

**T**he birds were released like doves at a peace ceremony. These winged symbols of harmony, however, weren't allowed to rise and fly away. As soon as their wings were spread, they were shot down; dying to the sound of human applause.

It was still early morning with the first gunshots rang out. The green Pennsylvania hills were draped with a fine mist, making the area seem more like Brigadoon than Hugins, site of the annual Labor Day Pigeon Shoot. I'd come down on a bus from Boston, seven hours of difficult sleep and nauseating dread for the protest ahead. I thought the day would disgust and horrify me, wear me out with frustration. I was wrong. It was much worse.

As soon as my group from Boston, made up of members from Citizens to End Animal Suffering and Exploitation (CEASE) and New England Anti-Vivisection Society (NEAVS), tumbled bleary-eyed and rumped from the bus, we collected our signs and went across the damp field serving as a parking lot to the gates of the shoot. We stood outside, lining up on either side of the rutted track, watching a few people wander in.

Soon, more Hugins spectators showed up. When I looked over my shoulder, I saw cars lining up to park like morning commuters on an interstate; I hadn't expected "their" side to be so large, to consist of so many people who narrowed their eyes at us as they walked through our ranks. At first I was quiet, but the sheer number of shooters and surly abusive shoot supporters unhinged my mouth and I joined the other protesters in shouting at them as they passed through.

## OPINION

More protesters kept arriving and we would greet them with smiles and a shout of "reinforcements!" as they took their place in line with us until we were three deep on either side, each of us yelling at the people waiting to get into the gates, into the zone which I would never enter, to hail their friends and laugh us off. But we would not be ignored.

In the midst of their waiting group, most wearing t-shirts advertising the shoot, occasionally a small child would come, led by a hovering parent. One small girl with the largest brown eyes I will ever see looked up at me and I was struck speechless. What could I possibly say to her that she would remember in her little bed at night, to make her question the actions of her mother, who was even now coming physically between us?

"I'm sorry," I whispered as she watched my face, "I'm sorry these are your parents, I'm sorry you have to watch this. I'm so sorry." With a sudden jerk she was whisked away, big, observant eyes and all, to be replaced by a man handing out, ironically enough, pro-life literature. He showed graphic, exploitative photos of aborted fetuses and I listened to

the gun shots beyond, every clear ringing meaning another death.

"Is this your idea of preserving the sanctity of life?" I said. The others around me were shouting things like "Cowards!" and "Would God be lining up with you?" But in all the now-hoarse screams, one voice from behind me came through clearer than the others. I never saw the woman, she was too far behind, and I was two inches from a state trooper, unable to comfortably turn around and find her.

# The Sorrow of Legal Murder: My Experience at The Hugins Pigeon Shoot

By Elizabeth Gunderson