



UNDERCOVER WITH MY OWN EYES

KINSHIP CIRCLE

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info@kinshipcircle.org ▲ www.KinshipCircle.org

by Brenda Shoss

Matt loops a noose around the fox's neck and dangles the animal before Dan, who evaluates the coat. This one's a "kill," so the men carry him past rows of dingy fox-filled cages to the electrocution area. Dan shoves a probe into the fox's rectum and taunts him to bite down on a metal conductor in his throat. When the fox chomps, Dan channels 240 volts of electricity through the small body. The fox emits a crackling sound. His teeth break and fall out. So does the probe. Cursing, Dan thrusts the probe into the convulsing fox at least 4 times before the animal finally succumbs to a 2-minute heart attack.

"My job was to hold the animals with a noose around their necks," says Matt Rossell, 33, an undercover investigator recruited by PETA to document operations at an Illinois fur farm in 1996-97. "I held each dying animal's face up to a camera concealed in my waistline."



Rossell/Fox at fur farm

While many can barely muster the gas to fuel a predictable nine-to-fiver, Rossell regularly clocks in beyond the gates of hell to videotape and photograph the animals he loves inside veal farms, chicken factories, roadside zoos, circuses, slaughterhouses and research laboratories.

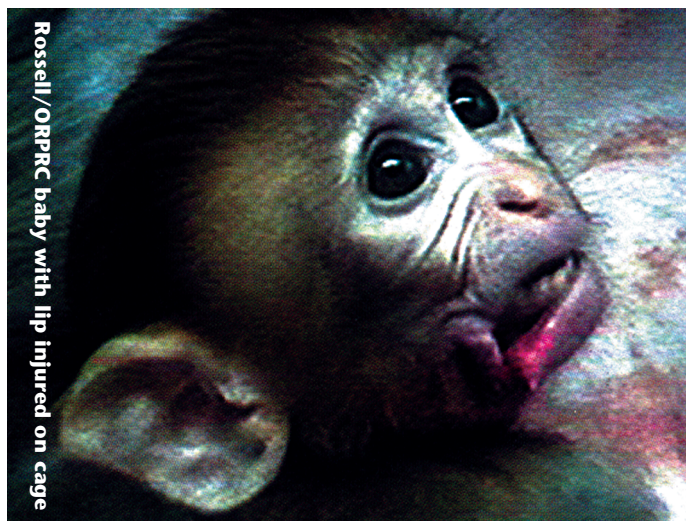
An unpretentious sort with an easy chuckle, Rossell gains access into unseen worlds with quick wit and resilience. Once, when another fur-farm hand discovered Rossell's camera, he swiftly concocted a tale about shooting home videos for an ailing dad. Unbelievably, the co-worker kept Rossell's secret. Dan was later convicted with cruelty charges. With Rossell's evidence in hand, Illinois Dept. of



Rossell/The kittens at Boys Town

Agriculture officials found fecal matter under cages, cannibalized animals, and a fox who'd chewed off his entangled leg to reach food.

From 1995-96 images of mutilated 2-day-old kittens haunted Rossell, who drove home in tears from his security guard "job" at Boys Town National Research Hospital in Omaha, Nebraska.



Rossell/ORPRC baby with lip injured on cage

Working incognito to bust researcher Edward Walsh's federally funded study on human deafness, Rossell befriended a direct-care staff mandated to starve kittens, screw metal devices into their skulls, and slice open their heads.

Walsh ignored his staff's pleas for analgesics to aid the dying kittens. Eventually Rossell gave the press footage of kittens with arbitrarily clipped motor nerves, unable to nurse, walk or see. After widespread media and protests, the Boys Town kitten experiments were shut down.

"You instinctively shut off your emotions because you know you have a job to do," Rossell claims. That job encompasses diligent notes and a crash course in every state's 1-party or 2-party consent laws for covert videotaping. When gathering proof to disclose a facility's USDA or industry violations, detail is essential—animal ID and room numbers, company logo, environment, food, supplies, lighting, and sounds.

"What helps me is to think how much easier I have it than the animals. They are there 24/7, locked into a cage with no relief," Rossell says. His main regret is that long-term campaigns "don't save the individuals in front of you crying out for help."

From 1998 to 2000 Rossell metamorphosed into a primate technician to log the psychosis of 1500 primates stockpiled alone in 2-by-2 foot cages at the Oregon Regional Primate Research Center (ORPRC). He observed intelligent rhesus monkeys, prematurely weaned from mothers, exhibit aberrant behaviors such as pacing, swaying, urine-drinking, feces-smearing, infant abuse, and self-maiming.

Rossell enlisted fellow techs to interact with monkeys, but the assembly-line research forced untrained personnel (ORPRC scientists rarely handled animals) to fixate on little beyond their inept attempts to give shots, draw blood and perform operations.

"I witnessed technicians jabbing monkeys dozens of times, unable to find a vein for a blood sample. One of our veterinarians, Gwen Maginnis admitted, 'They're not thinking about the monkey in front of them, but the next 20 down the line,'" Rossell says.

Rossell and USDA inspector Dr. Isis Johnson Brown tried to advocate reforms in compliance with the Animal Welfare Act, but soon realized that the feeble laws left them powerless to initiate change. In 2000, Rossell and Dr. Brown left ORPRC to blow the whistle at a press conference.

Though ORPRC installed a few humane modifications, ABC's Good Morning America recently exposed the frivolous work of Judy L. Cameron, an ORPRC researcher who receives part of an annual \$15 million in tax dollars to torment rhesus monkeys in studies to "shed light on abnormal behaviors in children."

For one test, Cameron implants a bulky transmitter and



ORPRC monkeys in cage

heart monitor under the monkeys' backs to check heart rates while remote-control planes zoom over their heads.

Today, Rossell works less secretively as Northwest Outreach Coordinator for In Defense of Animals, a national non-profit dedicated to animal protection. He is more likely to be spotted on Capitol Hill lobbying legislators than behind the scenes.

Still, the chance to bear witness attracts Rossell with magnet-like intensity. "I don't know that I could do anything else," he says.

"I've been inside. I have come to know the animals as individuals. And I have seen their abuse with my own eyes."