

## Ann Cottrell Free:

### Poet/Journalist/Animal Advocate Extraordinaire

*Beagle, beagle  
Circle, circle  
Circle within your cage  
A path to the brook...  
A path to the hedge...  
Over the hill...  
Down to the meadow...  
Fresh with dew...  
You have worn down the grid,  
but never quite through.  
—"Stir Crazy Laboratory Dog"  
from No Room, Save in the  
Heart*



**T**hat image of an imprisoned dog restlessly circling in her cage sums up investigative journalist Ann Cottrell Free's anguish at discovering hundreds of neurotic laboratory dogs in the basement of a federal government building only blocks away from the U.S. Capitol in 1959.

"I could only weep," recalls Free. Some of the dogs had spent up to seven years in cramped cages, piled one on top of the other. She particularly remembers an emaciated victim of the LD50 test, dead in his cage from forced feedings of toxic chemicals, with a "Do Not Feed" sign above his cage.

No stranger to politics or suffering, Free had already earned clout as a reporter and foreign correspondent for *The New York Herald Tribune*, *Newsweek*, *Washington Star*, and *Washington Post*. She had written about starving, dying Chinese, and her many articles about meatpacking plants had helped bring passage of the Humane Slaughter Act. But she was shaken to the "bone and heart" by the scene inside the Food and Drug Administration's windowless laboratory.

Free's despair at finding the dogs didn't prevent her from acting on their behalf. Rather, her tenacity led to the first Congressional action to protect laboratory animals. She

succeeded, after three years of effort, in getting Congress to approve the construction of a new building with indoor/outdoor runs for the dogs. "Perhaps I got certain powerful Congressmen to realize that it was to their eventual benefit to change that 'little bit of hell' I was describing to their constituents," Free comments. For taking on the FDA, she was awarded the Albert Schweitzer medal by the Animal Welfare Institute.

Free continued to expose suffering in labs and animal dealer compounds, "driving the biomedical lobby up the wall," she says. "That lobby didn't want their grant money—our tax money—going into any kind of improvements for animals. Money is what it's all about."

"That's why the much-criticized Animal Welfare Act is so weak and underfunded. Look at how the biomedical lobby has fought the Act's 1985 amendments that might provide a little exercise for caged dogs and some psychological relief to primates," she continues.

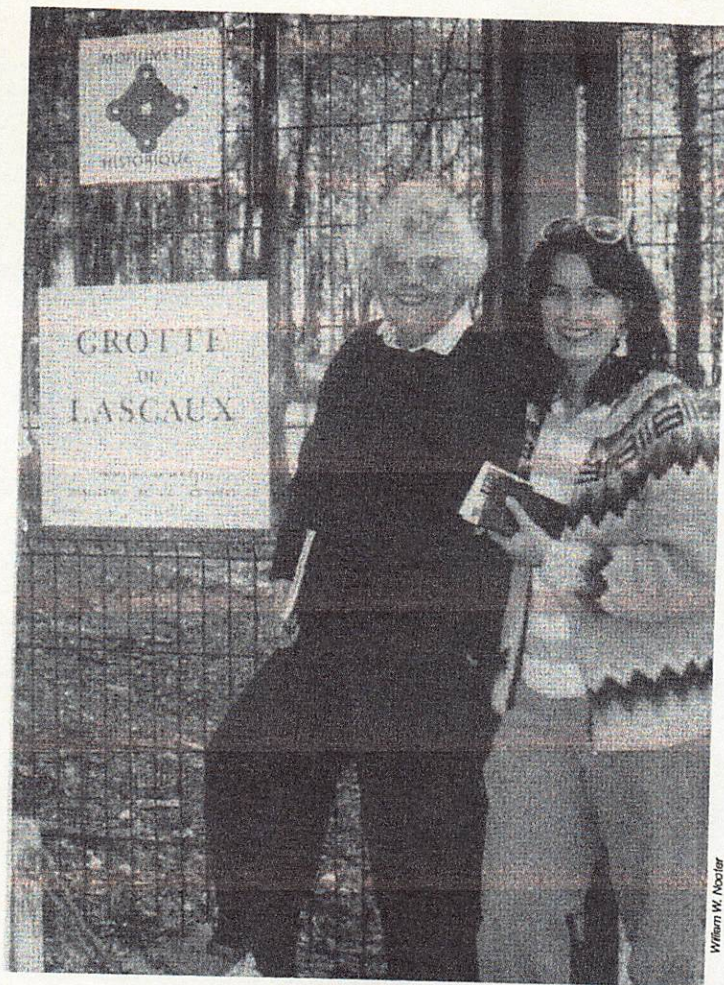
In the '70s, Free worked on Washington's dog pound, beginning

with an article in the *Washingtonian* magazine. This led to the removal of the decompression chamber. Later the pound was taken over by the Washington Humane Society, an organization Free had helped revitalize.

In 1982, Free took on the National Zoo, requesting that they halt a public shotgun and bow-and-arrow deer hunt at their fenced-in Virginia farm for endangered species. But they refused, so Free went public. A standing-room-only Congressional hearing followed, with Free as chief witness, resulting in the cancellation of the hunt and the retirement of the zoo director. Free had written about the zoo in her 1963 prizewinning novel, *Forever the Wild Mare*, about the zoo's closely-confined Mongolian wild horse—a species extinct in the wild.

In 1987, she tackled the seemingly insurmountable task of rescuing thousands of starving, homeless animals on the Puerto Rican island of Vieques. Her work resulted in the U.S. Navy helping to rescue and doctor more than a thousand animals, and in the





Ann and daughter Elissa Free.

formation of the Vieques Humane Society. "A miracle, but we still need a shelter and money to run it," sighs a grateful but weary Free.

Also an active environmentalist, Free stopped roadbuilders from destroying a Washington park, and national magazine articles written in 1970 led to a National Wildlife Refuge on Maine's southern coast being named in memory of her friend Rachel Carson, author of *Silent Spring*. In 1987, the Rachel Carson Council gave Free its prestigious Legacy award.

An adherent of a Schweitzerian "reverence for life" philosophy, about which she wrote in her 1982 book, *Animals, Nature and Albert Schweitzer*, Free recognizes the interrelationship of all life. "We save animals and microorganisms in nature by the refuge approach. We save animals from the labs through development of alternatives," she says.

To that end, she initiated and

managed the Albert Schweitzer Summer Fellows Competition for aspiring physicians and researchers at the Center for Advanced Training in Cell and Molecular Biology at Catholic University in Washington. "It was a step in the right direction, away from so much wasteful use of mice, sensitizing these young scientists early on." Free has also taken a leading role in pushing Congress and the National Institutes of Health to expand NIH's "measly budget for alternatives. We've gotten it tripled, but it's still small change compared to the costs for animal experimentation."

Free discovered her love for animals in the country. Her grandparents kept chickens, horses, cats, and dogs. "I agonized over the killing of chickens." Her poem "Church Picnic", from *No Room, Save in the Heart*, sums up her reaction to a "drumstick in cornmeal batter" that was "so lately

a ball of chirping yellow fluff."

Other youthful experiences are reflected in her writings, such as pity for caged foxes at the Deep Run Hunt Club near her Richmond, Virginia home. Today she lives in suburban Maryland with her husband, also a journalist. Their daughter, a Cable News Network producer, shares her mother's passion for animals.

Free is now at work on "two books that I hope will help change the way people think about animals and their protectors. I'm trying to be both a radical and a mainstreamer." She's also launching the Albert Schweitzer Council on Animals and the Environment, and is particularly interested in alleviating "the sad, dreary lives of tied-out rural dogs. They are in jails without bars—totally neglected. Their owners may operate within the law on food and shelter, but it's psychological deprivation on a par with those FDA dogs. We need to take the message 'Be a Companion to Your Companion Animal' to the countryside through bumper stickers, advertisements, and into the churches and classrooms.

Free's interest in human/animal relationships took her to France's prehistoric cave-painting region last fall. While searching the 17,000-year-old paintings of animals for clues to humankind's ambivalent attitudes, she became involved in another search, for a solution to a complicated situation involving a homeless dog. "Whatever caveman's attitudes, I had to act on mine—or else more sleepless nights," she says. Regretfully giving up precious days of research, she took the grateful dog to the distant refuge of the Princess Elizabeth de Croy in Burgundy.

While her achievements for animals are many, it is through Free's poetry that we meet her motivation. Dr. Fairfield Osborn, founder of the Conservation Foundation and author of *Our Plundered Planet*, summed up Free's spirit when he presented her with the Schweitzer Medal: "It is good to realize that people like Ann Cottrell Free exist...Through her work and her writings, through her sense of reverence of the rights of all living creatures, she has brought to the consciousness of many, many people the meaning of humanity in its broadest sense."

—Karen L.T. Iacobbo