



WOMEN IN THE ANIMAL RIGHTS WAR

The debate over animal experimentation is a bitter, irreconcilable battle. **REAL** speaks exclusively to two women – one a target of animal rights extremism who lives in terror, and another who is an activist behind one of the world's most daring animal rights groups

The wick of the bomb had been lit. But luckily for Carmel and Andy Johnson and their two young children, it had gone out. Lorry driver Andy, 37, had arrived home this June to his Leicestershire cottage to find the unexploded bomb nestled beneath his wife's car in the garage. Dialling 999, he told police that the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) had struck again.

The family escaped unharmed. But this attempted attack was the latest in a series that has seen the couple's car tyres slashed and ALF graffiti scrawled on the garage. The couple have no connection with animal testing, but have been targeted by animal rights activists ever since they bought their home from a solicitor who worked for a pharmaceutical company. It was a case of mistaken identity that showed the violent lengths some animal rights extremists are taking.

Darley Oaks Farm in Staffordshire has been the target of macabre extremism because it breeds guinea pigs used in scientific research. Protesters claim that many animals on the farm receive poor treatment and are later sent to be experimented on without anaesthetics. The farmers – the Halls – insist that regular Home Office inspections prove the farm's high standards of animal welfare.

As the campaign to free the guinea pigs mounted, not only did the farmers themselves stumble across explosives on their land, but a hoax bomb was left on the doorstep of the home of their elderly cleaner. Then the owner of a firm supplying fuel to the farm was sent poison-pen letters and had bricks hurled through his front door. Electricity pylons supplying surrounding communities were sabotaged, leaving homes in darkness; and in October last year, Gladys Hammond, the mother-in-law of one of the guinea-pig breeders, was dug up and taken from her grave where she had been buried seven years earlier at the age of 82.

MORAL RIGHTS AND WRONGS

Is it moral that an animal should die to save human and animal lives? On the other hand, very few people believe it is moral to attack a human being to save an animal. Yet tens of thousands of us support charities opposed to scientific experiments using animals.

Police estimate that there are only around 20 activists in Britain involved in such ghastly criminal attacks as attempted murder and the grave-robbing incident, but that they are supported by hundreds more prepared to commit minor crimes to save animals, and thousands who will march for the cause.

The Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty (SHAC) campaign to close down animal research labs at UK and US branches of Huntingdon Life Sciences (HLS) is at the heart of the animal activists' battle. 'Think what it would be like to be a beagle in HLS tonight,' reads a news article in one of SHAC's recent newsletters. 'The lucky ones die... no more lonely nights, no more beatings from technicians, no more pain.' Under a headline, 'A single act of defiance is worth more than a thousand angry words', an editorial advises: 'Animal liberation will not be won by faint hearts and what ifs. You don't get liberation without getting your hands dirty.'



ACTIVISTS STRIKE

HLS managing director Brian Cass was left covered in blood after an attack at his home. He was set upon by three animal rights activists wearing balaclavas and brandishing baseball bats

SHAC CAMPAIGNERS DENY ENDORSING VIOLENCE

The FBI recently singled out SHAC as one of the most serious terrorist threats to the US. In 2001, the managing director of HLS was left pouring with blood by attackers wielding baseball bats – an act vehemently denied by SHAC campaigners, who insist they do not endorse violence. Yet in the US, seven members of the campaign have been charged with harassing lab employees and vandalising company property.

New UK laws offer tougher protection to targets of animal extremism, but the ALF in response has vowed to unleash an arson campaign. Barbara Davies of the Research Defence Society (RDS), a UK group promoting understanding animal research in medicine, believes that those who protest against animals in scientific research are 'completely irresponsible'. She says, 'They have campaigns of continuous harassment. Once they have your contact details they never let up. It's horrific for the target and changes their entire life.'

In the late 90s, an undercover investigation at HLS in the UK filmed stomach-churning footage of cruelty to animals, including dogs being shaken and punched. The workers involved were sacked and HLS insists such practices are a thing of the past. But SHAC believes nothing has changed. Its 'Time for Action' video shows protesters setting off smoke grenades and bombarding targets in their homes to a soundtrack of overwhelming trance music.

Eminent scientist Professor O'Mara*, who specialises in disease research, is adamant that animal activists have got things wrong: 'To say scientists are perverts and sadists (a charge made by SHAC) is a gross slander. It is absolutely obscene. We are devoting our lives to saving lives and minimising suffering, not only for people, but also for animals, through the medicines we develop.'

'We already have extremely tight laws from the Home Office,' she explains. 'Often it takes so long to get permission from the Home Office to do an experiment with animals that we give up. Animals have state-of-the-art, expensive care; they are treated humanely, and protected from physical or emotional stress. There are strict rules controlling and limiting what level of pain an animal might experience. Everyone is trained and monitored and we have meetings upon meetings making sure everyone knows the rules.'

* Name has been changed >

“ANIMAL LIBERATION WILL NOT BE WON WITH FAINT HEARTS AND WHAT IFS. YOU NEED TO GET YOUR HANDS DIRTY”

“I KNOW WHAT YOU LOOK LIKE, I'M WAITING MY TIME, I WILL GET YOU UNLESS I HEAR YOU'VE STOPPED SUPPORTING HLS...”

A poison-pen letter sent anonymously to a man who does business with an animal testing lab

DID THE HORROR OF AN ARSON ATTACK WEEKS BEFORE I GAVE BIRTH LEAD TO MY PREMATURE BABY?

Ruth Sanderson*, who is in her late 30s, is managing director of a company which supplies animal welfare products to clients including Huntingdon Life Sciences and Darley Oaks Farm. Her family became a frontline target of animal rights extremism

I am a mother of three children. We live within close proximity to our business, and I was eight-and-a-half months pregnant with my third child when the ALF attacked us with arson.

For several years, our company has been attacked by animal rights extremists. We have had the usual fairly peaceful but still very intimidating protesters turning up shouting with loud-hailers, trying to force entry every time a door was opened. These extremists called themselves SHAC, but at demonstrations some had ALF posters. They made our life a misery to the extent we had to move and change our name.

When we moved, we carried out all the security measures advised – working under a PO box number, securing the perimeter around our business – and took tremendous care, with the police's help, not to leave a trail. They still managed to track us down. Within a year they managed to find our telephone number and email addresses and they let us know by that means of communication that they weren't going to give up trying to find us geographically.

In the early hours of the morning, one winter night several months ago, when I was weeks from giving birth, my husband and I were woken by an alarm going off. My four year old and my nine year old were in bed sleeping. My husband investigated and ran back to tell me we had to leave our children alone to try to put out a tremendous fire in one of our buildings. It was going up extremely fast and five minutes later we found two other huge fires. You can imagine the panic. We are fairly remote in the countryside and it took the fire brigade 20 minutes to get to us. Within minutes they told us this was extremely suspicious. It took 38 firemen until 9 o'clock the next morning to put the fires out. We suffered terrible losses and our insurance company says that it won't insure us again unless we pay far more. We have already spent in excess of £70,000 on security, even though we are a small company.

It was our worst nightmare come true. We knew the animal rights extremists had found us. I was scared witless – absolutely terrified. My baby was born prematurely and that was probably due to stress. A few months ago, the ALF claimed responsibility for the arson attack.

They have also now exposed our address on a website and invited people to let us know how they feel about us. One of my employees is getting repeated phone calls at four in the morning. We are sent threatening letters telling us this is only the start, that our day is coming and to watch our backs.

Last week we were sent used sanitary towels – it is not the first time, either. Their covert criminal approach is sinister and horrific. We can't feel safe. The police don't have the resources to help us – we are sitting ducks.

It is easy to understand why companies walk away from the medical research industry when faced with this terrorist-like intimidation. But these people should not be allowed to blackmail companies like ours and I want to expose to society the lengths these people are going to. I would not be able to live with myself if I gave in, because I am not doing anything to be ashamed of.

We know that animal research has to happen and we strive to make sure that it proceeds with the best welfare standards possible – we are constantly looking at ways to make the animals feel cared for.

We just want to carry out our legitimate business in peace without worrying about the security of our employees and our family.

*Name has been changed

SHOULD WE BE TESTING MEDICINES ON ANIMALS?

Diseases for which animal experiments have found life-saving cures or treatment include polio, diabetes, cystic fibrosis and Parkinson's

- 'Ask the experimenters why they experiment on animals, and the answer is: "Because the animals are like us". Ask, "Why it is morally OK to experiment on animals?" and the answer is: "Because the animals are not like us." Animal experimentation rests on a logical contradiction,' argued early animal rights spokesman Professor Charles R. Magel.
- 'It is essential to test on animals because cells in a dish or a computer are not the same as in a living animal,' states Professor O'Mara. 'Even if drugs don't automatically work the same way in an animal and in a human, it would be immoral to test potentially toxic compounds on people. If an animal rights protester has an accident, will they refuse any drugs that have been tested on animals?'

ANIMAL TESTING FACTS

- In the UK in 2003, 2.75 million scientific experiments used animals.
- The number of animal experiments has halved in the last 30 years due to higher standards of animal welfare, scientific advances and stricter controls.
- 85% of animals used in medical experiments are laboratory-bred rodents, 11% are fish, reptiles and birds, 2.7% are sheep, cows and pigs, 1% are rabbits and ferrets, 0.3% are specially-bred dogs and cats and 0.17% are monkeys.
- According to a MORI survey in 2002, 90% of the British public accept the need for animal research provided there is no unnecessary suffering, the research is for serious medical purposes, and there is no alternative.
- The law in Britain permits animal experiments only if the work cannot be done another way, any pain and distress laboratory animals experience is kept to a minimum, and lab workers undergo special training.
- Every lab must by law have a veterinary surgeon and a welfare officer who looks after the animals.

Information supplied by RDS



NOTHING'S GOING TO STOP ME FIGHTING FOR ANIMALS' RIGHTS

Softly-spoken Heather James, 38, from Reading, was one of the original founders of Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty (SHAC) and has devoted her life to animal rights activism. In 2001 she pleaded guilty to conspiracy to incite a public nuisance and spent four-and-a-half months in prison. Last year she was given an ASBO for assault

I was brought up well and taught decent, moral behaviour: to respect people, and not to cause damage. But I was taught that being cruel to animals was wrong. My grandparents were vegetarian; my dad, a retired lecturer, and my mum, who worked in a shop, are vegan, and even my dogs are vegan. I am very grateful to my parents for never giving me meat, and I have never eaten milk, cheese or butter.

After leaving school I worked with horses, the RSPCA, and as a nanny. It wasn't until I went to join a huge protest at Coventry Airport against exports of live calves being sent to veal crates in Holland that I met my ex-husband Greg, the co-founder of SHAC. Since then I have done nothing but campaign for animals. SHAC pays me a small allowance to survive on each week and I have somewhere to live. But apart from that I don't have anything – no savings, wages or pension. It's not a sacrifice. I don't want to do anything else. I've never been a money-minded person anyway.

Greg is now married to our fellow-campaigner Natasha, and we are all friends. Now I live alone. I only have the rest of my life to do everything I can to help these animals and there isn't much time to do anything else. I like walking my dogs. I don't really go out, I don't take drugs or drink. I'd like more time to read or go to the cinema or travel but campaigning takes up all my time.

Before starting SHAC, my group led two successful campaigns. Then we chose Huntingdon Life Sciences (HLS) as our next target. Even if dogs aren't being punched in the face anymore, the experiments are worse. Animals are burnt, poisoned, mutilated. Somebody needs to shout out for these animals, start stamping their feet and saying, 'This is wrong'.

At SHAC we all work seven days a week. It's more than a job – and it's certainly not a hobby. It's a way of life. We're absolutely determined to fight for those animals and nothing is going to stop us.

I have quite a few convictions, all for public order offences. We didn't realise

“DON'T TALK TO ME ABOUT VIOLENCE, GO TO HUNTINGDON AND SEE THE BLOOD AND THE SCREAMING!”

we were breaking the law when we printed targets' addresses in our newsletter in our early days inviting readers to write to them with nuisance mail. In 2001, Greg, Natasha and I pleaded guilty to conspiracy to incite a public nuisance and were sentenced to 12 months in prison – but I was let out after four-and-a-half months with a tag. Being in prison was fine – we needed a rest anyway. All the prisoners and prison officers loved us.

If someone's smashing rats across the head, they're someone we will target, but our attitude towards anyone who drives through the gates of HLS is one of zero tolerance: you do not deal with HLS, full stop. I can't protest at HLS anymore because I was given an ASBO (Anti-Social Behaviour Order) in December. I was walking through a gateway at a demo at one of HLS's customers' offices. A woman I didn't know was standing there. I walked past her and my shoulder must have brushed against her. She didn't stagger or fall, so obviously it was a very gentle brush. Weeks later, I was summoned to Huntingdon Magistrates' Court and convicted of assault.

We are very strongly driven and verbally aggressive, but not violent. Where are all these people lying in hospital we are supposed to have attacked? SHAC demonstrates outside businesses that deal with HLS, going up to people face to face and saying, 'How can you justify dealing with these people?' We hold up banners, hand out leaflets, shout 'Murderer' and 'Torturer' on the megaphone, and every time we demonstrate we play a tape recording of a beagle screaming in the hands of a Huntingdon worker. If that sound doesn't send a chill down your spine, nothing will.

Demonstrating at our targets' homes is impossible now due to new laws, but



the tactic has been successful in the past. Their neighbours with pets have a right to know that they are living near perverts and monsters. I have no sympathy whatsoever for an individual person being targeted. You're not dealing with some sweet innocent person here, you're dealing with someone who tortures animals to death. That individual can walk away from their work at any moment – so there's no use in crying and whining when their car is paint-stripped or people go to their house with banners embarrassing them in front of their neighbours. Don't talk to me about violence, go to Huntingdon and see the blood and the screaming! These little incidents, compared to the scale of millions of animals in horror and agony, are nothing.

When you try every legal tactic, and then those rights are eroded, and animals are still in agony, you are driven underground. That is when people go out and do something extreme. It is OK to use as much force as necessary to stop someone being attacked, so why not use force to protect animals? It's not something I would do, but I do understand it.

There are bad people in the world who do terrible things, there are people who have a sadistic nature and need an outlet for it, and I believe the people that fall into that category go to work at HLS, where no-one can hear or see what they do to animals. Either they are not very bright, or they are sadists – and I believe those are the ones running the show.

I am a good person. If I see injustice against anybody or anything, I feel it strongly and need to do something about it. I wish with all my heart I didn't have to do this – I don't enjoy it – but I have to.

■ A spokesperson for HLS says, 'We help to develop new medicines to treat conditions such as cancer, Alzheimer's, Parkinson's and AIDS. The use of animals is a small but vital part of the research. The welfare of our animals is of paramount importance to us and, quite rightly, stringent regulations are in place to ensure this is the case.'

FEATURE Olivia Gordon PHOTOGRAPHS Istockphoto/Manni Masons/Corbis