

July 24, 2005

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I just finished watching a video from a rodeo in Australia where a rather large male bull rider assaulted a small woman who was filming events in the rodeo. He knocked her to the ground several times, slammed her against the steel fence and then pushed her head under water and held it there before finally releasing her. Later on the video, she had substantial bruising on her legs and shoulders. She also showed evidence of mental trauma when she shook and cried when describing her ordeal. The evidence on the video is quite clear that he criminally assaulted the woman.

Not only was the woman assaulted but also the crowd kept cheering the bull rider to keep abusing her. This is an example of how rodeo affects people. Rodeo can only exist because the animals endure painful procedures to enhance their performance. The spurs, electric cattle prods, tail twisting, slamming roping calves to the ground and sometimes dragging them by the neck, constant travel, injuries that remain untreated (as seen in the videos of your rodeos and ours), and rough handling hurt animals. You cannot have a humane rodeo. Accepting, promoting and even cheering violence to animals are evidence that people watching rodeo are insensitive to violence. It takes very little to transfer that insensitivity from animals to humans. Children watching the woman get beat up were also part of that cheering audience. Adults condoned it so the children did also.

In 1985, I left veterinary medicine to enter law school. After graduating from law school, I spent a year in the criminal court here in Vermont as a prosecutor. There I learned about the relationship between animal abuse and crimes against humans. I found that it is very dangerous to expose young children to animal abuse, especially when condoned by large numbers of people attending something like a rodeo. Kids accept violence as "normal" behavior. In the States, serial killers and arsonists almost always tortured animals before switching to people. All of those boys who killed other boys in the school killings here several years ago tortured animals. One of them set his dog on fire. The bridge between violence to animals and violence to humans is a short one. At your rodeo, I saw two little boys laughing at the little calf's bellowing in pain from a man twisting its tail.

I wonder how violent the bull rider could have gotten before the crowd changed its support. I suspect he could have killed her before the crowd stopped cheering.

This bull rider bully needs to spend some time in jail. If I were prosecuting him, I would be asking for the maximum sentence. He should not be rewarded for the harm he has done to the woman and also to the audience, especially the children watching this assault and hearing the audience cheer.

Sincerely,
Peggy W. Larson, DVM, MS, JD