



# Our Hen House

CHANGE THE WORLD FOR ANIMALS  
a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization

## Interview with Julia Orr

By OUR HEN HOUSE

Published July 5, 2014

*Following is a transcript of an interview with **JULIA ORR** conducted by **JASMIN SINGER** and **MARIANN SULLIVAN** of [Our Hen House](#), for the [Our Hen House podcast](#). The interview aired on Episode 234.*

JASMIN: Welcome to Our Hen House, Julia.

JULIA: Thank you so much. I'm very happy to be here.

JASMIN: Very, very happy to have you. We're talking about something today that we want to start talking about more and more on our podcast and on our TV show because it's just such an important facet of animal rights. Let's start by talking about the exhibit "Light in Dark Places" which is currently going on at the National Museum of Animals and Society. What instigated this exhibit?

JULIA: It was when I met Carolyn Mullen, the director of the museum about a year ago, it's a strange story. One of my supporters who goes out and protests with me, 'cause I protest against vivisection, is an older lady and she had a huge collection of artifacts that she'd collected through the years and she wanted somewhere for them to go. So I had met Carolyn and thought that that would be a great place once she got her museum in place, so we went over to Bea's house, and we're going through all of her pamphlets and booklets talking about vivisection, and I guess that Carolyn just kind of came up with this idea and said, "Would you like to curate an exhibition on vivisection?" And I was like, "Yes, I would, I would love that." And it took a while because the museum didn't have a physical location at the time. So it wasn't until I think it was last October, November, they actually got the physical location and we started really scheduling for the exhibit.

MARIANN: I love that story, that this material was sitting there waiting for the museum to find it and somebody created a museum. It's not the way things usually happen, but it's a very moving story in a lot of ways. I find the photographs of the women in the early days of this movement so moving. There's just something about them that I -- they're just, through their heavy Victorian clothing, their presence as firebrands just somehow comes through.

JASMIN: Yeah, you don't want to fuck with them.

MARIANN: Can you tell us a bit about these women who spearheaded the movement in its early days?

JULIA: Yes, and they were a real revelation to me as well. I had no idea either when I started curating this exhibition. Now -- and I love that you said that -- the one photograph that we used of all of the group of women, they're at a conference, I look at those ladies and

I go, "If those women came at me with an issue I would just agree with them. I would give them whatever they wanted." So I've no idea why we're still fighting this.

But there were some -- Frances Power Cobbe was a formidable force. She was the lady who really kind of kicked off the anti-vivisection movement in Britain. And it wasn't that vivisection hadn't been going on or that people hadn't been fighting it, but when the vivisection industry really got industrialized, that's when the movement really started. And she came across vivisection in Italy and wrote some articles against it and then when she came back to Britain she really got involved and started some groups. The first one was the Victoria Street Society, which was initially called the Society for the Protection of Animals Liable to Vivisection but I think she found that title too much, so that became the Victoria Street Society. And then she went on to form the National Anti-Vivisection Society, and then when she disagreed with some of the things they were doing she went on to form the British Union for the Abolition of Vivisection.

So there were a number of women in the Victorian era who really kicked off this movement and were formidable forces and were great orators, great speakers. She was one of them. Anna Kingsford was another. She was a very spiritual woman who trained to be a doctor in Paris because at the time in England it was illegal for women to be doctors. Actually none of these women had the right to vote or anything, they basically didn't have any rights. So at this time they were also fighting for animal rights, they were fighting for women's rights and children's rights and workers' rights and things like that. So Anna Kingsford was another one, she went to Paris to train to be a doctor so that she could fight vivisection.

MARIANN: It's so moving when you say these things and it's just -- we all know it and you can just say them so casually. But these women were fighting for the rights of animals when they didn't themselves have the right to vote and she was not allowed to become a doctor in her home country.

JULIA: Right, it's extraordinary, it really is. That's what I found. When I delved into this and discovered these women, I just thought it was an extraordinary thing and I really wanted to put them at the forefront of this exhibition because it's very hard for us I think to understand what it must have been like for them, to be always to be ridiculed and to not have any rights but still to be fighting for animals at a time where people were like, "What are you doing, you crazy people?" And they really made this a very strong and powerful movement. I think a lot of the time they were -- at the end of their lives a lot of them did write about how sorry they were that they didn't make as much progress as they had wanted to.

There were other women, like Caroline Earle White. She was an American lady who was definitely a grandmother of this movement in America. She started the American Anti-Vivisection Society with her friend Frances Lowell. And that was again an extraordinary time because the group that she first started, she had to have her husband and son be on the board of directors 'cause she was not allowed to be on the board of directors when she started the group, which was another extraordinary issue at the time.

And there was another lady who I think is another amazing woman, Louise Lind af Hageby. Her and her friend, Leisa Schartau, they actually studied vivisection. They went into the schools to watch the vivisection so that they could report on it and write about it. And that's one of the things -- that's another aspect of this. These women actually watched vivisection happening in front of them. So to endure that as well... that's not something that most of us

do. We can see it in the undercover footage, but these women actually went into these places and watched it. And Louise Lind af Hageby and Leisa Schartau ended up writing a book, *The Shambles of Science*, exposing the vivisectors as they apparently laughingly vivisected on animals over and over again. And that blew up an entire case called the Brown Dog Riots. People were rioting in England over her book and there was a huge court case, a huge scandal. So there really was at the time a phenomenal movement, there were thousands of people marching on the streets. It not only encompassed people who were interested in animal rights, it was people who were trade unionists --

MARIANN: Yeah, you had mentioned that, that the animal activism of these women and I assume of others was really intertwined with other social justice movements. Can you untangle that a little bit?

JULIA: Yes. And all of these women, Frances Power Cobbe, Caroline Earle White, Anna Kingsford, Louise Lind af Hageby, Leisa Schartau, they were all fighting for women's rights. In fact, Frances Power Cobbe, one of her essays, "Wife-torture in England," directly influenced the UK Parliament in passing the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1878, which enabled battered women to gain child custody. Before that they had no rights over their children even though they were being beaten.

So all of these women, they lectured on women's rights, they fought for women's rights. And a lot of the people who came out on the protests were working class because the working class saw an affiliation between their problems and the problems of the exploitation of animals in these labs. And it was noted in a lot of the things that I read that women in particular, when they looked at the vivisection they felt -- what's the word? -- a kind of empathy with the animals because that is how the women of their day were treated in the medical profession. They were strapped down, they were experimented on, especially working class women. There was a lot of gynecological operations going on that were just experiments. They didn't really care if it went right or not, it was just kind of part of the experiment. So I think a lot of the women felt an affiliation with the animals and what was happening to them.

MARIANN: I think that it's so interesting how many parallels there are with today's movement, and some differences and some parallels. You had mentioned the Brown Dog Riots. Can you tell us a little bit more about that?

JULIA: Yes. The Brown Dog Riots were incredible. As I said, Louise Lind af Hageby and Leisa Schartau wrote this book, *Shambles of Science*, and in it she wrote about the vivisectors laughing and joking as they experimented on animals who were screaming in pain because at that time they weren't really using anesthesia on animals. And this caused an uproar, and I forget the name of the experimenter but he took them to court and he won the case. It was a libel case and they had to take out that part about him but they reprinted the book without that part. And then what happened was, I forget who did it, but one of the societies wanted to erect a statue to that dog that they had witnessed being vivisected on. And they did that, so they put up this statue, and medical students rioted in London to get that statue taken down. And for weeks and weeks, there were thousands of students on the streets rioting, trying to get the statue taken down in Battersea Park. So it was incredible, there's news articles and pictures and everything of all these people, and in the end they secreted the statue away and it supposedly got melted down. There is a new one up now

that was erected, but yes, it was an incredible time of rioting, and it wasn't animal rights protesters who were doing that. It was the medical students who were rioting.

JASMIN: Who were some of the other, perhaps more well-known, people of that era who were part of the anti-vivisection movement?

JULIA: These women were actually -- oh, the more *famous* --

JASMIN: Like, I heard like Mark Twain and --

JULIA: Oh, I see. Right, yes. The one thing that struck me about the research was that animal rights activists these days are really denigrated, I think. We're kind of classed as crazy people and just animal-crazy people and terrorists and things like that. And through the research I discovered that some of the most amazing people in literary circles were also ardent anti-vivisectionists: Mark Twain, George Bernard Shaw, Lewis Carroll, and even Queen Victoria. I was so amazed to find that Queen Victoria was opposed to vivisection. But yes, Mark Twain was one of the first celebrities that the anti-vivisection movement utilized his celebrity to kind of like further the cause. He wrote extensively against it as did George Bernard Shaw. I think most of George Bernard Shaw's works were based around his beliefs on anti-vivisection.

MARIANN: So extraordinary to find out what was happening in this movement so long ago. But can you move forward a little and tell us what happened as the 20th century unfolded? It seems like things did not go the way people hoped.

JULIA: No, it didn't. And I think it was a situation where the medical -- they were finding so many, they were having so many discoveries in the medical field, not necessarily due to animal experiments, but it was an exploding industry and there were certain things that really didn't help at all. And then of course the First World War and the Second World War hit, so people at that time were preoccupied with the World Wars and that kind of curtailed any work on anti-vivisection. So that was unfortunate, and then I think after the World Wars it kind of got galvanized again. But I think it was basically the World Wars that really took a hit on the anti-vivisection movement. Even the BUAV were based in London and their HQ got hit by a bomb in one of the blitzes so they had to move out of London. And of course at the time, the paper was short, they couldn't produce pamphlets. Gas was short, they couldn't drive their vans around. There was a lot of things that really hampered the movement.

And I think right at that time, another curious thing is the adage that they use now in -- the publicity and marketing adage that's been very successful is the choice between a mouse or your child, which actually started in the Victorian era. One of the vivisectionists, whose name again I forget, coined that phrase and they've used it ever since. And I think people just became really terrified. There were a lot of diseases that ran rampant at that stage like cholera and diphtheria that people wanted to find cures for, and they were just blinded by the white coats, as we call them now, basically.

MARIANN: Was there ever a moment when things were close to ending vivisection and medical research would have gone down a different road and perhaps a better road, who knows, even for humans? Was that moment ever there?

JULIA: I think there were many moments like that, definitely before the First World War at the very beginning there were. I've read so many moments where, there was one in particular where Frances Power Cobbe -- in her days, they had written a legislation to, if not ban vivisection, really curtail the practice, and it went to the Houses of Parliament. She was in Wales at the time. It was one of the Lords who had championed this bill and he was just about to present it and his mother died and he had to leave, and that gave the vivisectionists like another week or two to gather their support and really oppose the bill and the bill went down in flames. And there was many, many times like that where it was just like a case of somebody didn't show up or somebody showed up or things like that that happened. We've been so close many times, but I think in the earlier days it was -- 'cause I think we had the public support in the early days. Most people were opposed to vivisection, whereas now there's so many issues to think about, not many people think about this issue.

MARIANN: Yeah, I think that's true, and I think also the fact that medical research *did* go down that road and people think that our lives depend on it. But we just have no idea what would have happened and what might have been much better in so many ways. And certainly our healthcare could be much better than it is and could be less drug dependent and more knowledgeable about nutrition or whatever. We could have come to those things maybe sooner if we hadn't gone down this road. But once we did people came to think of it as, I think, a mouse or your child. And then it becomes that much harder to end it.

JULIA: Yes, I believe that too. Often people say to me, "But what do you want people to do, experiment on humans?" Well, we have experimented on humans and we still do to this day. But there's no knowing what would have happened if we had taken a different route. I'm a firm believer, if we did not experiment on animals, that we would have a lot more cures than we do now. I just think, to use a silly euphemism, we're barking up the wrong tree. I totally believe that. And it was the World Wars as well that really hampered us because out of the Second World War, the horrible laboratory at Porton Down opened in England and they were experimenting on animals for warfare, and that was obviously a big moneymaker.

MARIANN: Yeah, and of course still is. That research continues today. So what have been some of the early milestones in what we think of as the modern animal rights movement regarding vivisection, say starting in the '80s?

JULIA: Well, I think the biggest milestone starting in the '80s was the Silver Spring monkey case really blew the entire vivisection industry open again. That was Ingrid Newkirk and Alex Pacheco who started PETA. Alex went undercover in a research laboratory and found some just horrific things going on with the monkeys in there. They were kind of cutting off nerves in monkeys so that they couldn't use one limb, and then putting them in these torture chambers trying to force them to use their disabled limbs. And what he found was the most appalling situation and the most appalling environment, and they really blew open that case and that really started PETA and really galvanized the movement again and that kind of spread around the world. Unfortunately it wasn't a great outcome for most of the monkeys. Most of the monkeys were rescued and then went back and then got killed and things like that. But I think that was a major, major milestone.

JASMIN: Let's go back to the exhibit that's going on at the National Museum of Animals and Society, which people can learn more about on the website, [museumofanimals.org](http://museumofanimals.org). Can you tell us a little bit about what people will find at this exhibit, which I believe runs through August 3?

JULIA: August 3, yes. Actually on August 3 I'm doing a curator's tour so I hope that will be exciting.

JASMIN: And this is in Los Angeles, for people who...

JULIA: It's in Los Angeles, yes. A lot of the exhibit, we were very lucky to find, get connected with the Ernest Bell Library, John Edmundson. And he loaned us a lot of original artifacts from the 18th and 19th century, so we've actually got books, original pamphlets printed by Frances Power Cobbe, and things like that. And as I was looking through them, I wanted people to have an opportunity to actually look through these books and see the amazing illustrations and read some of the writings. So I'm gonna do a curator tour on August the 3rd and we'll let people into the locked cabinets and flick through the books and the pamphlets and things like that.

But I think that the exhibit, if I do say so myself, turned out really, really well. It was a very difficult exhibit to put together because I must say that we as a movement have not been great at documenting our history. And a lot of the artifacts are long lost, they're very hard to get hold of. A lot of the groups involved have not had time to categorize their artifacts properly so they had to kind of go through cupboards and cupboards of things trying to find the things that I needed. But I think it's a very nice looking exhibition. We've got the Victorian ladies as you walk in, portraits of them and explanations of who they are. We did really try hard to source artwork 'cause that's how the exhibition started. I really wanted it to be a creative way of introducing people to the vivisection issue because most people turn away from the issue and don't want to look because it is such an ugly, ugly thing to look at. So this was a way of encouraging people to come. We tried to avoid using any imagery that was really horrific to look at and traumatizing, even though we do have the Silver Spring monkey pictures and some pictures of Britches that are quite traumatic. But as much as possible we stayed away from that just so people could come in and feel comfortable and bring kids in as well and learn from it. So it's a very educational exhibition, there's a lot to read.

MARIANN: Well, I'm so glad this exhibit is there. I'm so glad it's bringing attention to what's been happening to these animals by the millions over the years and I'm really so glad it's bringing attention to some of these heroic women who, their names aren't even known to me, which makes me feel sad. And I want their names to be known, women like Frances Power Cobbe and Anna Kingsford. They're our heroes and they're the heroes of our movement. So both for bringing attention to the animals and for bringing attention to some of these heroes I think this is a wonderful, wonderful exhibit. And I wish we were in Los Angeles where we could go see it.

JASMIN: Yeah, me too. And you, Julia, are a light in a dark place and we're very grateful to you for everything that you do and all of the awareness you raise. And we're also very big fans of the National Museum of Animals and Society as I mentioned, and it's just really paving the way for new advocacy and new change for animals by kind of grounding us at our core of what our movement has been in history and what it is now I think will help shape what it becomes. So thank you for everything you do and for joining us today on Our Hen House and we look forward to staying on top of all that you're working on.

JULIA: Oh, I so appreciate you having me on. It's been so lovely talking to you guys.

JASMIN: You too, you have a great -- I love your accent too.

JULIA: Thank you.

JASMIN: Which is just like icing on the cake.

JULIA: Well, now you know why I love the Victorian ladies so much.

JASMIN: Exactly. Well, thank you, Julia.

JULIA: Okay, thank you.

JASMIN: That was Julia Orr. Learn more about the exhibit "Light in Dark Places" at [museumofanimals.org](http://museumofanimals.org).