”*

In a [recent article](#), I wrote about the science of keeping animals happy and healthy in shelters. In it, I provided the findings of over a dozen peer-reviewed studies showing how shelters are stressful places for animals. Specifically, I explained why temperament testing doesn't work, how shelters set animals up to fail, why animals get sick there, and what they should be doing instead. Unfortunately, instead of trying to help the animals, shelter staff often label them “unadoptable” and kill them.

Not everyone was happy. [On the Facebook post about it](#), one person was upset that I “seem to always post what shelters are doing wrong.” Another, a veterinarian, called me “out of touch” for focusing on shelters that kill. Yet another person said it was not the fault of shelters. Though I am sure these individuals are not representative of most, it is important to explain why these (still very prominent) views are wrong.

A reporter once asked [Willie Sutton](#), a famous bank robber, why he robbed banks. Although almost certainly apocryphal, Sutton is reputed to have replied, “Because that's where the money is.” So why do animal advocates focus on shelters? *Because that's where the animals are* — animals who are being killed.

I've made no secret of my belief, backed by copious evidence, that animal shelters in this country are dysfunctional and need reform. That topic covers 90% of my posts and has since I started the page back in 2009. I've also written half a dozen [books about the topic](#), wrote and produced an [award-winning documentary that aired on PBS](#), created [over two dozen guides for shelter reform activists to rectify the dysfunction](#), and crisscrossed the country giving presentations to that effect.

Of course, as a former animal control officer, chief of animal control, private shelter director, animal control shelter director, consultant to dozens of shelters worldwide, and Executive Director of [The No Kill Advocacy Center](#), I do more than condemn killing: I offer proven solutions to end it. In fact, I have a track record of having achieved and having helped others achieve No Kill communities. In short, I have dedicated my professional career to reforming shelters and, not surprisingly, discuss the topic extensively [on my Facebook page](#).

To be an animal advocate means to be opposed to their neglect, abuse, and killing. That is, after all, the definition of the term. To believe or do otherwise just because they are in a shelter proposes a privileged class of animal killers. That is why other animal advocates like me think it should be illegal for shelters to kill animals if they are not [irremediably suffering](#), and [I've written legislation to that effect](#). And that is why we believe it should be illegal for veterinarians to kill them if they are not [irremediably suffering](#), and [I've written legislation to that effect](#). The fact that this would give some people pause is the result of the long, unfortunate history of organizations — like some SPCAs and humane societies — claiming to exist for the benefit of animals harming them instead.

Take, for example, the killing of [a mother dog and her four puppies](#) by the Waycross, GA, pound. According to reports, after killing the mother for snapping (but not making contact) when staff repeatedly prodded her with a pole:

Being a Friday afternoon and employees not wanting to bother with bottle feeding puppies, the puppies were also euthanized. This was a senseless tragedy created by unchecked and uncaring employees who couldn't be bothered with extra work or following protocols because they were just there to collect a paycheck.

Rescuers are notably upset because they asked city officials not to kill the five dogs and arranged to pick them up. They are also upset because of “screenshots of text messages” from staff that appeared to be “bragging and laughing about euthanizing animals after collecting a surrender fee.” One of the staff texted, “LOL” and told others that the job entailed “surrender fee and euthanasia.” Although it is no laughing matter and shows a lack of caring, fitness, maturity, and temperament for the job, the staff member subsequently claimed she was ‘joking around’ when she said, “stick em all with a needle.” And yet, “stick em all with a needle” is exactly what they did to the mother and her healthy, newborn puppies. How is the behavior of the employees at the Waycross shelter compatible with caring about animals?

Waycross Animal Shelter is neither alone nor an aberration. McDuffie County rescuers are similarly upset after the animal shelter in that county [killed more than 30 dogs who also had rescue commitments](#).

In addition to killing those healthy dogs, a local newspaper is reporting that witnesses are accusing the [McDuffie County animal shelter](#) of:

- Placing animals “in body bags before they even stopped breathing”;
- “[C]hoking animals with leashes or kicking or stomping on them to get them under control, particularly if they struggled while being euthanized” and “slam[ming] their heads on the concrete”;
- “[R]emoving collars from dogs, though those collars suggested the animals had homes” to kill them;
- Killing animals before their holding period expired and then lying on the paperwork in the event people come looking for their lost pets; and,
- “[I]mproper euthanasia procedures” including heart sticking (without sedation and on fully conscious animals).



*Two of the more than 30 dogs and puppies killed by the McDuffie County, GA, animal shelter despite rescue commitments.*

Heartsticking involves plunging a syringe through the chest wall and several layers of muscle into an unanesthetized animal's heart. It is a cruel process involving a struggle, heavy restraint, and immense stress and fear.

It also hurts — a lot. An animal killed by heart stick feels extreme, severe pain (due to the number of nerves) and then suffers a heart attack. To get to the heart (and assuming the dog killer didn't miss), the needle would have to penetrate skin, body wall with costal musculature, costal pleura, pleural cavity, pericardial pleura/mediastinal pleura, fibrous pericardium, serous pericardium, pericardial cavity, epicardium, myocardium, endocardium, and ventricular chamber. If the lung is penetrated, the needle must pass through the pulmonary pleura and lung tissue itself. In both Waycross and McDuffie, private veterinarians participated in the killing by contract with the local shelters.

These killings would not have happened if the shelters embraced [the No Kill philosophy](#), [the No Kill Equation](#) which makes it possible, and if it was illegal for shelters and veterinarians to kill them. In other words, these shelters cannot and will not become “shelters” in name and deed until they change how they operate, and that won't change unless we demand that they do. While people surrender animals to shelters, it is the shelters that kill them, and [one does not necessarily follow or excuse the other](#).

Similarly, the actions of the private veterinarians are incompatible with the animals' best interests. As *animal advocates*, we are duty bound to speak out against veterinarians behaving in ways human doctors would never act: killing healthy individuals out of convenience and expediency, even if done at the behest of a local “shelter.”

Unless the animal is [irremediably suffering](#), *Veterinarians protect animal life. We do not end it to serve the professed needs of a culture that has not yet become sufficiently enlightened with respect to the welfare of its animals. Until it does, we will not participate in this practice, regardless of what our larger society deems acceptable.*

A veterinarian who kills healthy and treatable animals “[should do so at the risk of losing their license to practice veterinary medicine](#).” Likewise, a shelter director who kills healthy and treatable animals should be fired. Animals not only have [a right to live](#), but there are [humane solutions to killing](#) that [communities across the country](#) have implemented successfully.

I intend to make those things happen, and I will not stop until every last shelter in every city does so. Why? Because I am an animal advocate, and “shelters” are where animals are killed. Anyone who finds this puzzling has been played by the traditional “sheltering” establishment into condoning violence. And a person who condones violence against animals cannot, by definition, be an *animal* advocate. They are, in fact, the antithesis.