



Poultry Press

Promoting the compassionate and respectful treatment of domestic fowl

“Slaughterhouse Worker Turned Activist” UPC Talks with Virgil Butler and Laura Alexander

In testimony given via PETA in January 2003, Virgil Butler documented the horrific treatment of chickens that he witnessed every night while working at the Tyson chicken slaughterhouse in Grannis, Arkansas from 1997 to 2002. His testimony and ongoing website revelations resulted in a front-page article in the *Los Angeles Times* on December 8, 2003, “A Killing Floor Chronicle.” On August 21, 2004, at UPC’s 5th Annual Forum in Norfolk, Va., Virgil gave his first conference presentation about his Tyson experience, “Inside Tyson’s Hell – Why I Got Out of the Chicken Slaughtering Business.”

In the interview that follows, Virgil and his partner, Laura Alexander, talk about their relationship to the chicken industry, and to each other, and how their relationship influenced Virgil to become, in his words, “a slaughterhouse worker turned activist.”

Q. Virgil, please describe your job at Tyson when you first met Laura.

A. I worked on back dock, where I hung live chickens in the shackles and worked the kill floor. I was lead hanger for the last few years, so it was also my job to teach new-hires how to hang and kill chickens. In the hanging cage, I stood on a line with six other guys where we took live chickens

off the belt and hung them by their legs upside down in the metal shackles. The line goes by at about 182-186 birds per minute, so a hanger must be able to hang 26-30 birds per minute. As lead hanger, it was also my job to

catch the empty shackles that the new-hires would miss. I spent so much time catching empty shackles and one-leggers (birds hung by only one leg), that I didn’t have much time to train anybody to do anything.

Some nights I worked in the kill room. The killer slits the throats of the chickens that the killing machine misses. You stand there with a very sharp 6-inch knife and catch as many birds as you can that the machine misses because the ones



Photo By: Karen Davis

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you miss go straight into the scald alive. You have to cut both carotid arteries and the jugular vein for the chicken to die and bleed out before hitting the scald. This requires quite a bit of skill and entails quite a bit of risk. It's the most dangerous job in that department. All but one of the most serious accidents I saw the whole time I worked for Tyson occurred in the kill room due to the killer having to cut the throat of a one-legger. Some of those accidents happened to me. I have scars all over my hands from working the kill floor.

The killing room was worse than the hanging cage. It really does something to your mind when you stand there in all that blood, killing so many times, over and over again. **The blood can get deep enough to go over the top of a 9-inch set of rubber boots –**

I have seen blood clots so big that it took three big men to push them. You have to stomp them to break them up to get them to go down the drain. That can happen in just 2 ½ hours. We filled up a diesel tanker truck with blood every night in one shift. I have actually had to wipe blood clots out of my eyes. Working as a killer was what I hated the most. But since I was good at it, that was where I got sent a good bit of the time.

Q. How did meeting Laura affect your attitude toward your work? What happened, and why?

A. My attitude changed in such a way as to make me not want to go to work anymore. I would start finding excuses not to go. I got sick of it, even literally. I was

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Photo by Tal Ronnen

PoultryPress

is published quarterly by
United Poultry Concerns, Inc.,
a national nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization
incorporated
in the State of Maryland.
Federal I.D.: 52-1705678

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constantly getting sick all the time for the last year or so. And I started feeling ashamed. I didn't want Laura to know what I did, the specifics of it. I had told all of my co-workers not to talk about anything that happened down there, in front of her. Laura cares so much about animals – all animals – that I just knew she would be horrified at what I was a part of.

Q. At our Forum, Laura, you mentioned your feelings the first time you accompanied Virgil to the slaughter plant. Please tell us about those feelings and about the impact they had on you and on your relationship with Virgil.

A. I had been to the plant before, but only in the parking lot. Even there, though, you could just feel a certain wrongness in the air or something. But one time we went down to pick up one of Virgil's paychecks from when he had been off work sick. It was right before the shift started, so the plant wasn't running yet. **I asked Virgil to take me back to the hanging cage where he worked so I could see for myself what it looked like.**

You know, I had prepared myself to feel disgusted, sad, and uncomfortable, but nothing could have prepared me for the way I felt when I saw it. It's kind of hard to express in words, but it was like this wave – this wall – of negative energy hitting me in the face when we opened that door. The only thing I can even try to compare it to would be that feeling you get in places like hospitals and jails, where there is suffering and death, dread and fear. You know what I mean? Well, take that feeling and magnify it by at least 10 and you will have maybe an *inkling* of what I felt at the door of that room that day. I couldn't leave fast enough.

I talked about it all the way home in the truck. I didn't realize it then, but I remember now: Virgil just sat over there in the passenger seat with his head down, listening to me spew all this as we went down the road. I was just so outraged and loud about it. I found out later from him that that was the night he knew he couldn't do that work anymore. That he was terribly ashamed of what he did. Things got a bit rocky after that for quite some time, almost as if he was trying to get me to reject him and not want anything to do with him anymore.

Of course, that behavior had the opposite effect on me. All it did was to make me feel worse for him and understand more about what had made him feel so tormented in the first place. And that made me even more determined to see it through and try to help heal him. It was so heartbreaking to think that he had subjected himself to that life for so long, and that he thought that was all he was good for, all he could do, and that he was doomed. My heart went out to him. It ultimately brought us closer. And that closeness enabled him to finally tell me – and then the world. I could tell Virgil wasn't really a bad person, not deep down. He was just lost.

Q. Virgil, one of the most powerful things you describe in your writing is making eye contact with the chickens on the slaughter line and seeing their terror. When did you start to connect with the chickens that way? Was there a time when you didn't "see" them, but then you did? Was there a time when you saw their suffering but didn't care, but then you did care? What happened?

A. I felt that connection from the first night I killed. That's part of what made the job so hard for me. I just suppressed how I felt because it would have been an unpopular opinion among the other workers. What happened was that this feeling just kept adding up and getting worse. By the time Laura came along, I was already pretty disgusted, but Laura helped me to finally make the move to walk away forever by going public. I knew that when I did that I could never go back. And that's part of why I did go public. To make sure I never had that option again.

Also, once I came into contact with all of these other people who cared so deeply about animals, I felt like it would have been wrong for me not to jump in and help to do my part, especially since I was responsible for so much of the suffering they were fighting. It's been a good way for me to work through the guilt that I accumulated for so many years, especially since I always knew that the work I was doing was wrong and just kept justifying my actions and kept on doing it.

Q. Is your change of heart unusual or unique in your opinion – an "isolated incident" so to speak? Or do you

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believe there are many slaughterhouse workers with similar feelings of compassion that are simply buried? If so, why? and what can be done to bring out this buried compassion?


A. My feelings aren't that unique, I don't think. I may have been one of the first to come forward, but I doubt I will be the last. I can see others coming out in the future. I have talked to a couple that want to. The main thing that keeps most workers silent is knowing that they will suffer through what I did in not being able to find work and having others still connected to Tyson shun them. I don't know of a single person I ever talked to down there that liked the job. They are there because they feel they have no choice. If they had somewhere better to work they would leave in a heartbeat.

Q. Laura and Virgil, you are a team, are you not? Please tell us about your activism. What are you doing now, and what are your plans?

A. We are a team. We do everything together. Everything. We were already active in environmental issues before any of the animal rights stuff started. And

we were already exploring spiritual healing and trying to be responsible citizens of the planet, like recycling and not being wasteful. Animal rights seems to round things out. Of course, we changed our diet. We couldn't credibly criticize the abusive practices we were protesting against if we were still consuming the products of those practices. **We just couldn't look at a piece of meat anymore without seeing the sad, tortured face that was attached to it some time in the past.**

For now, we intend to finish writing Virgil's first book – the story of his transformation from killer to savior – and to keep making speaking engagements in an effort to make people more aware of the consequences of the choices they make on a daily basis. If people can start to realize they are being lied to by the poultry industry and the government, and that the horrible things we've described are not isolated in any way, we hope people will question the effect that their actions have on the world around them, especially on the innocent creatures who share it with us. We hope people will join us in changing their lives.

Virgil and Laura can be emailed at cybergypsy1964@yahoo.com. To visit their website, click on www.cyberactivist.blogspot.com 

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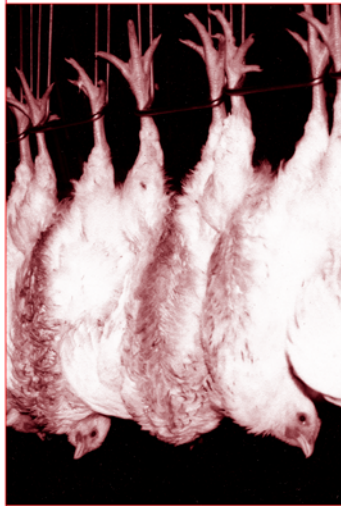
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You can help United Poultry Concerns this year by donating to us through the Combined Federal Campaign. **Our 2004 CFC Number is: 1844.**
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The Stunner: "All it does is paralyze the muscles. It doesn't render the chickens unconscious or make them insensible to pain. Every chicken is bled out while still sentient. They hang there and look at you while they are bleeding. Sometimes if they are not completely immobilized, they will try to hide their head from you by sticking it under the wing of the chicken next to them."
– Virgil Butler, former Tyson chicken slaughterhouse worker

"All of us engage in a form of direct action every day, simply by choosing a vegetarian diet. By that action alone, we save numerous animals from the fate of being tortured and killed. By that action, we don't waste so many natural resources. Every single meal you eat that doesn't include an animal corpse is one that has decreased the violence in this world and increased the compassion."
– Virgil Butler, former Tyson chicken slaughterhouse worker
(cyberactivist.blogspot.com)



United Poultry Concerns (upc-online.org) and the Eastern Shore Sanctuary & Education Center (bravebirds.org) will provide free literature in front of McKeldon Library on Thursday, September 30. Please stop by.

**More Information: United Poultry Concerns * PO Box 150 * Machipongo, VA 23405
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Thank you for making a difference for these birds.

Farmed Animal Slaughter Statistics

“Free-Range” Does Not Reduce the Death Toll

Animals Slaughtered for Food in the U.S. in 2000 and 2003 (Minimum)
(individuals rounded to nearest thousand)

Animals	2000	2003
Chickens	8,424,208,000	8,684,434,000
Turkeys	268,026,000	267,781,000
Pigs	98,106,000	101,043,000
Cattle	36,416,000	35,648,000
Ducks	24,494,000	24,301,000
Lambs/Yearlings	3,141,000	2,691,800
Calves	1,172,000	1,039,000
Goats	542,000	647,000
Sheep	166,900	145,000
Horses	47,000	50,000
Bison	18,000	35,000
TOTALS	8,856,337,000	9,117,814,800

Data from federally inspected plants only.

Data do not include fish and other animals routinely farmed for food.

Data for chickens, turkeys, and ducks from *Poultry Slaughter* (February 2001) and *Poultry Slaughter 2003 Summary* (March 2004). Data do not include hatchery slaughter data.

Data for pigs, cattle, calves, goats, horses, bison, and sheep/lambs from *Livestock Slaughter 2000 Summary* (March 2001) and *Livestock Slaughter 2003 Summary* (March 2004).

Source: United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food Safety and Inspection Service and National Agricultural Statistics Website.

These statistics are presented in “On the Killing Floor” by Paul Shapiro of Compassion Over Killing (COK.net) in the Summer 2004 issue of the *AV Magazine*, published by The American Anti-Vivisection Society. The Summer issue features farmed animal issues from biotechnology to aquaculture. It includes a UPC cover photo of rescued former battery-caged hens perching in the trees and an essay by UPC President Karen Davis, PhD, “The Life of One Battery Hen.” (American Anti-Vivisection Society, 215-887-0816, www.aavs.org)

For estimated 2004 U.S. slaughter figures and discussion, visit www.WFAD.org

For 2003 global slaughter figures and discussion, visit www.upc-online.org/slaughter/92704stats.htm

Three New Videos - Now Available from UPC!

Inside a Live Poultry Market

By *United Poultry Concerns*

This new educational video takes you inside a live animal market in New York City where you see birds and rabbits, adults and children. Live markets are where many “free-range” chickens, ducks and other birds end up. At the market, you occasionally hear the videographer talking in an upbeat way, in order to obtain the footage without revealing her purpose. At the end you see some birds she managed to rescue from the market. An alternative to “factory farming”? Watch and decide.

11 min. including Introduction. VHS and DVD. \$10 (includes shipping)



Photo By: Ann Cottrell

Behavior of Rescued Factory-Farmed Chickens in a Sanctuary Setting

By *United Poultry Concerns*

Some people believe that birds bred for factory farming have lost their natural instincts and are content to live in crowded, filthy, unstimulating cages and buildings. This video shows chickens, turkeys, and ducks at UPC's sanctuary racing out of their house to start enjoying their day – they pounce on lettuce, dustbathe, scratch for food, preen, socialize, and roost on perches at night.

12 min. including Introduction. VHS and DVD. \$10 (includes shipping)

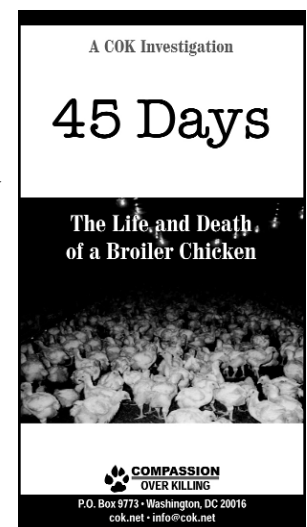


Photo By: Faye Chiu

45 Days: The Life and Death of a Broiler Chicken

By *Compassion Over Killing*

This documentary was produced with undercover footage from several chicken farms and slaughter plants in the United States – including two of the country's largest poultry producers, Tyson and Perdue. The conditions shown are the industry standard for the more than 8 billion baby ‘broiler’ chickens slaughtered each year for meat in the U.S. Nearly 1 million of these birds are slaughtered every hour. 12 min. VHS. \$10 (includes shipping).



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“Mad Cows to Mad Chickens” - 2004 Forum Speakers/Talks

- 🐔 Sarahjane Blum. GourmetCruelty.com – “Delicacy of Despair: Behind the Closed Doors of the Foie Gras Industry”
- 🐔 Virgil Butler – “Inside Tyson’s Hell: Why I Got Out of the Chicken Slaughtering Business”
- 🐔 Terry Cummings, Poplar Spring Farm Animal Sanctuary – “The Reality of Free-Range Turkey Farming”
- 🐔 Mary Finelli – “Are There Humane Production Alternatives to Animal Factories?”
- 🐔 Lester Friedlander, DVM – “Mad Cow: The Man Who Knew Too Much”
- 🐔 Michael Greger, MD – “The Killers Among Us: Infectious Proteins in the Food Supply”
- 🐔 Pattrice Jones, Eastern Shore Sanctuary & Education Center – “Deep in the Heart of Poultry Country: Depression, Despoliation & Demoralization on the Delmarva Peninsula”
- 🐔 Jim Mason – “My Job at the Turkey Breeding Factory”
- 🐔 Paul Shapiro, Compassion Over Killing – “Letting the Animals Speak for Themselves: The Importance of Undercover Investigations”

UPC thanks the following people for their financial assistance: Lynn Halpern, Audrey E.V. Haschemeyer, Lenore Madeleine, Richard J. Peppin, and Sheila Rybak.



Photo By: Julie Beckham

Lynn Halpern, UPC Forum Benefactor

“Promoting Veganism” - 2003 Forum Speakers/Talks

- 🐔 Carol J. Adams - “Beyond Just ‘Living With’ Meat Eaters”
- 🐔 Karen Davis, PhD, UPC – “Should Animal Advocates Promote a ‘Humane’ Animal-Based Diet and Endorse ‘Humane’ Farmed Animal Production and Products?”
- 🐔 Bruce Friedrich, PETA – “Effective Vegan Advocacy: Look at Corporations and Steal from Their Corporate Playbook”
- 🐔 Pattrice Jones, Eastern Shore Sanctuary & Education Center – “Get Real: Facing Reality and Crafting Strategies Accordingly”
- 🐔 Jack Norris, Vegan Outreach – “Mainstreaming Veganism by Reaching Youth and Focusing on Animal Suffering”
- 🐔 Loren Ornelas, Viva!USA – “My Experience Going From Working on Anti-Vivisection to Veganism”
- 🐔 Paul Shapiro, Compassion Over Killing – “Making a Big Difference with Few Resources: Effective Vegan Advocacy on a Tight Budget”
- 🐔 Zoe Weil, International Institute for Humane Education – “Inspiring People to Be Vegan”

These videos are a production of The Compassionate Living Project, PO Box 202, Granby, CT 06035 (860) 653-0729
www.compassionatelivingproject.org

California Law Bans Production, Sale of Foie Gras



Worker force feeding a duck

the Florida sow gestation crate ban that voters passed in 2002 doesn't go into effect until 2008.

And yes, the foie gras industry could use the phase-out period to try to repeal the law, but this means that animal advocates must invest energetically in public education during the same time period to make sure this doesn't happen. Footage of ducks having metal pipes jammed down their throats three times a day, as shown in the GourmetCruelty.com video, *Delicacy of Despair* (available from UPC), is so sickening that it convinced California lawmakers to ban the practice. Instead of fretting about what "they" will do during the next 8 years, our job is to focus on what WE are going to do to make sure that the law goes into effect in 2012, and that other states follow suit.

Photo By: PETA

SB 1520, a bill to ban the force feeding of ducks and geese to produce foie gras, passed the California Legislature and, on September 29, 2004, was signed into law by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger. While the law does not become effective until July 2012, it is viewed by the majority of national animal advocacy groups* as a major victory for farmed animals and farmed animal legislation in that it prohibits both a farmed animal abuse and the sale of the product of that abuse – foie gras or "fatty liver" – throughout the state.

Opposition to the amended SB 1520 drew attention to the fact that the law has an 8 year phase-out period during which time Sonoma Foie Gras, the only producer of foie gras in California, is immunized from civil or criminal lawsuits directed against force feeding (though other acts of cruelty may be charged and prosecuted during that time). In response it has been pointed out that all legislation banning cruel farmed animal practices includes a phase-out period; for example, the European ban on battery cages for hens, passed in 1999, includes a phase-out period until 2012, and

*The following groups explicitly endorsed SB 1520: Animal Protection and Rescue League, Association of Veterinarians for Animal Rights, Farm Sanctuary, Viva!USA, **United Poultry Concerns**, Los Angeles Lawyers for Animals, HSUS, ASPCA, The Fund for Animals, PETA, In Defense of Animals, American Anti-Vivisection Society, Last Chance for Animals, Animal Protection Institute, Animal Legislative Action Network, California Lobby for Animal Welfare, United Animal Nations, Animal Place, The Paw Project, Animal General Hospital, GourmetCruelty.com, Compassion Over Killing, Vegan Outreach, and Vegan Action.



What Can I Do?

- 🐔 Use every opportunity you can to write letters to the editor and to participate in radio call-in shows.
- 🐔 Order the video *Delicacy of Despair* and show it at your local library and on public access television. Send copies to any media representatives who express interest. Available from UPC. \$10 includes shipping. 🐔

Mila and Priscilla



Photo By: John McDonnell - The Washington Post

By Karen Davis, PhD

UPC President Karen Davis' book *More Than a Meal: The Turkey in History, Myth, Ritual, and Reality* has been praised by animal advocates and scientists alike. Following is an excerpt from the chapter "The Mind and Behavior of Turkeys":

I opened this book with my introduction to turkeys a number of years ago. I would like to close this chapter with my memory of Priscilla and Mila, two white turkey hens who lived with my husband and me for several years until they died. Victims of a truck accident, they both would have been dead by the time we adopted them if they had not been rescued. Though roughly the same age, these two hens were very different from each other. Mila was a gentle and pacific turkey with an intent, watchful face. Priscilla was a moody hen with emotional burdens. Throughout the spring and summer Priscilla would disappear into the woods around our house and I would have to go look for her. Eventually I would spy her white form nestled in thick vegetation, where she laid many clutches of eggs that, since there was no male turkey to fertilize them, would never hatch. Priscilla kept trying to be a mother, and doubtless in part because she could not realize her desire to be one, she was out of temper much of the time.

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When Priscilla got into one of her bad moods, you could see her getting ready to charge my husband or me, and maybe bite us, which wasn't pleasant. With her head pulsing colors and her yelps sounding a warning, she glared at us with combat in her whole demeanor. What stopped her was Mila. Perking up her head at the signals, Mila would enter directly into the path between Priscilla and us, and block her. She would tread back and forth in front of Priscilla, uttering soft pleading yelps as if beseeching her not to charge. Priscilla would gradually calm down.

I do not know whether what I saw taking place between Mila and Priscilla has any connection to Konrad Lorenz's description, in *King Solomon's Ring*, of what happens when two male turkeys have been fighting and one of them wants to quit. According to Lorenz, the one who has had enough makes a "specific submissive gesture which serves to forestall the intent of the attack." He lies down with his neck stretched out on the ground. At this, "the victor behaves exactly as a wolf or dog in the same situation, that is to say, he evidently wants to peck and kick at the prostrated enemy, but simply cannot: he would if he could but he can't! So, still in threatening attitude, he walks round and

round his prostrated rival, making tentative passes at him, but leaving him untouched."

In the case of Mila and Priscilla, the belligerent hen submitted to the peacemaker's inhibiting signals. Information was communicated, learned, used, and remembered by both hens in what must have been for them a genetically familiar, yet novel, situation. It involved two female birds derived from a background of genetic selection for "meat-type" characteristics supposedly linked to a reduction in brain weight or size – crude measures of intelligence in an era dominated by the knowledge and armed with the power of subatomic particles, genes, and nanotechnology.

More Than a Meal: The Turkey in History, Myth, Ritual, and Reality is the only book you can buy that looks at the turkey under every aspect from symbol to science, "food" to friend. Put this book on your holiday shopping list for your school, your library, your friends, and yourself. Send check or money order to UPC, PO Box 150, Machipongo, VA 23405. \$20 (includes shipping). Orders of 3 or more copies receive a \$40% discount: \$12 per book, shipping included. Order today! 🐔

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The pain of losing them is the price we pay for the privilege of knowing them and sharing their lives. . . . Vicky Barbee



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In memory of

Belladonna, UPC rescued Cypress hen. A soul that adds beauty and grace to life creates something wonderful that lasts forever. – *Catherine Drysdale*

In memory of Seneca and Betsy, two hens rescued from abuse by Farm Sanctuary. – *Ruth A. Michel*

In loving memory of Pretty-boy. – *Lydia C. Giglio*

In honor of Lucy Ross. – *Thomas Lewis*

In honor of Judy Kane. – *Caroline Kane*

In memory of Ginger, owned by Kathy Feldman. Ginger was a beautiful hen. May she rest in joyful chicken heaven. – *Louisa Jaskulski*

Urge the University of California To Enact an Anti-Cruelty Policy Student Slaughtered a Chicken in an Art Class

On February 12, 2003, a student in Professor Kevin Radley's "New Genres" art class, in the Department of Art Practice on the University of California Berkeley campus, butchered a chicken, delivering at least two blows with a meat cleaver. In response to UPC's call for an investigation, the UC-Berkeley Animal Care and Use Committee (ACUC) produced a Report on May 20, 2003. **Without any supporting evidence, and contrary to the student eyewitness who told the Berkeley Organization for Animal Advocacy that the butchery was "terrible," the committee found that "the chicken was handled in a humane manner by the student prior to its death" and was subsequently "cooked and eaten."**

The committee cited the *2000 Report of the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) Panel on Euthanasia*, regarding decapitation, to support its finding that "there are no significant animal welfare concerns associated with the manner in which the animal was handled and euthanized." According to the committee, the AVMA says that "decapitation without prior sedation or anesthesia is an acceptable euthanasia method for birds that are intended for human food."


What the AVMA Report actually says is that decapitation as a form of euthanasia (humane death) "requires training and skill." Observing that the "interpretation of the presence of electrical activity in the brain following decapitation has created controversy" about the humaneness of decapitation even when properly performed, **the AVMA considers decapitation only "conditionally acceptable if performed correctly."**

Nothing in the ACUC report suggests that any of these AVMA stipulations were met by the student, or that Professor Radley couldn't have prevented the killing, conducted while the student was feeding "fried chicken and egg salad to the class" in an "autobiographical" presentation about "the nature of the link between food sources and processed foods in contemporary culture."


On September 9, 2003, UPC requested records under the California Public Records Act relating to the incident, including a necropsy report on the cause of death of the chicken, who, when stuffed in a box by Professor Radley, may not even have been dead yet. We were informed on October 24, 2003 that no further records existed.



What Can I Do?

 Urge the President of the University of California to enact a campus-wide Anti-Animal Cruelty Academic Policy specifically prohibiting the use of animals in art or performance. In addition, urge the Chancellor of the University of California Berkeley campus to enact the same policy on the Berkeley campus. Penalties should include student reprimand, suspension, expulsion, and failure to graduate. Faculty who encourage or allow the use of animals in art or performance should be subject to disciplinary measures including reprimand and suspension. Crimes that violate state anti-cruelty laws should be referred immediately to the county sheriff's office and county prosecutor's office. Contact:

Dr. Robert C. Dynes, President
Office of the President, No. 12113
University of California
1111 Franklin Street
Oakland, CA 94607-5200
Phone: 510-987-9074
Fax: 510-987-9086
Website: www.ucop.edu

Dr. Robert J. Birgeneau, Chancellor
Office of the Chancellor
University of California-Berkeley
200 California Hall #1500
Berkeley, CA 94720-1500
Phone: 510-642-7464
Fax: 510-643-5499 

Book Review: Minny's Dream

By Clare Druce

2004 Nightingale Books-
Pegasus

Young People's Fiction with
Illustrations, ages 8-14

ISBN: 1 903491 21 5

Softcover 129 pages

www.pegasuspublishers.com

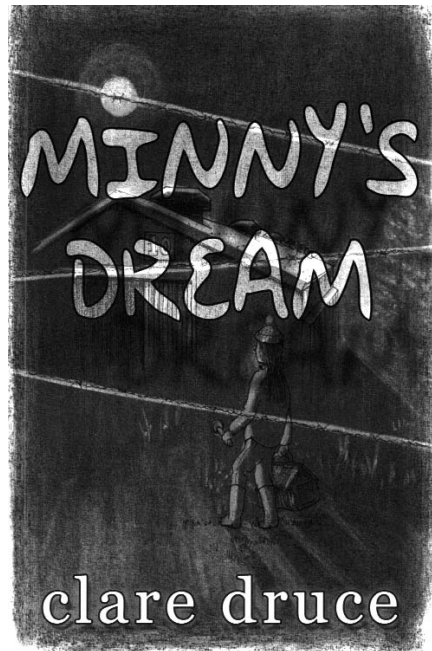
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Reviewed by Karen Davis,
PhD



"Please, never, ever, call me a battery hen. . . . I am in a battery cage, and I do live on a battery farm. But I am not, repeat not a battery hen. A hen in a battery cage is not a battery hen. Which is to say, she is not some kind of newly-invented species. . . . I, Minny, am a proud descendant of the Red Jungle Fowl."

Imagine moving from the city to the country cottage of your dreams only to discover a battery hen business nearby. This is what happens to the young girl Paula and her parents in Clare Druce's riveting true-to-life gothic tale for young people of all ages, *Minny's Dream*. Drawing upon the archetypal theme of a "fall" from innocence into hell, Druce tells what happens when the curious and adventurous Paula Brown takes a walk one day from Orchard Cottage to Folly Farm to buy some eggs for the family breakfast. Approaching the farm, she wonders why there are no animals about the place – no chickens, cows, or pigs – just a huge Alsatian dog "crouching beside a gloomy kennel."

What Paula finds instead are ten "bleak rows of sheds" emanating "a musty, sickly sort of smell, unlike anything she knew." Instead of a "jolly farmer," out from one of the sheds comes snarling Mr. Dredge, who

tells her "you're not wanted here." But Paula asks questions. And Mr. Dredge, pleased by her naïve interest, soon boasts that he has a quarter of a million hens inside the ten sheds, "twenty-five thousand per shed." Do the hens like it in there? "*Like it? Course they like it.*"

Paula talks Mr. Dredge into letting her accompany him into Shed Ten. The "biosecurity" boot-bath at the entrance is just like what undercover investigators describe: a "shallow tank of murky liquid" with a "greasy film" that "reeked of strong disinfectant." In they go.

Paula knew she would never forget the moment when she first saw the rows of cages, stacked from floor to ceiling, five tiers high. And she knew she'd never forget the first time she heard the sound of twenty-five thousand hens, all together in one building. It took a few seconds for her eyes to accustom themselves to the gloom, and to realize that the ghostly impression was due to the myriads of cobwebs that hung from the roof girders, and festooned various iron struts and items of machinery. Dusty light bulbs glowed dully the length of the aisle down which Mr. Dredge was leading the way.

As if one shock weren't enough, suddenly from the top tier of cages, a particularly imploring look is followed by an imploring voice: "only return, and I'll fill you in on every single miserable, rotten, cruel aspect of this dismal place! You see," the voice says, "*you* can get out of here, but for us, it's a life sentence."

Paula: "Who are you?"

Voice: "I'm Minny, and I've been standing or crouching down on this wire floor for the best part of a year. Yes, I'm Minny, a proud descendant of the Red Jungle Fowl. Say you'll come back. You see, you're our only hope."

Paula, already about to faint from the cobwebs, ammonia fumes, and now the mysterious "Minny" speaking to her through the din of machinery and hens,

continued on page 14

continued from page 13

seeing Mr. Dredge “advancing towards her through the gloom,” quickly memorizes Minny’s position amongst the cages. I’ll be back, Minny,” Paula calls up in a whisper, “you can depend on me.”

From this point, Paula takes up a covert life while taking care to appear “normal.” She does “secret” library research to learn more about the Red Jungle Fowl. She visits Minny and learns all about Minny’s present life, her “ancestral memories,” and how those memories produce Minny’s dreams, at night as she sleeps in her wire cage, of the future she longs for – “Busy, yet contented.” But, Minny tells Paula wistfully, “The terrible thing about dreaming beautiful dreams is that you have to wake up, and face another day.”

Meanwhile, time, which drags on forever for Minny, Goldie, Crosspatch, and the other inmates in the ten sheds, is also flying. As “spent” hens, the Shed Ten hens are about to be sent to slaughter, for, Mr. Dredge tells Paula: “Them hens” are “rubbish.” **Paula, “finding it hard to think about anything except the catchers arriving in the dead of night, to yank Minny out of her cage by her poor weak legs,” is faced with a decision: she “had never gone against her parents’ wishes in anything really important.** She’d never crossed a forbidden road, or stolen sweets from the corner shop near the flat, like some children

did. But here she was, planning to steal three hens! No, not *steal*, she reminded herself. . . . Perhaps she would be put away, to wherever they put children instead of prison. Perhaps. . . .”

Rather than spoil the ending for you, I’ll leave it at this: the climax of *Minnie’s Dream* is sheer suspense and brings the wrath of Paula’s law-abiding parents down on her. Will they relent? While you are trying to imagine how the story ends, order *Minnie’s Dream* for that young person (or persons) you know whose life, and with it the lives of many chickens, this book will powerfully influence – Hen’s honor!

“Minny, I’ll have to go,” Paula hissed [she hears Mr. Dredge coming!]. ‘But I promise I’ll be back.’ ‘Hen’s honour?’ pleaded Minny, in a low, urgent voice. ‘Hen’s honour,’ breathed Paula, ‘see you, Minny.’”

About the author. In the early 1970s, Clare Druce co-founded the pressure group, Chickens’ Lib, which now incorporates the Farm Animal Welfare Network (FAWN).

To learn more about FAWN and how you can help, visit www.fawn.me.uk or write to FAWN, PO Box 40, Holmfirth, HD9 3YY England. 🐔

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Several of our members have made financial contributions in the form of stock to United Poultry Concerns through our securities account. We are deeply grateful for these gifts, and anticipate more in the future. There are two obvious benefits in making stock contributions. Please consider these advantages in making your future gifts to United Poultry Concerns.

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From United Poultry Concerns and all our Feathered Friends, we thank you for helping to ensure our future!

Sincerely,
Karen Davis, Ph.D.
President



Photo by Tal Ronnen

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POSTERS

A Heart Beats in Us the Same as in You

Photo by People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals

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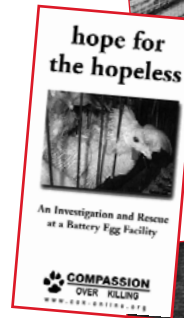
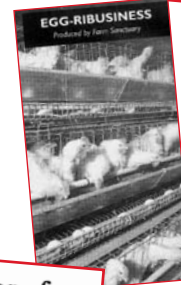
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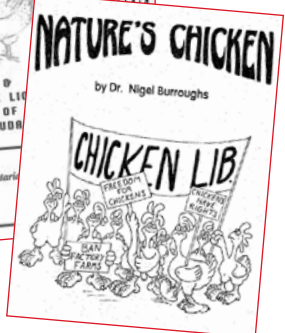
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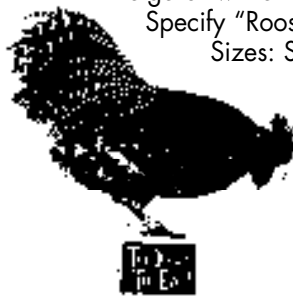




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