The Liberty Bell ★ Volume 2 ★ Issue 1 ★ WINTER 24/25 ★

To Protect and Serve, but to Protect and Serve Whom?

By Jim Mundorf-Lonesome Lands, *Reprinted with permission*

PORTIONS REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION FROM
The Cavalry Group
TheCavalryGroup.com

Ask most Americans and they will tell you that laws are supposed to be enforced and that local law enforcement is there to protect and serve the people of their community. But the reality is that law enforcement today is more about protecting and serving themselves and the government than it is the individual freedoms of the people who elected them. Local law enforcement isn't supposed to play favorites or selectively enforce the law, or, even worse, make up their own laws because they don't like someone.

That's what makes what happened to the Peermans in Flathead County, Montana so alarming. Montana, Big Sky country, is where most of the rest of the country imagines is ground zero for the "land of the free." But Brandi Peerman and her family were being bullied by their neighbors and local law enforcement because they have two livestock guardian dogs who do what they were bred to do-bark.

Brandi, her four children, and her husband, moved from California to Whitefish, Montana in 2017. They bought a 16-acre property known as Peerman Family Farm just outside the city limits to take up farming; and opened a farm-to-table restaurant called The Farmhouse Inn and Kitchen.

They also home schooled their children and kept goats, sheep, pigs, cows, chickens and raised other agricultural items on their farm. The farm had ¼ mile of the Stillwater River running through it so it attracted plenty of wildlife, including a herd of elk, grizzlies, and mountain lions.

There was always a significant concern about predators in their area. Accordingly, the Peerman's owned two Caucasian Ovsharkas, a livestock guardian dog breed that has been kept by farmers and ranchers for centuries; specifically, to protect their livestock. Kodiak and Elsa, the Peerman's two Caucasian Ovcharkas, kept the bears, big cats, and coyotes away from the Peerman's flocks. They also had a Labrador Retriever named Angus who apparently wasn't much of a barker and not an issue in this case.

Unfortunately, the Peermans' had a neighbor who complained about Kodiak and Elsa's barking and an animal control officer (part of the sheriff's department in Flathead County) showed up at their door and gave them a citation. The problem is in Montana there is a state law 7-23-2110, that says livestock guardian dogs are exempt from local barking dog ordinances:

"The governing body of a county may, by adoption of an ordinance that substantially complies with 7-5-103 through 7-5-107, regulate barking dogs. An ordinance adopted pursuant to this section may not apply to a dog that is owned, kept, or harbored as part of the business of a licensed veterinarian, animal boarding facility, or agricultural or livestock operation."

Flathead County also has an ordinance that says livestock guardian dogs are exempt from barking dog ordinances. These dogs are doing their job to protect animals on the farm – an agricultural business. Barking is part of their job. The Peerman's livelihood depended on successfully raising their animals without predators killing them. So, how is it that a local animal control officer – part of the county sheriff's department – issued them a citation for barking dogs?

When Brandi spoke to someone at the Flathead County Sheriff's Department, she was told, "*If enough people complain then there has to be an exception to the laws.*" She was told that if her neighbor continues to complain, they will continue to cite her family for barking dogs.

Animal control and the sheriff's department are well aware of what the state and county laws say about livestock guardian dogs being exempt from barking dog laws. They were simply ignoring the law.

According to Brandi, she has heard from other

farmers in the area who say that they have also been pressured into giving up their livestock guardian dogs despite the laws that protect them in Montana. Farmer's from around the state and country were relying on the precedent from the Peerman's case to help them in their cases. It seemed agricultural operations, across the state and country, with guardian livestock dogs, were facing similar issues with their neighbors.

The Peerman's attorney was out of town, so they had to go to court with a substitute attorney. When Brandi met with this attorney and started listing her constitutional rights and how Montana law protected them, her alarmed attorney advised that if they went into court talking about their constitutional rights, the judge would think they were crazy and they would lose the case.

The Peermans were told they either had to pay upwards of $10,000 in legal fees to fight the case or pay $35, plead guilty – and give up their livestock guardian dogs. The Peerman's were not only disappointed in this advice, but they also knew they were fighting for more than just their barking dogs. They lost the first round to have the case dismissed and fired that attorney. The judge assigned to the trial, did not appreciate dogs in general and ignored the state and county laws, and ordered a trial date.

The Peermans knew they had the resources to fight-something most native Montanans don't have. They found a new attorney, and when their trial date arrived, their neighbor who lodged the complaint didn't even bother to show up for the trial. The Peerman's won their case, and got the county prosecutor to agree that there was no violation of the law which set a precedent that helped livestock dog owners across the country.

However, winning the case was not the end of the Peerman's problems. Those neighbors who couldn't be bothered to show up for the trail, continued to harass the Peermans. When the Peermans would be away from home, the neighbors would trespass onto their property and steal livestock from their barn. When the Peermans called the sheriff, he said he wasn't going to get involved and refused to investigate or press charges.

What the Peermans want people to understand is that law enforcement in Montana, and essentially around the country, has the discretion to enforce the law or ignore it when they deem it in their best interest to do so, not in what is in the best interest of those involved or the community at large. In other words, the Peermans knew they were up against the Good Old Boys' Clubs, and being newcomers from the "Communist State of California," the locals had it out for the Peermans and were using law enforcement to harass them and then law enforcement was selectively choosing when they would enforce the law.

"I'm the fighter of fighters," Brandi said referring to her battles within the justice system. "What I learned is the cards are stacked against you; especially if you aren't a local. The problem has so little to do with justice. You may be right, but that doesn't matter; especially in Montana. The people of Montana don't realize they have lost ground-they have lost their rights. Our family spent a lot of money fighting for what is right and although we won in court, we lost locally. The whole process was a bad experience in the 'injustice' system. It is more about who you know, not who is right and what is fair and just. You can be right all day long and it doesn't matter because law enforcement and the courts will do what they want."

Even 6 years later, after winning her case that helped Montana farmers and ranchers across the state, Brandi feels Montanans are judgmental. "I moved here for freedoms I didn't have in California. Freedoms I was willing to fight for. When you come from somewhere where you don't have the rights afforded as you do in Montana, you fight for them."

Many Montanans assume if you come from a blue state you are a missionary instead of a refugee. The Peerman's fight though, wasn't just for their family's ability to own guardian livestock dogs. Their fight benefited every Montanan with guardian livestock dogs. Brandi shared, "I still get death threats on social media from people telling me to go back to California. Montanans are so caught up in where people are moving from, they have lost grip on the reality that they are losing or have lost freedoms they failed to protect because they were so focused on xenophobia. It makes me feel like I value freedoms more than the native Montanans do."

Despite winning their court case, Brandi is terrified to live in Montana because the county sheriff has ignored the safety of her family. Brandi confides, " We have had people trespass, stolen our property and threaten our lives and the county sheriff says he won't get involved.".

The Peermans and others in the area have a right to farm. Shouldn't local authorities be encouraging agricultural businesses instead of bullying them or allowing them to be threatened? Should animal control and the sheriff's department, not to mention the court, be upholding state and local laws instead of ignoring them? Research proves that when minor crimes including vandalism, theft, trespassing and other public order crimes are ignored, the incidence of major crimes also increases because of the perception, by criminals and law-abiding alike, that law enforcement isn't serious and is ineffective.

It is up to authorities to uphold the Rule of Law, not interpret the law to suit their agenda. That is the real concern in Whitefish, Montana and all across America today.

There are a lot of farmers and ranchers, not to mention dog owners, who benefitted from the efforts of the Peermans. Yet, the community where she lives and stands the most to gain from a fighter like Brandi who was willing to put her money where her heart is and fight for our freedoms, is the community that has torn at the fabric of her family's safety and security by threatening her and condemning her actions.

"Some people believe they are Christians and that they are somehow protecting their native state by threatening and condemning newcomers who start businesses, contribute to their communities and safeguard their freedoms," states a disillusioned Brandi. "People need to treat each other with more love and kindness and understanding. We are all made in the image of God. Is attacking each other the way to behave and show God's love through each other as Christians? I try really had to be a good neighbor, but my neighbors violate my privacy , safety and private property rights by stealing, physically assaulting me, flying drones over my property and trespassing to take photos of the animals on my property so they can condemn me for having my guardian livestock dogs live outside in a heated dog house. I love my animals, but when is it ok for concern for an animal to turn into death threats, condemnation and harassment of fellow human being? How does that show God's mercy and love? Where have people's kindness, compassion and Biblical virtue gone and why does law enforcement fail to protect our rights against this behavior?"

Brandi added, "My entire life has been turned upside down. The cost our family has had to pay both financially and emotionally has been enormous and has caused me to have zero respect for law enforcement and the justice system. It is a very broken system that dispenses injustice more than anything else. What good does it do to win in court when the community continues to punish you for 'perceived' crimes you have never committed?"