



The Pet Press

*For The People Who Love Animals And
The Animals Who Need To Be Loved*

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Shannon Keith

**An Advocate for Saving Laboratory Animals and
Helping People Live a Cruelty-Free Life**

By Lori Golden



Shannon Keith and Maya

A native of Studio City, California, Shannon Keith was raised as an only child where animals were always her best friends. "I grew up with all kinds of rescue animals - dogs and cats, and animals we'd rescue from the street, including injured birds and such. My mother was very encouraging of that, so it was a very nurturing atmosphere that cared for animals."

By the time she got to college she decided to become an animal rights attorney. "When I first heard that animals were considered chattel, meaning a piece of property, I decided I wanted to make it my life's mission to end that and to change their status as simply being pieces of property," Shannon explains. "So I went to law school specifically for the purpose to defend animals, to protect their rights and advocate for them."

"I then opened my own law practice," she started a non-profit organization in 2004 continues, "and while I was practicing I had dedicated to educating people about animal the very favorable decisions for animals on testing and other forms of exploitation. That the lower court side regarding recognizing non-profit was called ARME - Animal Rescue emotional distressed damages for injury Media and Education - and I made documentary or loss of an animal, which was wonderful. films that are now called classics about those During that period I became very active in topics."

In 2010 Shannon found out about some all forms of exploitation are horrible and I beagles in a laboratory who were going to be fight for all of them, the area that hits me killed if they could not be rescued within 48 the hardest is the realm of animal testing. I hours.

"That was a dream come true for me because think because it encompasses everything I never thought that anyone would be able to from physical to psychological abuse and I trauma and it's just so unethical on every legally save animals from animal testing," she level, not just for the animals but for says. "And so, I jumped at the opportunity and humans as well. And so I wanted to do went on my first mission to get these beagles something more than practice law and I

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**ADOPT
DON'T SHOP**



Shannon Keith

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who had lived their whole lives in a laboratory. The experience touched me more than I ever thought possible. I already thought, I know what's going to happen, I know what they've been through, I know what to do, but it was completely different. I thought when I opened their cages for the first time that they would be so happy they would run out of the cages with joy. Instead when we opened the cages they just stood there and would not exit those crates. They were so terrified that they defecated on themselves. They were shaking and salivating - they had never been outdoors. And they were hardly able to stand because they had no muscle tone from being kept in a cage their whole lives. Finally after about 25 minutes one beagle came out of his cage very slowly and walked over to the other one and touched his nose, and so the other one got the courage to take his first steps. And as they both took their first steps gingerly on the grass, they would touch the grass and lick their paws - they didn't know what the feeling was. After a few minutes they started walking around and then they started playing and becoming dogs. It was the most beautiful but bittersweet moment of my life, and at that moment I made it my life's goal to fight for them until we could open every cage and change the law."

Those rescued beagles in 2010 led to a new mission of ARME called Beagle Freedom Project.

"I called it Beagle Freedom Project because beagles are the number one breed of dogs used for testing. But we rescue all breeds and all animals from laboratory research. I call them my gateway drug because it was a way to educate people about testing and get people interested and then teach them about other animals and other breeds. So it started as a mission of ARME but it really took off and sort of became its own entity. And recently we merged the two and changed the name and rebranded, so now we're called Rescue + Freedom Project."

"The change was important because there was a little bit of confusion about the types of animals that we rescue and we wanted to expand our supporter base because we've got all kinds of dogs from animal testing, not just beagles. We've got hounds, pit bulls, chihuahuas, and all kinds of mixed breeds, and it was hard to reach out to people to potentially foster or adopt dogs other than beagles. So I thought it was important to change the name so people realize we're rescuing them all... and not only animals from laboratory research but animals from other abusive trades as well."

As for what kinds of animals do better than others Shannon says, "the puppies do much better when they come out of the labs. In fact you might not even notice that they had any kind of trauma. They are happy and excited and act like puppies. Dogs

that get out after about a year or longer you'll see what they've gone through and their PTSD, and of course, when they're older, 5 years and up, it can be difficult. It's definitely a rehabilitation process that we go through with our fosters and adopters with these dogs. The dogs are the easiest in terms of a family member coming from a laboratory. The cats, unfortunately, are treated a lot worse in the laboratories than dogs are, so the cats have a harder time adjusting. However, they do adjust and we have a 100% success rate with the cats as well in their adoptive homes. It just takes a lot longer for them than it does for the dogs."

They recently rescued more than 20 cats that have gotten a lot of attention because they were in a laboratory longer and have had a bit more trauma. "We've been looking for very special homes for them. It's difficult when people meet a companion cat to share their family with and the cat might not be warm and loving at first. They have to understand what they've been through and that when they do finally make that breakthrough it's going to be amazing. These cats are a little older - they're over a year."

"Those first two dogs we rescued were Freedom and Bigsby, who were about 2 1/2 at the time, and are still alive and in their wonderful adoptive homes and doing very well. Since 2010 when we rescued those two dogs we've rescued more than 2000 animals from animal testing facilities across the globe. All kinds of animals from several different states and countries."

"Rescue + Freedom Project encompasses everything we did with ARME and Beagle Freedom Project," she continues, "so saving animals from testing facilities, legislation campaigns and outreach, also rescuing animals from high kill shelters, from the meat trade and other areas of abuse."

I asked how she finds out about the animals that need rescue from laboratories.

"Laboratories do not want to release animals to us. The bio-med industry specifically has an agenda against myself and my organization. They don't like our politics because we talk about what happens to animals and we talk about the fact that we get animals out of labs... and they hate it. They actually have conferences about us where they talk about how to avoid getting tricked into releasing animals to us. It's a fascinating, sick, dirty world they live in where they would rather kill animals than give them a chance at life and give them to us. Not only have they said that at their conferences but they've said that to me personally. It's simply because they don't want the information out there. And they've done a damn good job because as much as BFP and RFP have been in the media I still can meet at least five people every day who say to me, 'oh, I didn't know they still tested on animals. I didn't know they still tested on dogs and cats.' It's hugely still prevalent. So it's difficult for us to get animals out of laboratories."

"I send letters to every single facility that tests on animals every year, inviting them to please work with us," she continues. "I also offer up

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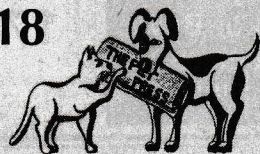
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**Don't Contribute
To The Misery
Neuter & Spay
It's The Kindest Way**

Shannon Keith

(cont'd from p.17)

confidentially agreements in case they don't want information out there, which none of them do. We also rely on people who work in the laboratories to contact us. Those who know that these healthy animals that are done with testing and will be killed will call us. And then it's a matter of trying to negotiate with a higher level employee or management or the contracting company to try to get them to release them to us. It's a really difficult and touchy process."

Their signature legislation is the Beagle Bill. "We started it several years ago in Minnesota, which was the first state that passed it... and then to California and the others. It seeks to mandate the release of dogs and cats to non-profit rescue organizations when the testing is over instead of killing them. So this is a way to force facilities to have to call non-profits and try to get these animals into homes and give them a second chance at life. There's no controversy. We're not getting involved in the actual testing. We're just saying, hey, when you're done with the animals, let them go. But they still fight that tooth and nail. In California we had to fight two years for this, but it finally did pass. It's passed now in nine states and we're pending in two other states. After we hit our tenth state we might go federal with this. And once we pass federally then we'd like to move on to other legislation that will protect animals even more."

"Politics is interesting," she says. "I learned a lot about how a bill becomes a law and it's not what you learned in grade school."

Shannon credits her amazing team, dedicated staff, great volunteers and supporters, and fosters and adopters across the globe for her being able to fulfill her mission. "It's really wonderful and it's really become a dream come true of what we're doing... and we're doing more and more every day."

"All of the animals we rescue go right into foster homes. We have a waiting list across the globe of people who want to foster these special needs animals. When we know we're going to get them out we go to our data base of applicants all over the world and begin the interview process, the home check process, the reference check process and let them know what they need to do and be prepared for. And we get them all set up and they go right into their homes."

"We don't post most of the animals we rescue on our website because most of them are confidential," she continues. "If people want to foster or adopt, go to our website (RescueFreedomProject.org) and fill out an application. When we have a rescue in that person's area we give them a call to find out if they're interested. And then we go from there."

"In all the years and everything that I've done to fight against animal testing - the protests, the lawsuits, everything - this has been the single most effective way to create change. For someone to meet an animal testing survivor and look them in the eye and make that connection and know what that animal went through... we have changed thousands of people's lives. They've indirectly become activists, vegetarians, and vegans, just because they met that one animal who opened up their eyes and hearts."

It wasn't enough for Shannon to rescue animals after being tested in laboratories, she took it one step farther to help people shop wisely by not buying products tested on animals with her free **Cruelty Cutter** App.

"This is the best cruelty-free shopping app in the world, if I do say so myself," explains Shannon. "All you have to do is scan the bar code of an item and it instantly tells you if it's cruelty free or not. It's also an activist tool where you can share the results on Twitter, on Facebook, or you can mail them. You can also instantly tag the company that tests on animals or doesn't test and make them aware you didn't buy their product because they test on animals."

If you want to get involved visit RescueFreedomProject.org and read about their programs and campaigns and everything they do.

"We are a non-profit so donations are really needed. And we always need hands-on help. We just opened a rescue and outreach center in Agoura Hills and that's where some of our harder to place animals will be living until they find their homes. And we'll also be giving tours and lectures on cruelty-free lifestyles."

"We need a lot of help at that facility right now because we have an event coming up on September 29th," Shannon explains. "It's a Celebration of Survival and everybody should buy a ticket which you can get through the website. But we're still getting the place together and getting it ready for more animals coming out of a laboratory. We have two goats coming in two weeks and we still need to finish their enclosure and we have a pig coming out and need to finish his enclosure... so if anyone is into hands-on help, we need a lot of assistance with that. We also always need help in our office, and we have a kids program called RFP Kids, and welcome kid involvement as well. We have meetings every month and talk about what the kids can do."

"Our event is for the grand opening of our very first rescue and outreach center... something we've been working on for years. We will have a lot of our survivor dogs you can meet. You can expect amazing vegan food created by world-renowned chefs, a huge silent auction and the gift bags are out of control. You're going to need a suitcase to haul it away. It's crazy. There will be a program with a video and a couple of celebrity surprises as well. General admission tickets are \$150, VIP tickets are \$250."

"We have so much to learn from animals. I am so fortunate to have been able to share my life with so many special animals... After I started the Beagle Freedom Project and witnessed the horrors these animals go through and then their rehabilitation, and their breakthroughs and their trust of humans, I realized how important it is to take our lessons from them. We have a capacity to forgive and move forward with life and to experience joy and happiness and really live every single moment to its fullest. And that's what I learn from them... that despite everything they've been through, they are so happy to be alive and so full of love. I try to remind myself about that every day."

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