

\*Horse breeder acquitted of animal cruelty

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Ontario Court Justice Anton Zuraw was cited as questioning the integrity of the Hamilton-Burlington SPCA because of its handling of the investigation of animal cruelty charges against an Ancaster horse breeder, that he was troubled by the perception of bias and conflict of interest by the agency, including its use of this high-profile case to fundraise, and an SPCA board member who "profited" from the probe into how Cindy Pauliuk cared for her small herd of 10 Peruvian Pasos.

Zuraw heard what he described as "some of the most bizarre evidence" in 40 years "in a case that has cast doubt on the integrity of one of society's most respected institutions, stating, "The perception of bias that looms over all of the Crown's evidence of this case is like a stake to the heart -- totally damaging the Crown's ability to prove its case. It would be unreasonable and dangerous to convict on this evidence and I refuse to do so."

Pauliuk, 52, broke down in tears outside the courtroom after hearing the verdict. She was forced to sell her horses to cover a \$6,000 bill from the SPCA for a veterinarian's bill and boarding fees.

"It's just destroyed my life, my reputation, my livelihood, my everything," said an emotional Pauliuk, who had earned her living by offering trail rides and horseback rides for children.

Defence lawyer Beth Bromberg said she will refer Pauliuk to a civil lawyer to sue the SPCA in connection with the July 30, 2003, seizures of 10 Peruvian walking horses.

The judge heard the horses were seized because a SPCA inspector believed the conditions in which they were housed in a Book Road paddock were not appropriate and the animals were undernourished. The inspector also testified she saw no water and little food."