

Lucky Puppy Rescue in LA Found Guilty of Animal Abuse, Neglect Charges - Did the 'System' Betray Her?

Phyllis M. Daugherty 28 August 2017

ANIMAL WATCH-On August 23, General Manager Brenda Barnette issued a [media release](#) announcing, "**LA Animal Services investigation leads to animal cruelty conviction for Lucky Puppy Rescue owners.**"

Undoubtedly, news outlets did not rush to break this story, because the "guilty verdict" for one count of animal abuse and two counts of negligence against Rachel Kennedy and Sandra Vasquez was rendered almost a week earlier, on August 16.

The charges were almost anticlimactic compared to the hype (and sympathy) that accompanied the May 6, 2016 raid of the alleged first upscale Rescue/Retail shop in a highly visible commercial location under a 2012 ordinance related to Councilman Paul Koretz' much-acclaimed [LA "puppy-mill" pet shop ban](#).

This is the law Koretz recently testified in Sacramento should be expanded statewide. Some Los Angeles activists claim that LA Animal Services realized Kennedy had too many animals and continued to encourage her to take more old and sick pets to lower the City shelters' population and achieve Mayor Eric Garcetti and Brenda Barnette's illusion of "No Kill."

LUCKY PUPPY RESCUE CONVICTIONS

The release explains that during a May 6, 2016 seizure, LAAS officers found 68 dogs and three cats being maintained inside Kennedy's residence in Studio City under conditions that "were deplorable and harmful to the animals' health. One dog, a diabetic, was found in a life-threatening condition. The defendants were found guilty of failing to provide medical treatment, which resulted in the dog almost dying. Several of the seized animals were suffering from various medical conditions as well.

"Two LA Animal Services veterinarians treated and cared for the seized animals and testified in court," the release states. It then it makes an unusual comment, "Each did an outstanding job in front of the defense attorneys who attempted to put the Department of Animal Services on trial."

Sentencing for both defendants will be in September, and could result in jail time for both. According to LAAS, "the judge ordered the defendants to remove more dogs and cats, which they have amassed at their new residence in Northridge since the seizure," and officers from LA Animal Services assured the animals were removed.

RACHEL KENNEDY TALKS ABOUT THE RAID



[NBCLA](#) reported that officers took 65 dogs, many of them with medical conditions, for humane reasons. Los Angeles City code allows only three dogs per residence, officials said.

"Every single one of them are my babies," Kennedy told *NBC*, claiming she took the dogs home to live with her because "many of them are too sick and cannot be legally adopted by the public."

On Facebook, Kennedy wrote that all the dogs taken were "elderly, blind,

deaf, cancer, and mommies left to die at the shelter with their babies."

She admitted that, although she has a permit for most of the dogs to live at Lucky Puppy Rescue and Retail, "she knew she was breaking the law when she took them home."

"There's something wrong in this system," she told *NBC*.

HISTORY OF LUCKY PUPPY IN LOS ANGELES

Just prior to its December 8, 2012, "red carpet opening" at 12238 Ventura Blvd in Studio City, prominent pet communicator Melissa Bacelar told [LA Splash magazine](#) that she and her partner, Rachel Kennedy, both had the same dream, "A store where the dogs were not puppy mills and amazing things for the people who adopted our dogs."



So, they opened Lucky Puppy, an upscale store in Studio City for rescue dogs, offering all breeds and mixes. "The mixes are often healthier because they don't have the problems that the pure breeds do," she explained, "but many people still want pure breeds and better they get them from us than from a puppy mill where the guarantee of the health of the animal is in question." She explained that Lucky Puppy features organic, raw and grain free foods and treats and that she and Kennedy, "found homeopathic ways to help the animals, especially with small things like skin infections."

"When you rescue 150 dogs a month, you have to learn how to cut corners and when to see a vet and when not," Bacelar said.

RACHEL KENNEDY TALKS ABOUT HER RESCUE DOGS

Then, on January 2, 2014, The [Tolucan Times](#) ran a cover page, **"Go to Your**

Happy Place in 2014 ... at Lucky Puppy Rescue & Retail." This time only Rachel Kennedy was featured in photos with two dogs and the caption, "Who Rescued Who?" This article describes Lucky Puppy as, "...**the first and ONLY of its kind that is a 100% non-profit Rescue Shelter AND Retail Store. Since they opened their doors in December of 2012, they have proudly placed 380 dogs in homes.**"

The *Tolucan Times* describes Rachel Kennedy as, ". . .the humble founder of Lucky Puppy," and states, that she has been rescuing animals since she was a youth in Minnesota. "It's in my blood, and I am willing to do whatever it takes to make a dog happy," Rachel said, adding that she was rescuing dogs for three years before she came up with the idea of a "humane store."

Rachel described Lucky Puppy rescue animals as coming from the streets and from "kill shelters." The *Tolucan* stated that, "**Rachel is so passionate about the cause that she will take spillover/special needs dogs back to her house so they have a warm place to stay.**" The retail aspect of the store is comprised of high-end goods, the article states. "**Lucky Puppy also has two play pens and can comfortably house up to 40 dogs,**" Rachel said, with 20 available for adoption at that time, ranging from 2 months to 13 years old.

WHERE'S RACHEL KENNEDY'S ORIGINAL LUCKY PUPPY PARTNER?

A few days later, on January 13, 2014, the [Studio City Patch](#) announced, "Wylder's Holistic Pet Center to Open in Studio City." It said Melissa R. Bacelar, one of the original founders of Lucky Puppy Rescue and Retail in Studio City, was opening Wylder's as a second humane dog rescue only a few blocks away on February 1, "with more focus on education between children and dogs."

Bacelar did not mention Rachel Kennedy, but told the *Patch*, that "she was

pregnant at the time she helped open Lucky Puppy and when her son, Wylder, came along in 2012, she had to take a step back."

RACHEL KENNEDY'S PROBLEMS BEGAN EARLIER

On March 5, 2015, [NBC News](#) reported that the landlord of the Studio City property was attempting to evict Lucky Puppy Rescue and Retail from its current unit. "It's not fair. It's Lucky Puppy. We save dogs for goodness sake," said owner Rachel Kennedy.

However, the optical business that was operating next door moved out, complaining of a stench coming from Lucky Puppy, which Kennedy said she had tried to have corrected.

She told the [LA Times](#) on Oct 31, 2015 *more than 1,400 animals* had found homes. But after a clash with Lucky Puppy's landlord, the group's lease ran out at the end of October.

The Lucky Puppy Relocation--GoFundMe page (originally created on Dec. 8, 2014) shows that Rachel Kennedy's attempt to raise money to help with relocation has, to date, only received \$3,947 of the \$150k goal (Raised by 76 people in 33 months.)

She wrote, "Lucky Puppy, the San Fernando Valley's pioneering rescue and retail store, has to move from its current location by Oct. 31, 2015. We have been served with an Unlawful Detainer Eviction Notice...we are now at a very important point in deciding the future of Lucky Puppy. It may be time to move."

STORE REOPENS ONE YEAR AFTER BRUTAL MURDER

The [LATimes](#) reported on February 4, 2016 that Lucky Puppy's new location at 12238 Ventura Blvd B, Studio City, opened on January 31 — the

one-year anniversary of the slaying of Rachel Kennedy's brother, Josh Sutter, by his roommate, Richard Medina.

Josh had reportedly moved to Los Angeles in 2011 to help his sister open Lucky Puppy Rescue and Retail. He "could build anything," Kennedy told the *Times*.

Josh began dating Sandra Vasquez, Kennedy's partner (also convicted on August 16, 2017 of animal abuse and neglect) one year before his death.

Sutter, 36, had moved to a rented Green Valley home on ranch property, planning to turn it into a "dog paradise," a sanctuary for the animals his sister couldn't place in a home.

Kennedy had previously hired Richard Medina, 36, who appeared in the "Power Rangers" television series, to care for the animals, and he also lived in the home. However, his behavior was becoming "erratic and concerning," she said, and during an argument Medina had threatened to release the dogs into the wild.

Then on January 31, 2015, after an argument with Sutter inside the home about Medina's girlfriend, Medina admitted stabbing Sutter with a sword, killing him, claiming it was self-defense.

Medina first said he acted in self-defense when Sutter broke down his door and was released. He was later arrested and charged with first-degree murder, supposedly as a result of Rachel Kennedy providing evidence via photographs taken by professional cleaners she hired, that the bedroom door which Sutter was alleged by Medina to have broken to come into his bedroom, was undamaged.

Medina pleaded guilty to voluntary manslaughter and was sentenced by

Superior Court Judge Daviann L. Mitchell in her Lancaster, CA, courtroom to six years. Medina's attorney said his client [agreed to plead to the lesser charge](#) rather than risk a murder conviction and a possible life sentence.

Medina played the Red Lion Wild Force Ranger on "Power Rangers Wild Force" in 2002. He was the voice of Deker on "Power Rangers Samurai" in 2011 and 2012, and also appeared in such shows as "ER" and "CSI: Miami."

DOES LA'S ANIMAL-RESCUE SYSTEM NEED FIXING?

At the July 25, 2017, LA Animal Services Commission meeting, LA resident Josh Liddy spoke at public comment about the raid and arrest of Rachel Kennedy and the trial which was upcoming. He said that "almost half of the dogs seized from her [Kennedy] were from the LA Animal Services' East Valley Shelter," and he questioned why she was given so many dogs if the City only allows a person to possess a total of three.

Then, subsequent to Brenda Barnette issuing the media release on the convictions, Whitney Smith of the REVA Foundation, wrote in an e-mail copied to several writers and activists and presented below (in part) with her permission:

Brenda:

Maybe the rescue [Lucky Puppy Rescue & Retail] was not up to speed--I have heard positive and negative about them--BUT CITIZENS SHOW UP IN PERSON EVERY DAY WITH THEIR ADMITTEDLY MEDICALLY NEGLECTED DOG AT THE END OF THE LEASH AND NEVER FACE PROSECUTION.

The PUBLIC is simply compelled to relinquish the dog and everyone walks away with no charges. Because the rationale is--if the abusers think they will face scrutiny at the shelter then they won't turn in the animal.

Is that the way the "law" works? Excuses for the public and prosecution for the rescues? How many CONVICTIONS against the PUBLIC for ANIMAL CRUELTY were obtained in the past 5 years?

Where is the EQUAL energy to investigate the APPALLING neglect that comes thru the shelter doors?

HOW ABOUT SLAPPING A FEE THEY GET IN THE MAIL for dumping a dog that was NOT FIXED OR LICENSED?

How many litters of puppies did their unfixed dogs add to the crushing overpopulation and tax supported shelter intake?

And link the payment to the ability to register their car LIKE THEY DO IN RIVERSIDE.

Thank God LUCKY PUPPY is being prosecuted.

But when folks dropped off a "stray" they "found in the street" at North Central--who could ONLY WALK IN HIS FRONT LEGS VERTICALLY due to untreated back legs, nobody raised an eyebrow. How many "stray" dogs have you found walking on their front legs with their dangling broken back legs in the air?

HOARDING IN PLAIN SIGHT AT LA CITY SHELTERS?

These are outstanding points by people who care deeply about what is going wrong for animals in Los Angeles. Another issue is the horrendous "hoarding" within the shelters themselves, caused by overcrowding so Mayor Garcetti, Brenda Barnette -- and Best Friends Animal Society -- can claim LA has achieved "stats" that indicate it is "no kill," regardless of the suffering.

Photos taken last week by visiting professionals at a Los Angeles city shelter showed cats in wire cages on shelves in an open office closet because there is no space in the cat holding area. Is this inhumane "slow kill" housing that results in the inevitable spread of fatal diseases -- not tolerable in a private home or by a hoarder -- allowable in a government shelter?

Judging from her comments to the *Tolucan Times* in 2012, Rachel Kennedy felt comfortable admitting publicly she had 40 dogs available for adoption and that the "overflow" was taken to her home. The City does not monitor "rescue/retail" operations for which LA Animal Services issues permits and which sell animals for an "adoption fee." It responds to complaints rather than establishing standards and having an option for unannounced routine inspections, as it did for commercial pet shops.

If shelter animals are being released to any individual or group in multiples, "free" or at a reduced rate, for the purpose of adoption/sale to the public, isn't it incumbent upon the City to define the parameters and make sure the system works?

(Phyllis M. Daugherty is a former City of LA employee and a contributor to CityWatch.) Edited for CityWatch by Linda Abrams.

-CW