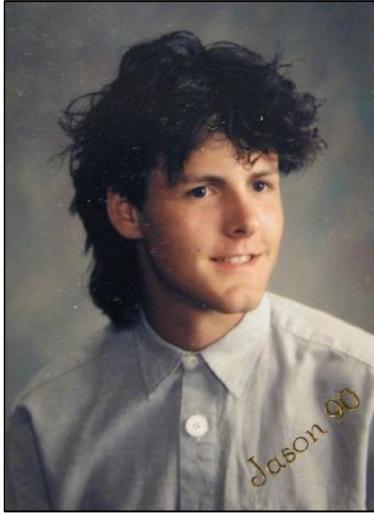


## TO BE A GLOBE-TROTTING VEGAN ANIMAL RIGHTS ADVOCATE

By **ROME JORGE**



Jason Baker is the reason we know about People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA): deploying food and water for pets abandoned in the war zone in Lebanon as Israeli planes indiscriminately dropped cluster bombs; smashing windows and breaking down doors to let loose animals threatened by drowning and starvation from Hurricane Katrina's flood waters in New Orleans; stalking then-US Vice-President Al Gore for six months in a bunny costume until the man relented and decided against supporting animal testing; rallying Filipino fashion model Isabel Roces to pose in nothing more than cabbage leaves to advocate vegetarianism; and picketing franchise outlets of the fast-food giant Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) to demand humane culling practices. Yes, that's him in the chicken suit.

Harnessing the media attention to spotlight his advocacy, he may also be responsible for reinforcing some stereotypes we may have about animal rights advocates—such as that they are attention-grabbing men in chicken suits. As director of People for the PETA Asia Pacific at its offices here in the Philippines, he is bringing previously unheard of awareness to his cause.

He has gotten our attention. Now is the time for understanding.

"We take the animal's side every time. It's about not eating animals, not wearing animals, not experimenting on animals, not having them in a zoo," Baker explains PETA's stand. But there are other things we want to know.

What is it like to don a chicken suit? Is wearing one really necessary? Are animal rights advocates overly sentimental about animals? Are vegans disgusted when their friends sink their teeth into a juicy hamburger? And how do PETA advocates feel about a reporter entering their office in leather boots? To know Baker is to understand the humanity behind all those humane.

This vegan is no social outcast despite his lifestyle and even has a dietician on his side: Susan Baker, a chef for US President Bill Clinton, has, along with Baker's father and siblings, become a vegan as well. Recalling animal rescue efforts in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, Baker proudly recalls, "I drafted my father to help organize the animal food warehouse."

After three years as vegetarian and 14 years as a vegan, Baker admits, "I definitely didn't go vegan for the taste. KFC still smells good to me," he confides. "I'm more against dairy

products," noting that we are the only species that persists in drinking milk past infancy and that majority of humans develop lactose intolerance past the age of 2. And he asserts, "There's no reason to eat meat nowadays," recalling his horror when he learned how animals were slaughtered.

He notes that PETA receives enormous support from celebrity endorsers in the Philippines such as Roces and fellow model Raya Mananquil, Manual Magazine editor in chief and former Sunday Times Magazine columnist RJ Ledesma, as well as the general public. He notes that in many ways, the country has been more receptive to their vegan advocacy than India, a traditionally vegetarian society, where today's youth eschew old practices for western lifestyles.

This animal rights advocate is not a pet lover. "I'm not into hugging and cuddling. I'm against suffering, whether human or animal." As for their recent campaign against Manila Zoo, he says, "Our campaign is against the Manila Zoo where we try to educate people that the zoo is not a good place for animals. We are against all zoos. The Manila Zoo happens to be one of the worst. It's about letting animals be where they should be."

The young man disproves stereotypes about vegans and vegetarians as gaunt fellows. He cites Olympian gold medalist Carl Lewis and buff celebrity Woody Harrelson as vegans with muscle.

He also dispels the notion that animal rights activists are extremists or overly sentimental. "We are pragmatic; we know the world won't become vegan overnight," he says citing animal welfare policies and vegetarian alternatives they advocate for fast-food chains. He notes that they support euthanasia to end animal suffering in terminal cases.

"Protest is the last option," he declares. "We have people who are passionate about issues. We suggest ways to react. Screaming and yelling are not the best tactics," he explains. "You have to embarrass them into changing."

On wearing bunny and chicken suits in public, "You build your way up to it," he says explaining that at various times he has worn diapers dressed as a cupid and giant condom. "I've been arrested a couple of times," he testifies.

Stalking politicians in animal costumes may seem a bit crazy, but what is truly insane is the unnecessary cruelty inflicted upon animals with brutal farm practices and the hurt we inflict upon our selves and on the planet with our cholesterol-laced carnivorous diets. With a world such as ours, we could use a few good men in chicken suits such as Jason Baker.

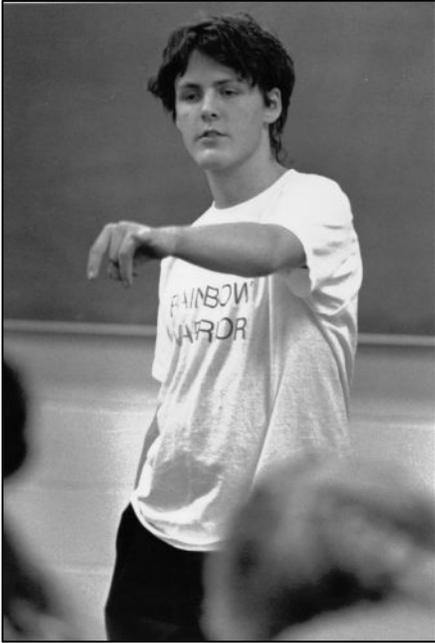
\*See Chapter 2 &  
Steward Preston Gill Family Sheet  
at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>



Norman James & Susan (Gill) Baker, parents of Jason Baker.

## STUDENTS AWARE

Club explores environmental issues, by Mike Tryree,  
The Northville Record, Thursday, 2 November 1989, Northville, MI



Last Thursday's final bell sent the bulk of Northville High School's student population streaming home, or to the practice field, or to other endeavors close to the hear of the average teenager. But nearly 100 students stayed behind and wedged themselves into a room to plot strategy for the balance of the school year.

The students weren't discussing homecoming, or next week's dance, or any one of the seemingly endless fundraising ventures normally associated with high school – aged kids. The students met to talk about the environment, about human and animal rights, and about recycling.

The organizational meeting of Students Aware of the World (SAW) attracted the dedicated, concerned, and just plain curious among the Northville student body.

SAW founder and President Jason Baker said he formed the group because he wanted to get involved with issues affecting the world today. And he wanted to get the word out that people can and should change their attitude toward today's headlines.

*(Picture: Jason Baker leads a group discussion during the meeting. Photo by Chris Boyd).*

"It's all about awareness," he said. "We hope to inform the community and students about environmental issues and work to make some positive changes."

Baker said SAW will receive input from such organizations as Greenpeace, Amnesty International, and People for Ethical Treatment of Animals, and will focus much of its energy on recycling programs around the Northville area. Baker said the impetus for the group came from frustrations he had with current events.

"Things like the revolution in China and the Exxon oil spill infuriated me," he said. "I thought, why not get involved and get others in the school organized so that we can address some of these problems. At least one of the issues we will be looking at touches someone here. Mr. Redmond (NHS assistant principal) said we could go ahead, and now we've got at least 100 people interested in the group."

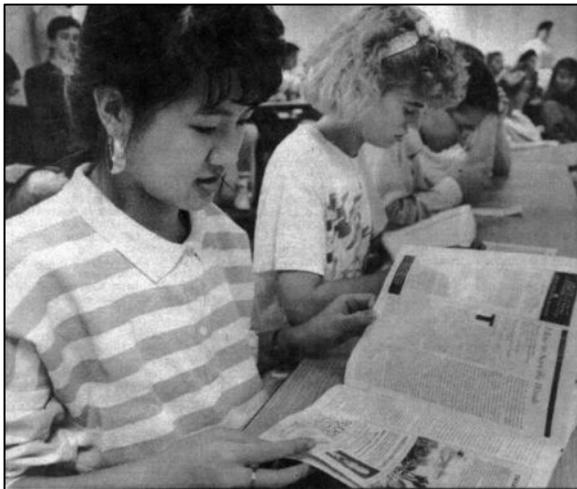
Redmond said the new group is very well from an educational standpoint," he said. "It's a new club, and it has the resources and energy of a new club.

“It might have a lot of value as an educational tool,” he added. “Whether this interest is maintained will show at the second meeting.”

Baker said the group would be looking into collecting recyclable items for shipment to a collection center in Livonia. He said that even though SAW was a school organization, the district itself may be asked some difficult questions.

“Does our school use the heavy pollutant type of Styrofoam?” he asked. “If so, we want to get it out of here. Is it possible for us to use recyclable paper? There are some of the things we will be asking.

“The main thing is to get things done,” he said. “We’re concerned about China, the (Amazon) rain forests, animal treatment and the environment.”



Like many initial get-togethers, the SAW meeting suffered from disorganization. But raw enthusiasm ruled the event, as students chimed in with questions and comments ranging from the sale of ivory to the use of animals in test laboratories. Baker said he sensed real dedication from his peers.

“If we get a lot of people involved, we can make a difference,” he said.

*(Picture: Marie Wen, left, 12<sup>th</sup> grade and Lisa Brown look over current event publications at the club meeting. Photo by Chris Boyd).*

Students Aware of the World will hold its next meeting after school November 16, at which time officers will be elected, groups formed, and agendas set. And it’s a sure bet that the majority of the conversation at the meeting won’t center on what someone’s friend wore to the dance last week.

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