

Proposition B—Afterlife
By Jim Hughes

“George, someone is driving down to the kennel. Who would just drive right past the house like that?” exclaimed Margaret as she rolled her wheel chair over to the window to get a better look. George went to the door and saw three people walking around the dog pens. He had ‘*No Trespassing*’ signs posted in several places. He also wondered who would have the nerve to ignore the signs and lack the common decency of coming to the house first. He slipped on his coat and started to the kennel. “Watch me”, he said. “I don’t like the looks of this.” When he got within sight, one of the men approached him. “Are you George Micheals?” the man asked. Warily, George answered as he looked at the Missouri Humane Society sticker on the car, “I am. What can I do for you?”

“We have a search warrant to inspect your kennel. We intend to do an inspection to see if you meet the requirements placed upon you by Proposition B. Please do not interfere.” George was prepared for this event, although it had been over a year since proposition B had passed in the general election. He instantly pulled out his cell phone and called his lawyer. “Mike, you remember I told you some idiots would be here to make my life a living hell? Well, there here!” “Ask to see a warrant”, Mike said. George asked, and one was immediately produced. “Are they accompanied by a law enforcement officer or a Missouri Dept. of Agriculture inspector?” “No”, George said. “Then tell them to get their butts back down that drive way and off the property immediately,” said Mike.

When Mike’s message was delivered to the men, they became belligerent.

“We can do this the easy way or the hard way, which do you prefer?”

George made a show of thinking hard about the question, and then he said, “I think I will take the hard way. Go get somebody with authority who might know his !@*# from a hole in the ground.”

With dust flying and gravel being turned into missiles along with threats of retribution, the car careened down the driveway and off the property. George had gained a temporary victory. But he knew it was only temporary. A few days later the Missouri Humane Society car plus a deputy sheriff’s car pulled into the drive. George called his lawyer to come over. He also called his Missouri inspector to ask if he was going to do the inspection. Both men said they would be right there. They accompanied the Humane Society men as they toured through the kennels. There were several violations found.

One hundred and nine dogs were over the 50 dog limit placed on Missouri breeders. An open sack of feed was found sitting on the floor of the feed room. The kennel consisted of four “Sundowner” type buildings. The two that did not house puppies were cited as being overcrowded and not sufficiently heated. The temperature reading in those two buildings did read only 41 degrees but that was because most of the dogs were laying halfway outside which left their doors propped open exposing the inside to the 37 degree weather.

The state inspector was mad. He had tried to tell these clowns that this was a good breeder and not the kind proposition B had intended to catch. It made no difference. George was told that he could voluntarily surrender the excess dogs and they would not press the state to file a violation for the other problems found. George asked if he scheduled an auction to sell down to the fifty dog limit, would that suffice? The answer was a resounding, No! He had a year to scale down and he failed to do it. The Missouri Humane Society would take possession of the excess dogs the next day. He needed to mark the animals he would be disposing of.

Mike said, “Don’t do anything just now. I will try to file an injunction against this confiscation.” They both knew that the kennel was going to have to scale down to the fifty dogs, but George

needed the income that a sale would produce to pay down the mortgage on his property. He could not possibly meet the mortgage payments and the everyday living expenses with just fifty dogs.

After everyone left, George started to pick out the dogs he would need to sell. That Doxie killed her pups last time. Those Frenchies were just not his cup of tea. What about those Poms? Oh, good Lord, he could not sell the Poms! The Poodles were Margaret's pride and joy; can't get rid of them. With her health problems advancing every day, she needs something to keep her interested in living. After much agonizing, he finally picks out ten dogs he thinks he can part with. He throws up his hands in frustration and walks out of the kennel.

The lawyer calls the next day to tell him the court has granted him an extension while they consider the application for time for an auction. But he must select enough dogs to get down to fifty. George is almost in tears as he selects the dogs that he must sell. He has got to evaluate the cost of production of the puppies. Some of the breeds will be more profitable than others. Some will cost more to produce per puppy. He must meet the mortgage payments, no matter that his heart tells him to keep certain dogs that have been very good in the past. He must let economics force him to do exactly what the Animal Rights Idiots have criticized the industry for, for putting monetary considerations first.

Two days later his world crashes. George receives word that the judge has ruled against him. He must trim his kennel to fifty dogs immediately. If he does not relinquish his dogs voluntarily to the Missouri Humane Society immediately, they will push the Dept. of Agriculture to prosecute and fine him for the violations they found during the inspection. He had to decide which dogs he would have to give up and he would not be paid a penny for them. The Frenchies could go, the Poms would have to go, and, as much as it broke his heart to hurt Margaret, the Poodles were old and they would have to go.

The stress of all of this pushed Margaret over the edge. She knew that the Poodles were getting old and the chances were very good that most of them would be destroyed. She suffered a stroke and had to be put into a nursing home. How would George pay for all of this when his source of income had just been taken from him? He would have to find a job. What he found instead was, there were no jobs, especially for a man of his age who had not held a public job of any kind for over five years. He could not draw unemployment nor could he qualify for Social Security. He was old enough, but they had moved the age up just past his birthday. It took everything the dogs could bring in to keep Margaret in the nursing home. He quit paying the mortgage payment in order to keep the utilities on. He had a car payment to make and he wanted to be sure to keep his life and health insurance in force. Slowly the bills mounted faster than his income. He sold the car and bought an older one. Then he let his health insurance lapse. Later, his life insurance had to go. He needed to go to the doctor but he had no money to pay for an office call. His kids finally took over the nursing home expenses for their mother, but he had gotten several months behind on his mortgage payments until the bank had to finally foreclose. If he lost the property, he would have no place to keep the dogs he had left.

The price of puppies had been dropping for the last two years as the cost of vet bills and dog food had kept rising. He realized that he would not be able to keep his dogs and he had better schedule an auction before those jerks came back and stole the rest of his dogs. The auction was not so good. He had paid \$800 for some of those dogs four years ago, but today they were only bringing \$250. By the time he sold the dogs, the bank had served him an eviction notice. He was now homeless, without an income, and no hope of anything getting any better. Now what would he do?

He rented a tiny two room apartment and spent his auction money very sparingly, but he soon noticed that it was disappearing fast. Drastic measures had to be taken. But what? He was too old to become a train robber like Jesse James. He could not kidnap a child. A life of crime was all he could think of and he would just not do that. Well, there was always suicide but he loved his family too much for that.

One night, George walked into a Choney all night buffet. He ate a good meal and told the waitress he would like a refill on his drink before he went to bed. She said, "Gladly sir, and I will be your cashier when you are finished. There is no hurry. Just stay as long as you like". "Thank you", he said. "Just send my bill to the Missouri Humane Society. From now on, I will be billing everything I need to them."

"Do you have a credit card from them that I can run for you?" the waitress asked.

"No, just tell them they are the ones responsible; them and the voters who voted **yes** on proposition B, for the destitute fix I am in."

The waitress thought it was time for the manager to handle this situation. When he arrived at the booth, George was stretching out with a pillow and blanket he had brought with him. "What are you doing?" the manager asked.

"Why, I'm going to bed," George answered.

"Where do you live? We could help you get home if you need us to," the manager said. "Why, no! I don't need any help, I live here. This booth will be perfectly comfortable for me to sleep in. It is right next to the bathroom, and you can provide three fine meals per day, so I will be just fine. Just send the bill to the Humane Society."

"But Sir, this is impossible! You can't live here! You're going to have to leave," the manager said to George.

"How did YOU vote on Proposition B, young man? Did you succumb to all the lying offered by the radicals to support Prop B?"

"Well, I voted yes, but what does that have to do with anything?"

George smiled sadly as he told him that he and about a million other voters who didn't understand the consequence of their vote was what put him into this dire need to find a place like the Choney all night buffet. "You are responsible for my plight, so it is only fair that you help me survive. You have all worried about the dogs, but you forgot to worry about the humans you forced into poverty."

The police were called and asked to remove that old man. He obviously needed to go to a mental institution. After several questions from the officer, he concluded that George was as sane as any one who had lost his means of making a living, had his wife committed to a nursing home with a stroke, had lost his home, and had become a burden on his children. The officer asked, "Is he creating a disturbance, being loud or offensive, or creating fear in your other customers?"

"Uh.. no," replied the manager, "But this is a restaurant, not a flop house. He cannot stay here."

"Well, you will have to get a court order to have him removed, because I am not going to do it."

The manager set up a folding room divider around the booth and called the corporate offices. The night office manager woke the company president to explain the situation. The company president called the corporate lawyer to see what could and couldn't be done. The lawyer suggested they get the Public Relations Department in on this. At the midnight meeting of all of these corporate heads, it was decided that the company president, the lawyer, two public relation's officers and a security officer would fly west the following morning. Five airline tickets were purchased for the flight to Saint Louis, a full sized car was reserved for the day and three hotel rooms were booked for that night. Because Choney Inc. was a major account for the travel agency, a discount was arranged for the travel. The total bill for the travel expenditures was

around \$3000 dollars. Meals and related expenses came to another \$1000 dollars more. As they left for the airport, the corporate president told his secretary, "Make a note, under no circumstances will this company ever send another dime to the Humane Society, and if we are committed to any contribution now, rescind that pledge."

When the consortium of corporate officers arrived at the restaurant, they decided that the lawyer would be the spokesman. He told George that he would have to leave or he would proceed with getting a court order to have him removed. However, food charges and related expenses would be waived if George would just cooperate. George said, "Thanks, but no thanks. I like it here. Just send the bill to the Missouri Humane Society." The lawyer was livid by this time so one of the public relations people took over the persuasion.

As the day wore on, the crowd was starting to grow. The nightly news crew showed up from the local television station, then a newspaper reporter, then an "on the spot" radio crew. The president was getting panicky. He decided to take matters into his own hands and ordered the security man to forcibly remove George from the premises, but when the security man laid his hands upon George, the cameras started to roll. The lawyer did not want this scenario to be recorded on film, but as he tried to block the lens, he knocked over the camera and it broke. By this time, several police officers had arrived on the scene to keep the peace. The camera man was so angry he told the officers he would press charges, so the officers arrested the whole lot of them and hauled them off to the police station. George just smiled and asked the waitress when the lunch buffet would be put out.

A local lawyer was retained, at the cost of \$5000 dollars, to handle the situation and the east coast crew returned home. The court dismissed the charges on the two public relations men but kept the charges against the lawyer for knocking over the camera, against the security officer for trying to use force and the president for giving the command that started the whole thing.

Meanwhile, George was becoming a local celebrity. He was being interviewed by almost everybody. Even the nightly national news from all four networks was now running the story. George was single-handedly educating hundreds of thousands of voters as to how they had been deceived and cajoled into voting yes on proposition B, and how that vote drove him into the Choney restaurant as the only way he could think of to survive. The general public was getting mad when they realized that practically all of the nearly 5 million dollars spent on getting proposition B passed was from out of state contributors. Something was, by gosh, going to happen to help George get back on his feet. One of the first things to happen was the camera man agreed to drop charges in return for a concession to George to eat, free of charge, at any Choney buffet in the world, whenever he wanted to. Also, Choney would pay the rent on his apartment for one year in return for him voluntarily removing himself from their restaurant. George agreed to the settlement and returned to his apartment, but not to his old ways of contentment and self reliance. There was talk of repeal of proposition B, but either way it went, proposition B had ruined George just as he entered into his "Golden Years". Life would never be the same again for George.