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Orinda photographer has natural affinity for Animal Rights activism

By Lou Fancher



Jen Frase Photos courtesy Jen Frase Photography

In countries around the world, people during the third week of June annually celebrate Animal Rights Awareness Week. This year, the global event takes place June 19-25 and as it has since it was established in 1991, the weeklong tribute provides opportunity for respecting animals, as well as raising the awareness of animals subject to exploitation.

The concept of animal rights traces its roots all the way back to the founding principles of Buddhist, Hindu, and Jain beliefs that uplift the embedded value and dignity of all sentient beings. With non-violence as a guiding principle, these ancient philosophies and spiritual and life practices lay the foundation for human beings' moral obligation to protect, defend, and preserve the safety of all animals.

The first animal rights legislation arose in 1635, when tearing wool off of live sheep was prohibited. In 1824, Richard Martin, William Wilberforce, and Reverend Arthur Broome founded the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, the first animal welfare charity. These steps, among others, were the precursors to the first Animal Rights Awareness Week launched in 1991 by In Defense of Animals, an international animal protection organization with over 250,000 supporters founded by

veterinarian Dr. Elliot Katz. Since 2011, the organization has been led by Dr. Marilyn Kroplick, a medical doctor and psychiatrist. Dr. Katz died in March 2021, but the In Defense of Animals remains a bright light on the animal rights landscape.

Animal rights activists come in all sizes and from all directions, and continue to be active, motivated in part by incendiary animal rights abuse statistics. For example, in 2019 in the United States alone, 15 billion land animals and 50 billion sea animals were killed for food; 15 million animals died in laboratories; 8 million were killed for their skin and fur, and 250 million were killed by hunters, according to research cited on the National Animal Rights Day website.

Here in Lamorinda, animal rights activism appears in grassroots clubs and "I could do this too" individuals. Lafayette resident Jen Frase is a longtime lover of dogs and a professional photographer with a studio in Orinda who specializes in making images of pets and the humans who are their caretakers.

Frase says that although her naturally left hemisphere-dominated, analytical brain led her to obtain a bachelor's degree in business from the University of Oregon and an MBA from UC Davis before pursuing a career in business, she always loved photography - and dogs. "I never thought to go into a creative field, but I ended up going into grad school at Academy of Art University and got an MFA in photography after having my twins (a boy and a girl, age 15). I got into dog photography because dogs have always been a passion. I'd do a wedding photo session that had dogs involved and I'd end up with more pictures of dogs than of anything else."

Clients who visit the Theatre Square studio, which Frase opened 10 months ago, upon entering will come upon photographs not shot by Frase -- the first clue she extends her interest in making images of dogs to actively protecting them. A large display presents the story of the galgos, the Spanish greyhounds that were among the first dogs ever domesticated but today are tragically abused in Spain.

In an industry outlawed throughout the rest of Europe, the Spanish hunting dogs are valued for their high speed and as fast hunters, are overbred for the "hare coursing" season during which they are used by hunters to chase down hares in competitions. Neglected and abused throughout their "work terms," the galgos are disposed of when they no longer serve their purpose. It is estimated that over 50,000 galgos are slaughtered each year.

Frase says she became aware of the galgos and their plight when she saw an image made by a Spanish photographer on Instagram. "I had never heard the term 'galgos' and when I Googled it, I came up with awful information. They're abused, treated like a tool, used until they are nearly destroyed, and then actually disposed of."

Frase donates a portion of her profits every month to supporting SOS Galgos, a rescue organization in Barcelona. On her website and in conversations with people in her studio, she provides suggestions and links to organizations actively supporting galgos rescues, adoptions, and efforts to create legislative protections currently lacking. She also encourages people to accept and act upon a realization she herself had about activism.

"There are so many causes related to animals one could donate to or build awareness of, it can be overwhelming. There's only so much one person can do. I realized I can support all animal rights and volunteer at animal shelters, but to talk about it on my website and in the studio, it's best if I focus on one thing. The galgos was a story that just moved my heart and hit close to home."

Although Monk, the six-year-old dog Frase and her family hope will "remain with us for a long, long time," is not a galgo, Monk is well-loved, safe and respected. Frase says that is simply something all animals desire and deserve.

For more information about Frase, visit <https://jenfrase.com/>

For more information on how to help the galgos, visit <http://www.galgorescue.org/>



Some of Jen Frase's work



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