

Animal House

How one small press is making a name for itself telling true tales about pets and zoos

By JUDITH ROSEN

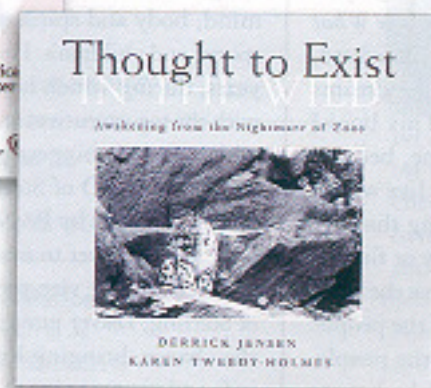
It's become an all too familiar story: author shops book idea, is told that it's "unmarketable" and publishes it successfully herself. In the case of Diane Leigh and Marilee Geyer's book on homeless animals, *One at a Time: A Week in an American Animal Shelter*, however, there was a twist. The authors didn't take their manuscript and photos to Lulu's or the local copy shop. Instead, they founded a nonprofit organization that publishes books as part of its educational outreach to generate awareness of those who are "unseen, ignored or disregarded by society."

If sales are any indication, Leigh and Geyer's chronicle of a week in a typical animal shelter is indeed marketable. Since 2003, their book has sold close to 20,000 copies and will go into a fifth printing later this year. No Voice Unheard's second title, Derrick Jensen's *Thought to Exist in the Wild: Awakening from the Nightmare of Zoos*, with photos by Karen Tweedy-Holmes, which came out last summer, should get a boost in selling out its first printing of 5,000 copies with two recent awards: the 2008 Eric Hoffer Award for Independent Books and the 2008 silver medal in the Animals/Pets category for the Independent Publisher Book Awards.

An additional vote of confidence in the press came earlier this year when National Book Network added No Voice Unheard to its client roster after NBN ended its Biblio Distribution operation for micro



A California press's focus on animal rights advocacy has resulted in two books, and a loyal following.



presses. No Voice Unheard was one of only about two dozen Biblio publishers out of 550 that the distributor asked to stay. "We are happy to take on publishers if they have good books, are planning to have an ongoing program, are serious about what they're doing and don't have outrageous expectations," said NBN senior v-p Marianne Bohr. "In this case, No Voice Unheard has a real following in a specific niche. They have a good track record. And they have a really, really low returns rate, 3%."

As for Leigh and Geyer's animal activism—impelled by the fact that every nine seconds a dog or cat is euthanized in a U.S. animal shelter—Bohr said, "I don't think we've ever turned away a publisher because of subject matter. We're happy to sell the two backlist books and the next one." There's no question that environmentalist Derrick Jensen's presence on the No Voice Unheard list helped. Jensen

is an activist and author known for the stridency of his passions, whether concerning violence in America, misogyny or deforestation. Shortly after he signed with the press, Leigh and Geyer were able to interest trade distributors to add No Voice Unheard to their roster. They signed with Biblio in 2006.

As it happens, Jensen came to No Voice Unheard with his latest for the same reason Leigh and Geyer started the press—he was told that his book was unmarketable. "I have 12 books out now," said Jensen. "I thought when you get to this stage I'd have publishers drooling over me.

We sent *Thought to Exist in the Wild* to a bunch of publishers and got rejection letters from all of them. Sierra Club sent a nasty rejection: 'We don't think rants like this advance discourse.' Another publisher wanted to cut the photos. I was incredibly moved by Diane's other book, so I was happy to go with her. Other than the budget, she's everything I'd want in

a publisher. She didn't tone down the politics. She's what activist publishing is supposed to be about."

Although No Voice Unheard does not have a large promotion budget, it has not stinted on production values. "The books we've done so far are very beautiful, very visual books. In both, we printed the photos in duotones. For us, it's showing the animals with dignity and respect," said Leigh. "One of the nice things about being a nonprofit is that as the proceeds from sales come in, we're able to do more outreach and more education."

Although after two books No Voice Unheard still doesn't have enough money to do more than one at a time, it is in the midst of planning a third title on farm animals. The working title, 95, refers to the number of animals saved each year by a person on a vegetarian diet. ■