

S A F E P R O F I L E S

Nichola Baker



His IR12 tax certificate states 'animal rights campaigner' and for over a decade he has been a driving force behind SAFE. We profile SAFE's National Director, Anthony Terry to learn if it's loyalty or lunacy that motivates his commitment to advocate compassion to all beings.

What prompted you to become an animal rights campaigner?

For several years before learning of 'animal rights' I felt a sense of imbalance — an injustice in society that was horrifically unjust. Society's apathy and tolerance to wars, poverty, violence, social injustices, environmental degradation, human and animal suffering plagued me. The foundations for a peaceful and caring world were being overshadowed by greed and selfishness. It was awfully depressing.

In late 1989, I returned from two years of travelling overseas. An old school friend invited me to a SAFE meeting. It was my first introduction to people advocating for the rights of animals. I felt an immediate affinity with them. I promptly discovered the extent animals suffered and the compelling arguments in favour of animal rights, through books like Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation*. The animal rights principles seemed twofold solutions to a troubled world. Advocating compassion seemed logical solutions to addressing many of the world's problems.

Many activists quickly reach 'burn out', having been involved for over 10 years, what motivates you to carry on?

Someone once compared my work to putting out a warehouse fire with a glass of water!

As much as I would like to think I could enjoy drinking the water and wait for the fire to burn itself out, they're right. I have seen some of the most active campaigners fall victim to their own convictions, often being overwhelmed by a feeling of isolation and hopelessness.

Campaigning for animal rights is extremely difficult and I believe it is the most ambitious objective ever sought. Animals are unable to challenge being oppressed and argue their defence. Campaigners against 'speciesism' are the minority who often feel they're fighting a losing battle. I've been there, it's an awful feeling and I can fully understand why people leave the cause. Sadly, animals desperately need our help and people need to be educated about their plight. We can't give up. Humans have created the problems and we owe it to the animals to help them.

Since working for SAFE, do you feel you have personally changed?

I feel more enlightened and endeavour to lead a lifestyle which reflects my beliefs. It feels very satisfying knowing you are not exploiting animals or the environment. I have a deep respect for anyone prepared to make sacrifices in their lifestyle to benefit others. I wasn't a vegetarian before joining SAFE and didn't think twice about buying cruelty-free.

The implications of my consumer choices were never an issue. I appreciate all life and set no precedents over particular species, races or cultures. My practical and cynical nature helps me through the 'depressing patches' of knowing the realities of the world.

As a child, were your views any different to other children?

No I seemed a regular kid raised in Christchurch. I do however have awful memories of whacking white butterflies with a tennis racket to protect my dad's vegetable garden, enjoying fishing, keeping caged animals and I enjoyed going to the zoo. The conflicting care/kill messages don't help. I was told to be nice to the cat yet not discouraged to harm or even kill other animals such as fish and insects. I wish someone had encouraged me to foster respect towards life, rather than harming it during my early years.

What frustrates you the most in your work at SAFE?

Apathy, closed-mindedness, a lack of resources and funds. It's hard not to become resentful at people unwilling to consider the impact of their daily decisions in life. It's too easy for people to ignore the extent animals suffer. Our selfish attitude to life means animals and the environment pay the highest price. Continuing to improve our lifestyles makes an enormous difference. It all comes down to changing lifestyles and sometimes making sacrifices.

What's your life like outside of SAFE?

I share my life with six rescued, well-loved cats and Nichola, my very supportive like-minded partner. I'm a bit of a homebody, enjoy watching videos, love the X-files, and being with friends. I despise rugby/enjoy pool, hate sago/crave liquorice and feel very at home in Christchurch. While sometimes hard-going, I feel my life would not be as fulfilled if it wasn't for being involved with SAFE — it is my life.

Any last words . . . advice for would-be animal advocates?

Speaking metaphorically, grab a bucket of water and let's put this fire out. Some of us may get burned but I reckon we can extinguish the blaze. Undoubtedly there will be smoke forcing some people to keep their eyes shut, but with our support, we can guide them to a 'SAFE' place and see them right!

