

PROFILES IN CITIZENSHIP: WAYNE PACELLE



Paul Markow Photography

In the midst of one of his finest moments, Wayne Pacelle got himself thrown out of the gallery of the House of Representatives.

He was watching the vote on a budget amendment he had lobbied hard for, an

amendment to cut millions of dollars of taxpayer money spent to promote the sale of U.S.-made mink coats in Italy, China, and France. He needed 218 votes to win, and everyone thought they were going to be trounced. He watched the scoreboard light up with vote after vote. When they got to 232, he couldn't help it. He let out a yell and pumped his fist. But the House frowns on emotional displays in the gallery, and out he went. Was he abashed? Hardly. "It didn't take the smile off my face," he says, grinning even now at the memory.

It was a great win, but every single triumph matters to Pacelle—it's how he feeds his spirit and keeps himself going in the face of the often daunting odds and unimaginable stories of animal abuse he confronts daily in his job as CEO of the Humane Society of the United States. Each law enacted by Congress to protect animals (15 in the past few years), each state bill passed (more than 150), each statewide ballot measure approved (15 so far), each animal life saved, each creature relieved of pain and suffering—he tallies them all. "I celebrate the positive action because it's easy to get burned out," he says. "It's easy to get demoralized.... And for me, I just tell people you've got to celebrate every little victory, it makes a big difference."

"For us, it's not an all-or-nothing game," he explains. "We can't solve all of the issues in the world, we never will. . . . But if we solve it for a million, or 10 million, or a billion creatures, that's a 100-percent victory for each of those animals. And just that one act of merciful behavior or the shielding of an animal from abuse or cruelty can mean all the difference between a good quality of life and a miserable, tormented existence for that creature."

Pacelle has felt that kind of enormous, compassionate connection to animals ever since he was two or three years old. "It was a purely emotional, altruistic response that I had toward other creatures. I just saw them as powerless and I saw them as peers at that age, and they looked to me like they were composed of the same spark of life that people were."

He carried that empathy and awareness with him as he got older and, as he read philosophy and learned more about the world, he began to fit it into a broader context of what it meant to him to be a responsible citizen. He started an animal rights group in college in the 1980s, at the same time that he was active in the antiapartheid movement to limit U.S. investment in South Africa and in protests of U.S. involvement in Central