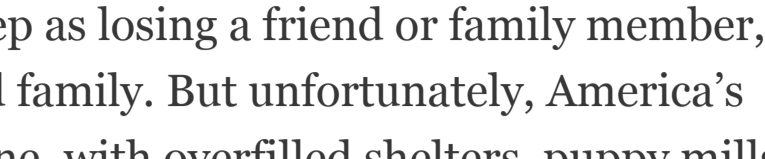


# Review: 'One Nation Under Dog' A Heartbreaking Look At America's Relationship With Canines

Review: 'One Nation Under Dog' A Heartbreaking Look At America's Relationship With Canines

Kevin Jagernauth  
Jun 18, 2012 11:58 am



In the realm of relationships between humans and animals, there are few as rewarding or profound as that between man and dog. It's difficult to describe to those who've never had a pet, but a dog will give its loyalty and love wholly and without question. They see us at our best and worst, often remaining by our sides through moves, break-ups, marriages, deaths and more — ever faithful, ever loving. Once a dog takes root in your life, that presence is one that benefits both and in which they end, that void can be as deep as losing a friend or family member, simply because, they are your friend and family. But unfortunately, America's relationship with canines is a troubled one, with overwheeled shelters, puppy mills and abuse still rampant, leading to something of a crisis with millions of dogs put down each year. **"One Nation Under Dog: Stories Of Fear, Loss & Betrayal"** presents a triptych of stories, looking at these issues from various angles and coming to the conclusion that we need to do more to the animals that give us so much.

The opening section, **"Fear,"** begins the doc on a rather curious note. Coming off more like a **"20/20"** segment, we're not sure how this piece exactly fits in with what follows, except to show that one can be overly devoted to their pets to the point of being ignorant of the danger they may pose. As we tend to often forget, dogs are animals, and will revert to their instincts in unfamiliar situations or those in which they feel they are afraid of threatened, leading to bites...or worse. Enter **Dr. Robert Taffet**. The proud owner of a family of Rhodesian Ridgebacks, he earned the enmity of his neighbors in suburban New Jersey following a string of biting incidents — were his dogs vicious or were these just random, unlucky occurrences? The truth lay somewhere in the middle, but Taffet refused to give up his dogs, spending money on expensive lawyers to fight the mounting lawsuits he faced, until one particularly harrowing event wakes him up to the reality of the situation, and with a heavy heart, he puts down one of his four beloved Rhodesians.

The entire story is a bit sensationalist — we're not even sure "Fear" is accurate title for the segment, perhaps "Devotion" might be more fitting — but in its way, it does get the point across of how strong those bonds of attachment can be. And leading into **"Loss,"** it's not hard to understand how far that well of sorrow goes when that connection is broken. This section of the film focuses on just what the title implies, moving from a support group at the San Francisco SPCA, a burial at a pet cemetery and then in an obvious play at a lighter moment, the story of a wealthy, elderly couple who successfully clone their departed dog. The latter feels a bit too goofy and out of place within the context of the rest of the film, but perhaps it's needed because **"Betrayal"** is the wake-up call 'One Nation Under Dog' builds to, giving an unflinching look at just how much more we need to do as a nation in protecting and caring for our dogs.

But thankfully, there are heroes out there making a difference. Best illustrating how little it takes to rehabilitate a shelter dog, and how much all they want is basic love, care and attention, is **John Gagnon** of New England PAWS. In one of the film's most touching moments, we see him lasso a gorgeous dog in a shelter — who is labelled as a "biter" and stands aggressively snarling any time her cage is opened — and lead her outside, into a field. With patience and a strong, but calm attitude he begins talking and petting the dog, whose tail initially goes flying between her legs in fear...but within moments of continued affection, the dog flops to her side, licking his hand, completely at ease. She's a totally different dog, and one that John has no problem finding a home for after just a month of training.

There's also **Julie Adams**, who on her immense farm property, cares for over 100 stray or abandoned dogs. As she notes, many of them that come her way have never been cared for, fed, or even given a kind touch, and she allows them to flourish. She also works to find homes for the ones who show the most promise. An interesting subtext to both John and Julie's stories are their own personal backgrounds that undoubtedly shaped them into the people they are now. For John, teenage rage issues he believes allows him to recognize the problems a dog might have rooted in their psyche, allowing him the opportunity to identify and fix it. Meanwhile Julie came from an era where dogs simply weren't considered with the same compassion, and her tales of loss — which still sting to this day — are the driving force behind her commitment now.

"One Nation Under Dog" does an admirable job of capturing that indescribable spirit that is forged between our dogs and ourselves. By turns heartbreaking and moving, the film at times made this writer want to head down to the local shelter, scoop up all the dogs and go live in the country. What they give and how they enrich our lives is immeasurable, and 'One Nation Under Dog' simply asks that we give back to them, as much as they have given us. [B]

*"One Nation Under Dog: Stories Of Fear, Loss & Betrayal" airs on HBO tonight at 9 PM.*

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Comments

- STEVE MAY 21, 2016 11:57 PM  
*Dogs being put to death with gas? I just cannot watch this.* Reply
- MEL MAY 21, 2016 11:57 PM  
*This was a great look at the dichotomy between how some American pets are pampered while others are abused, neglected or abandoned to be dealt with by overrun shelters. Please don't buy, adopt! And spay & neuter!* Reply
- JONI GEORGIA MAY 21, 2016 11:57 PM  
*It may be hard to watch, but unfortunately, especially in the southern states of this GREAT country, it's a cold hard truth. Heart Sticking is another terrible way of euthanasia. This is one of the dirty little secrets in America that no one wants to see, discuss... its time to take the head out of the sand and do something to mitigate a change. This is something you could imagine in 3rd world countries... We need spay and neuter laws and breeders should be licensed much like RESCUERS have to be!* Reply
- LYNNENU MAY 21, 2016 11:57 PM  
*Please don't look away at the horror. Cry, Get sick. Get pissed and DO SOMETHING.* Reply
- DANL MAY 21, 2016 11:57 PM  
*Watched this show last night. Truly heartbreaking. We adopted a 'lost cause' dog just about a year ago. She has flourished and has become the sweetest, most affectionate and obedient dog you could ask for. Everyone that meets her loves her instantly. All she needed was a chance. So many great dogs out there just hoping for the same...* Reply
- ANGIE MAY 21, 2016 11:57 PM  
*I watched this last night and I wept. It was a true eye opener on what is going on in our country with our shelters, etc. It made me want to hold all of my dogs a little bit tighter. I think everyone should watch it!* Reply
- CHEYENNE MAY 21, 2016 11:57 PM  
*I support as many organizations as I can and its not enough. I love my dogs, and cats. But you can't change stupid people and corrupt states at support the evil puppy mills. They should be banned and the people arrested.* Reply
- TIM MAY 21, 2016 11:57 PM  
*Absolutely disturbing documentary. Some of the things that were shown during this show, should have not been shown/seen. I understand that "puppy-mills" are over run with dogs, but the show did not have to actually show/hear the crying and then not crying of the dogs. This show was over the top.* Reply
- THE PLAYLIST MAY 21, 2016 11:57 PM  
*The dogs being euthanized scene — lin that horrific gas chamber with their human-like screaming and near-pleas: utterly haunting.* Reply
- KEVIN MAY 21, 2016 11:57 PM  
*I have saved over 600 dogs from pounds and puppy mills. This show doesn't show have the horror that goes on. For the most part people turn their head and pretend that dogs like this don't happen. Please people make a difference and do something... it's murder!!* Reply
- PHELICIA TRAYER MAY 21, 2016 11:57 PM  
*This was one of the most compelling and heart wrenching documentaries I have ever seen. Being a mom to two rescued male Chihuahuas were were both abused as puppies, I can only imagine the horrors they endured and a petition is going around. Many have no clue this is even going to so government officials don't get much pressure to close them down. Now I'm praying that many will be outraged and do something about.* Reply
- LISA MAY 21, 2016 11:57 PM  
*I also see many want to help animals and contribute any way they can. After watch this, I found Julie Adams and New England Paws on Facebook. Julie is the woman with over 100 rescue dogs on her farm. I really would love to see her get more help for all she does. She has an amazon wish list so trying to spread the word about it, her story really touched me. Items are in all price ranges, many inexpensive items for those who would love to do more but just can't at the moment. I'm sure anything she received is greatly appreciated.* [http://www.amazon.com/gp/registry/wishlist/SPTSSX531ITLB?ref=cm\\_sw\\_su\\_w](http://www.amazon.com/gp/registry/wishlist/SPTSSX531ITLB?ref=cm_sw_su_w) Reply
- MARS MAY 21, 2016 11:57 PM  
*I came across this doc while flipping tonight and as a animal lover, it immediately resonated with me. I wish I had read an advance of it's subject matter though, for it might have prepared me for the "betrayal" segment. I had never seen animals euthanized like this, and naively, I wasn't sure that was going to happen to them once placed in the box. I burst into tears as soon as I saw them turn the dogs. The sounds of those beautiful, unwanted, innocent dogs will haunt me forever. However, if I can spin a positive, it was a wake-up call to learn that this type of abuse is being perpetrated by "shelters" entrusted to care for the animals, and worse still, that more are euthanized inhumanely than not. I've heard the numbers before, the Bob Barker msg, the ASPCA commercials. I don't dispute their sadness, but for the average person, they're easy enough to put the numbers or images out of their heads, and go about their day, next pay day. By contrast, this heartbreaking footage doesn't allow the viewer the luxury of post-dating a response. Should be mandatory viewing for everyone. This front row view of the horrifying consequences of irresponsibility and apathy should be mandatory viewing. It might inspire more people to fight for the dignity and rights of animals. I couldn't watch the film after hearing the cries of those dogs. Does anyone know if the people responsible for gassing the dogs were named? They're still getting away with murder.* Reply
- DIANA MAY 21, 2016 11:57 PM  
*I haven't cried that much in a long time, although the dogs that were "humanely" euthanized got the better end of the stick than those that had to, and still have to, live in the deplorable conditions that puppy mills do. I do not understand how people can be so disgusting as to do that to beautiful little creatures. It hurts my heart to know that there is that much suffering out there, not to mention the other pets like cats, rabbits, etc.* Reply
- RON MAY 21, 2016 11:57 PM  
*VERY disturbing documentary. I agree, the ASPCA needs to be told. I've always been meaning to join the ASPCA and after watching this show, joined immediately while the credits will ralling. I've always purchased dogs from breeders but my next pooch will definitely be a rescue. My wife was never a dog person but once we got married she converted. I think she loves our Doberman more than me sometimes but thats ok :)* Reply
- ALI MAY 21, 2016 11:57 PM  
*This is sooo sad!! I can't stand people like that, have a heart!! Man the punishment I would give for those who do this and I would have every puppy mill shut down!!! And every shelter a no kill!! So damn stupid. Politicians complain they have no money yet they spend billions of dollars on stupid shit. Especially the mayor in NYC. Like changing st sign from caps to lower caps so people can see better or the st in time square. Use that money for more shelters for animals and people. I will make a difference one day!! Sorry for these animals.* Reply
- KATHY MAY 21, 2016 11:57 PM  
*very powerful statement about how we treat dogs in this country. Watch this — its an eye-opener. I sobbed and cried for 1 hour and 14 minutes. Dogs are my favorite beings on this planet. Hard to watch....* Reply
- SIMONE MAY 21, 2016 11:57 PM  
*Watching this immediately made me think of the HOLOCAUST. Putting dogs/cats down the way they showed is one of the most horrifying things I've ever seen. I never cried so hard! We need to convert to an ALL NO KILL SOCIETY!! This documentary is a big wake-up call! I just hope it reaches the people that will learn from it as opposed to the people who already know!* Reply
- KAITLIN HOLZAPFEL MAY 21, 2016 11:57 PM  
*I volunteer with three rescues/shelters in my area (near Chicago), so when I came across this film, at thought, hey... Why not watch this. And beginning from the euthanization of Duke and on... it was a sobbing mess. I have never cried so hard during a movie in my life. The gas chamber is maybe the worst thing I have ever witnessed. I do think everyone should see this movie. It did inspire me to continue to help, but also to think of ways to SOLVE this problem once and for all. My husband tells me we will always have homeless dogs, just like homeless people. Overpopulation is a tough ordeal to solve...but we have to keep trying. These poor dogs break my heart and this movie will stick with me forever.* Reply
- CARLA MAY 21, 2016 11:57 PM  
*You can follow one of the stars of the film, Julie Adams here: <http://www.facebook.com/JulieAdamsDogRescuer?ref=hl>* Reply
- CHRIS MAY 21, 2016 11:57 PM  
*I can say from my gut I am a changed person from watching this documentary. The third short labeled "Betrayal" was so shocking I literally screamed "NO!" So many times and so loudly the front office of my high rise called to make sure I was ok and someone wasn't trying to gas me in a metal box!! I have never had a reaction like that to something on TV before. You couldn't possibly give an amount for me to do that job. I think you have to have no sole to do it, especially the way he was... They deserved more respect than that. I had never seen this "tactic" of putting them down. I have volunteered for years and still was ignorant about how they took care of "Death row". I honestly had no idea. No creature deserves that kind of ending. Their little faces as he continually loaded them into that metal container was traumatizing and cut me to the bone... My heart hurts as I am thinking about it now. After I forced myself through the entire thing I must have stared in silence at the wall for a good 20 minutes. Asking myself why I hadn't educated myself? What can I do? Do I try to collect & throw money at it until it stops? Maybe I should start with my state? I know some states are outlawing it. Will man ever change a damn thing? I know we have to attack the issue at the root cause. How can I make a difference and where in the f--- do I start? Politicians encouraged people I know to watch it. Not to hurt them obviously, but to raise awareness. I warned them first of course before I got any nasty phone calls or emails. What can I do for them??? This has to stop.* Reply

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