

# Animal trainer wins case vs. hate groups

by Kathleen Marquardt

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In August of 1990, a jury awarded Las Vegas animal trainer Bobby Berosini \$3.1 million from two animal rights groups, for defamation and invasion of privacy. The groups, People for the ethical Treatment of Animals (PeTA) and Performing Animal Welfare Society (PAWS), have appealed the judgment, and the court will rule on their appeal in the coming weeks.

PeTA apparently had been running low on fundraising scams, so with the help of disgruntled Stardust employees, the group surreptitiously filmed and later altered a videotape of Bobby and his popular performing orangutans, a Las Vegas jury found. PeTA then accused Berosini of cruelty, and began using his name in their fundraising. High profile and celebrated, Bobby was a perfect choice.

Before the trial, Dr. Richard C. Simmonds, a veterinarian with 25 years experience, including 17 years working with primates, examined the Berosini's orangutans. He found no signs of abuse, and reported, "the orangutans appeared to be in superb condition." After providing testimony at the trial, Simmonds described PeTA's lawyer as a "slimeball." An apt description, and one with which Judge Myron E. Leavitt apparently agreed. He fined PeTA's attorneys \$52,000 for their outrageous misbehavior during the trial, which included "manufacturing" evidence.

The Berosini trial is a crisis for animal extremists and they realize it. Before the verdict was announced, PeTA's attorney Phillip Hirschkop said that a ruling in favor of Berosini would "set animal rights protection back years." In fact, the verdict has had no deleterious effect on true animal protection. But if left to stand, it will make it harder for animal terrorists to harass and defame responsible animal owners like Bobby Berosini.

Gary L. Francione, director of the Animal Rights Law Clinic at Rutgers University, analyzed the effect of the trial on the animal rights movement and wrote: "The Berosini suit was, in essence, a challenge to the *philosophy* of animal rights [his emphasis]." If PeTA loses its appeal, he has written, "It will, in effect, eviscerate the animal rights movement in the United States."

I certainly hope so, because Francione—a take-no-prisoners advocate of rights for animals—defines the goal of the animal rights movement as "nothing less than the *total*

liberation of nonhuman animals from human tyranny [his emphasis]."

After PeTA released the tapes of Bobby and his orangutans to national television, life for him and his wife Joan became a nightmare. Since then harassment from animal rights activists has been non-stop.

The Stardust Hotel, where Bobby appeared with his act, and which was supportive of his battle with the animal activists, was picketed by animal rights protesters. The peace and safety of their home has been shattered by ugly phone calls and threatening letters that swore to "hunt [Bobby] down" and "get even for the animals" by "beating him up" and by "blowing up" his home. Many of the nameless cowards wished the Berosinis a "slow and painful death."

Joan, who is Putting People First's chapter chair in Las Vegas, told me that before they were targeted by PeTA they had experienced absolutely no trouble with any legitimate animal protection group or agency concerning the treatment of their animals. In fact, throughout the appeal, both animal welfare groups and the U.S. Department of Agriculture have testified on Bobby's behalf.

It is ironic, but since the harassment began, one of their biggest fears has been for the safety of the orangutans. They worry about "animal liberation" fanatics releasing the well-cared-for animals from their enclosures to almost certain harm. Because of this they have had to increase security measures around their home.

Equally ironic is the fact that the reign of terror against the Berosinis comes from a group that claims to promote "compassion and respect for all humans and animals" in order to obtain a "peaceful, non-violent world." These assertions of benevolence and goodwill are, of course, nonsense: PeTA's tactics clearly show they are interested only in making money by exploiting animals and terrorizing people.

The people who track these things tell us that hate crimes are on the rise in our country. More and more churches and synagogues are being vandalized. More and more people are becoming victims for no other reason than the color of their skin, their nationality, or their religion. To these victims of hate crimes we can add people whose work or activity involves the use of animals. People like the Berosinis who train orangutans; people like Dr. Richard Aulerich in Michigan who recently had his office and 30 years of research destroyed by animal terrorists; people like the Columbia University scientist whose house was burned down after phone threats from animal rights activists; people like the family in England whose fur farm was stormed by a mob of animal rights fanatics and who were punched, kicked, and had their lives threatened; and the thousands of others too numerous to list.

The Berosini trial is important for setting legal constraints on animal activists, and that is good, but it is also important, I hope, in stopping PeTA and other animal cults from terrorizing innocent people.