



August 2010

Dear Friend,

The administrators of a program run by the Ontario Veterinary College (OVC) of the University of Guelph, the College of Veterinarians of Ontario, and the Ontario Veterinary Medical Association scheduled 10 healthy, little beagles to die on August 5th.

In fact, their lives were saved. They were saved, as you'll read below, thanks to your generous contributions to Animal Alliance / Environment Voters and your compassion for animals.

The beagles' plight and our rescue of them are emblematic of the deep, ethical failures in the University of Guelph. There was never any medical or morally justifiable reason to kill the 10 beagles. For the three veterinary institutions, the beagles, having served their teaching purposes, had become nothing more than "garbage". Killing animals, you see, is the institutions' solution to a "waste disposal" problem.

The 10 little dogs – all female – were used in the institutions' *Veterinary Skills Training & Enhancement Program* (VSTEP). VSTEP upgrades the knowledge and skills of veterinarians trained in other countries to prepare them to practice in Ontario. Since its launch in 2006, VSTEP has unnecessarily required the veterinarians enrolled in the program to kill 160 dogs.

Let me tell you the story of how the 10 little beagles, with your support, were saved. The story begins almost a year ago with a dog named Rainbow. The story will end even more happily – if you'll once again trust us with your financial support – with animal saving reforms at Canada's oldest veterinary college.

Almost a year ago, Dr. Anya Yushchenko was completing her VSTEP course. Dr. Yushchenko is a graduate of the Kharkov Zooveterinary Academy in Ukraine where she not only graduated as a veterinarian, but also earned a PhD. Dr. Yushchenko currently practices at the East York Animal Clinic in Toronto.

The VSTEP course required Dr. Yushchenko to perform a routine surgery, a simple spay operation. She was assigned a beagle like the ones we rescued (thanks to your support) in August. Dr. Yushchenko was instructed to anaesthetize the dog, perform the spay operation, and then – rather than allow the dog to recover – kill her.

Dr. Yushchenko refused. Killing a perfectly healthy animal was an intolerable affront to her training as a veterinarian, to her respect for animals, and to her sense of right and wrong. She appealed to the University of Guelph to allow her to recover the dog and find her a home.

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It was difficult to get the University to agree to let the dog – now named “Rainbow” – live. Dr. Yushchenko was forced to retain a lawyer to assert her right to practice veterinary medicine ethically. In the end, the University relented, let Rainbow live, and Dr. Yushchenko found her a permanent, loving home.

To find Rainbow a home, Dr. Yushchenko posted an appeal on Facebook:

I've rescued 11 months old beagle from Ontario Vet College [at the University of Guelph]. She has been used for research in USA and brought to Canada to let students to practice surgery. It was very, very difficult to get the permission to save her and we got it in a very last minute. It was three weeks ago. She has already learnt how walk on a leash and socialize with other people and animals. Now I'm looking for a permanent place for her. Please let me know if you know someone who is looking for a dog.

Her name is “Rainbow”, she is tiny 7 kg dog. They breed them small for research. She is spayed and got a nice balanced character, despite of what she has gone through.....

Today, Rainbow is living with a wonderful family in the Kitchener area of Ontario.

VSTEP used 40 dogs last year. Only Rainbow survived. Had we known about the 40 beagles at the time, we could have found homes for the other 39. The University didn't need to kill them.

Our deepest thanks go out to Dr. Yushchenko and other heroic graduates from the Ontario Veterinary College who alerted us to the misuse and unnecessary killing of animals at the college. Surgery training, for example, is unnecessarily performed on live animals who are then routinely euthanized, a practice long abandoned by the best veterinary colleges in Canada, the United States, and Europe.

We decided to take up the cause of the animals being used, abused, and killed – all without good reason – at the University of Guelph, Canada's oldest veterinary college.

Earlier this year, I contacted the VSTEP administrators to ask them to spare the dogs used in this year's course and to let us find them homes. Rainbow, I argued, was a precedent.

The administrators stalled and delayed, but we persisted, and finally I got a meeting.

I explained to the VSTEP administrators that through our Project Jessie adoption program we had found homes for over 5,000 animals, almost all deemed unadoptable, including beagles, purpose-bred for research. The administrators claimed, however, that unfortunately the VSTEP dogs could not be recovered. It was impossible, they said.

I was dumbfounded. Here I was being told by administrators at one of Canada's leading veterinary colleges that it was impossible to revive perfectly healthy dogs after routine spay operations. What that says about the skills of the Ontario Veterinary College's administrators and faculty or their ethics is disturbing, indeed.

Like Dr. Yushchenko, we didn't accept their reasons (I've never heard sillier nor more self-serving ones) for why the dogs must die.

I informed the VSTEP administrators and their institutional partners that we were “going public” with a full page advertisement in the Guelph-Mercury newspaper. The last thing the VSTEP partners wanted was the public to learn about their unnecessary killings of healthy dogs.

You need to know that it was your financial support that made it possible for us to prepare the advertisement and to commit to running it in the Guelph-Mercury. Thank you.

I wanted them to tell me if anything I was saying in the ad was untrue or inaccurate. After they saw the ad, what was impossible on Wednesday suddenly became possible on Friday, and the dogs were saved. The VSTEP partners knew their killing of the dogs was indefensible, and could not survive press or public scrutiny.

Thanks to your support 10 little beagles – purpose-bred for the research industry – were saved and are now in loving homes.

Unlike at the University of Guelph, better veterinary colleges in Canada, the United States, and Europe no longer use and kill live animals in surgery courses. Many use ethically-sourced cadavers, just like medical schools do. Research shows that using ethically procured cadavers and other alternative education tools rather than live animals produces better teaching outcomes.

If you help us, both with your financial support and your advocacy, we can finish what we’ve started at the OVC and the University of Guelph and make them adopt modern, world class, ethical teaching and animal welfare standards.

Doing so will save the lives of many hundreds of animals every year at Guelph. Doing so will help the University graduate better trained, more ethical veterinarians to care for the animals who share our lives.

What is clear from our experience with the OVC and the University of Guelph is that unless they are pushed with the fear of public and press scrutiny – or the loss of donations from corporate sponsors and major donors – they will not change how they use and treat animals. Their bureaucratic and academic inertia is systemic and pervasive. They would rather go on killing animals thoughtlessly and unnecessarily than make changes that improve animal welfare.

This failure to improve is contrary to the University’s stated animal welfare principles. With your help, we want to force the OVC and the University of Guelph to live up to, rather than merely pay lip service to, those principles.

Included with this letter is a “Sign-on Letter”. Please, add your comments to it and mail it to Senator Pamela Wallin, the Chancellor of the University of Guelph.

I’ve met with administrators at the OVC. I’ve urged them to exercise the professional integrity and moral will to make the reforms necessary to honour the University’s professed ethical standards and modernize their use of animals in teaching. Their response was evasive and confrontational.

Senator Wallin may be able to bring the necessary moral leadership to the issue. My hope is that Senator Wallin will help convince the OVC and the University of Guelph to make true its now false claim that it is,

*...dedicated to maintaining a high level of animal care in all of its teaching programs...
Guelph has long been a leader in the promotion of animal welfare issues, and ... promotes
humane systems of animal management and fosters the development of alternatives in
animal use in research and teaching.*

My sincere hope is that the OVC and the University will rapidly agree to make the necessary animal welfare reforms – saving the lives of hundreds of animals – without forcing us to take to the public our fight to save the University of Guelph's animals. So far, however, with only one or two notable exceptions our concerns have been met with resistance, contempt, and duplicity. Hopefully, your intervention, and your appeal to Senator Wallin, will help change that.

Please, let me also ask you to make a substantial, generous contribution to this animal saving campaign. We expect the University of Guelph to respond with knee-jerk resistance. To confront them, we'll need to prepare newspaper and radio advertisement and be prepared to publish and broadcast them. We'll need face-to-face meetings with university officials to press our concerns for the animals.

Doing all of this will require the financial support of people who share our love for the animals who share our world and our lives.

In the end, with your support, we will – as we so often do – win for the animals. And this time it won't be just one dog like Rainbow who's spared, or the 10 we saved this August, but rather many hundreds.

Please, support us in this campaign.



Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Liz White". The signature is written in a dark ink on a light background.

Liz White
Director

P.S. Throughout this issue, I've asked the Canadian Council on Animal Care (CCAC), the tax-payer funded body that is supposed to oversee the use of animals by Universities, to help the animals at the University of Guelph. Rather than help the animals, it protected the University. The CCAC, based on its mandate, should have been the one to save the VSTEP beagles, not us.

Once we've saved the animals at the University of Guelph, I'd like your support as we take on the CCAC, which is doing more to harm animals than help them. Exposing and reforming the CCAC could save the lives of tens of thousands of research animals across Canada.