

## Erin Calhoon Hear Them

“Hear me; I’m crying out. I’m ready now. Turn my world upside down. Find me. I’m lost inside the crowd; it’s getting loud. I need you to see I’m screaming for you to please hear me.” Those words are lyrics from a song called “Hear Me” by Kelly Clarkson. Last year in my science class, I used that song in a video presentation I made to go along with a class project about animal testing and why it is wrong. I have cared about animals my whole entire life, but in the past year, I’ve realized that I can be doing so much more to help.

When I was growing up, it was the typical “Mommy, I want a pony!” story around Christmastime, my birthday, or any other gift-giving holiday. I never got one, but I have always loved animals of any kind. If there was a birthday party at the house of a friend who had a pet, all the other kids would be eating their cake while I was playing with the dog or the kitty. My childhood babysitter used to have a dog named Leroy. Before he was adopted, Leroy had been abused and didn’t really like to be around people. My mom bought a box of dog biscuits for me to take when I went my babysitter’s house. Before long Leroy and I were great friends. When it comes to animals and protecting them from harm, I am pretty passionate about it.

At my school, it is a graduation requirement for all students to complete a senior project. The projects must be community service and students have to put in at least twenty hours of work. My best friend Jenny and I both really care about animals, so we decided to do a joint senior project to help out our local Humane Society. We have tried to go as much above and beyond the minimum requirements as we possibly can. We wanted our project to be about helping out as much as we possibly could, not just getting in the minimum hours and going on our way. Since we joined together, it is required that

## Erin Calhoon Hear Them

we have forty hours dedicated to working for our project instead of twenty. As of now, Jenny and I have a combined total of over one-hundred hours put into our senior project. We started out last summer, selling handmade scarves and afghans at church softball games to raise money for our local shelter and volunteering there (walking dogs, playing with cats, and cleaning cages). The facility in Monroe, WI is small and in not-so-great condition. It is a no-kill shelter, so they are running out of space for all the animals. Because they are in need of a new facility, Jenny and I have been trying to raise as much money as we possibly can for them, and we hope we can help them accomplish their goals. We also very recently held a drive to collect items such as leashes, paper towels, animal toys, toilet paper, cleaning supplies, etc. from the Humane Society's wish list. Jenny and I called all the local churches asking them if we could put informational inserts in their bulletins and boxes in their churches to collect items. They were happy to help us with our wish list drive. We collected about 40 items, big and small, for our local Humane Society. At our school, we also held a hat day. Students could pay a dollar to wear a hat and teachers could pay five dollars to wear jeans. Before this weekend, we had risen over \$700 for the Green County Humane Society in Monroe, WI. This past Sunday, for our final fundraiser, we held a silent auction/ bake sale in our church's Fellowship Hall to raise even more money. We auctioned off quilts, afghans, and other handmade items. We also sold baked goods (that sold out within the first hour) to draw in more people to the event. After Sunday's fundraising event, the total amount of money we have raised for the shelter is over \$1,200! Jenny and I feel very accomplished and happy about all that we've done to help. The churches have been very generous in letting us use their facilities and putting informational inserts in their bulletins and ads in their buildings to

## Erin Calhoon Hear Them

spread the word about our project. I am really excited about the project, and it's good to feel like we are making a difference.

I am currently taking a class called Oral Communications (basically a class where students give numerous speeches) this semester, and we have come to our persuasive speech assignment. I'm giving my speech on animal testing, why it is wrong, and alternatives to animal testing. I am so nervous because public speaking is definitely not something I usually look forward to, but I am actually really excited to give this speech. I am excited to have everyone in the class hear my voice as well as the animals' voice and realize what I'm standing up for. I want them to know what they can do to help make a change, just by adjusting a few minor things in their lives.

In the past month or so, it has become fully clear to me just how many companies test on animals. Whether their products are actually tested on animals or just distributed by companies that fund animal testing, it is still wrong. I had no idea that it applied to so many companies. Almost all of the products I used to use were from companies who test on animals. I went crazy looking up on Google companies that do not test on animals. It was really tough because a lot of the brands that do test are the well-known, easy to find brands. Cruelty free toothpaste was one of things I had a hard time finding. Eventually, I found out that PETA has a cruelty-free shopping guide, so I went on their website and requested one. It came in the mail a few days ago, and I am really excited! I have found a bunch of companies who are cruelty-free and easy to find in stores. I am happy to say that I have switched completely to cruelty-free products. I don't even buy *Pringles* anymore because they are distributed by Proctor & Gamble, which funds testing. Trying to convince other people to not buy certain products anymore is difficult, though, because a

## Erin Calhoon Hear Them

lot of people like the products they use now. However, I have told all my friends, I wrote an article for my school paper about it, and I have posted lists on Facebook of “good” and “bad” companies. Getting the word out is the best thing I can do to spread awareness that animal testing is happening and that we can stop it.

So many people don't realize how many companies test on animals. They don't understand that when they buy their favorite makeup or face wash (or sometimes even pet food), they are putting innocent animals through cruel and unusual procedures that they themselves would never want to experience. Humans can speak for themselves, but animals don't have a voice. As humans, we have knowledge and power, and we need to be the voice for the animals. I want to be able to help spread the word and help animals as much as I can throughout my entire life.