

# The Last of the Giants: In Memoriam, Helen Jones

It pains me to report that on August 14, 1998, ISAR's founder and long-time president, Helen Jones, passed from this life.

Almost four decades ago, after several years with an animal protection organization that she considered impotent, Helen Jones formed the not-for-profit corporation that is today named International Society For Animal Rights. From then until her retirement from ISAR two-and-a-half years ago, Helen was an indefatigable fighter for the rights of all animals, opposing vivisection, factory farming, overpopulation, zoos, rodeos, circuses, hunting, and every other form of cruelty, abuse and exploitation.

Helen's was a loud, often lonely, voice—but not for the tired, unsatisfactory idea of animal welfare. No—from the beginning, Helen Jones espoused and fought for the then-radical principle that animals have *rights*. As a friend of hers noted not long ago, in advancing the idea of animal rights Helen Jones “provided the intellectual predicate for recognizing that nonhumans had interests *beyond* their admitted interest in not suffering.” He added that “if there is one person who can be credited with making the issue of justice (rather than merely reduction of suffering) front and center in the animal controversy, it is Helen Jones.”

Amen!

I met Helen Jones almost three-decades ago. While every national animal welfare organization was busy publicly disassociating itself from a notorious and politically sensitive Animal Rights case I had brought, Helen Jones alone offered to help. Indeed, that federal lawsuit, in which she was a named plaintiff, is the first reported decision in the United States to refer expressly to the concept of “Animal Rights.” A New York case in which Helen Jones was also a plaintiff is the first reported state decision in the United States to use the term “Animal Rights.” Much of what we in the Animal Rights field today take for granted is attributable to Helen Jones. Among her other unequaled “firsts” are:

- articulating the difference between animal welfare and Animal Rights;
- recognizing the role of law and lawyers in the fight for Animal Rights;
- helping to establish “standing to sue” for animals in federal and state courts;
- publishing and distributing books on Animal Rights and related subjects;
- identifying and attacking abuses of animals that no one had addressed before, such as “pound seizure”;
- initiating National Homeless Animals Day, the annual event which today heightens the consciousness of countless Americans to the plague of dog and cat overpopulation;
- organizing international symposia on the overpopulation problem.

And much more!

But even though Helen Jones' voice has now been stilled, those of us whom she inspired pledge to carry on. Certainly, ISAR itself will remain unwaveringly committed to the principle that animals have rights, and that a mere “welfare” approach to their protection is a wholly unacceptable compromise.

There is much work that Helen Jones left undone, in both traditional and untraditional areas. For example, the humane education of children and young adults has been largely overlooked. Overpopulation of companion animals continues to be a blot on our national character, with its consequences of abandonment, strays, disease, suffering, and, on a scale too large fully to contemplate, euthanasia. Pound seizure laws still exist, feeding the voracious vivisection industry, as do animal dealers from coast to coast. Puppy mills continue to grind out their hapless products. Licensing laws are ignored. Canine and feline contraception lags far behind control of human reproduction. Veterinary malpractice goes unpunished because the law still considers pets as mere property, lacking in value. Alaska and its corporate allies continue to abuse dogs in the infamous Iditerod.

All of these cruelties, abuses, and exploitations of animals must be fought. I promise you that ISAR will do its share—especially concerning the overpopulation problem.

With Helen Jones' death, the last founder of today's Animal Rights movement is gone. She joins other giants—among them Eleanor Seiling and Alice Herrington—in leaving a torch of compassion and activism which we can—must!—carry into the new Century.

In reflecting on Helen Jones' passing, I cannot help wondering whether, out there somewhere, Helen and the others are already planning yet another march, another protest, another campaign—in behalf of those who cannot defend themselves: the animals to whom Helen dedicated her life.

Helen Jones will be missed, and not soon forgotten. She will live in the memories of those of us who had their first glimpse of Animal Rights from one who can only be called the Mother of Animal Rights.

*Requiescat in pace, Helen Jones.*

