

Join the movement; help save animals

LIVING

There's a movement going on across the United States to end euthanasia and establish no-kill animal shelters that indefinitely house abandoned animals. I, for one, am thrilled. As an avid animal lover, particularly when it comes to dogs, there is no doubt in my mind that our pets are truly treasured members of our family and every animal deserves every opportunity to find a good, loving home.

A recent USA Today article stated that a growing number of animal lovers across the nation are working to eliminate the practice of euthanasia in shelters except for the animals that are terminally ill or dangerous. While conventional shelters may put strays and unclaimed pets to sleep after a few days for lack of money or space, no-kill centers house animals for adoption or send them to foster homes and pet sanctuaries for temporary housing until adoption can be achieved.

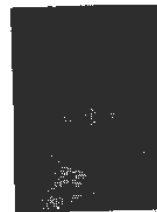
As a result, according to the article, euthanasia is down 70% from 17 million in the 1980s to fewer than 5 million today. The number of no-kill shelters has grown from about 50 in the 1980s to about 250 today — still a small fraction of the country's nearly 5,000 shelters, foster care groups and placement agencies. But, it's a start.

The problem is ... money. It takes a lot of it to house these animals and governments are between a rock and a hard place. Budgets must be cut and too many officials consider no-kill centers frivolous. In addition, civil rights groups question whether it's right to spend money on animals when people in this country are homeless.

Well, don't talk to California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger about cutting budgets unless you want a grimace from him in return. In June, he proposed saving \$14 million a year by allowing shelters to only hold strays three days rather than the current six before euthanizing them. The public outcry was so intense that he had no choice but to reverse his decision.

Since the government's hands are somewhat tied, no-kill centers tend to rely on donations, and there are some mighty powerful financial supporters out there. The largest is something called Maddie's Fund, a \$240 million foundation created in 1999 by David Duffield, founder of PeopleSoft, a Silicon Valley software company. Duffield has said he may contribute up to \$1 billion to the fund to end the practice of euthanizing adoptable cats and dogs for lack of money or space or because the animals need medical treatment or behavioral care.

The article goes on to say that Americans are more than willing to contribute to protect animals second only to gifts for international relief, which tends to attract more donations dur-



As I

see it

Peg DeMarco

ing war. Contributions to animal welfare groups have grown nearly 20 percent in recent years, six times faster than the growth in overall giving according to a survey of 3,000 of the largest

charities.

I'm glad to see communities coming together to fund no-kill animal shelters. Our own Burke County Friends for Animals, P.O. Box 1884, Morganton, NC 28655, phone: 433-1115, and Cat's Cradle, 112 Clark St., Morganton, NC 28655, phone: 433-4925, are two such worthy causes.

I don't know about you, but I want to adopt every stray I see, which of course isn't possible or practical. Since Burke County Friends for Animals and Cats Cradle rely on donations, please think about making any donation you're comfortable with. It doesn't have to be a huge one.

You can volunteer to help out or even just send a note to tell them that you care about abandoned animals as much as they do. Visit their Web site or pay a personal visit. You might choose to adopt a puppy or kitten, but please remember that taking care of a pet takes a lot of hard work and involves extra expense.

I have my own story to tell. On one snowy night last February, we found the newest addition to our family, Snow, a black Labrador puppy obviously abandoned by someone in our area and about six weeks old. She had somehow trudded up the mountain and was trembling and hungry under our front porch.

Some people don't believe in love at first sight, but I know I fell in love with Snow the moment I laid eyes on her. With no tags or collar to identify that she belonged to someone, I figured she was mine now and was determined that nothing or no one would ever hurt her again. She didn't make it to a shelter and most likely would have frozen to death or starved if fate hadn't intervened.

That's the way it is with pets. You form a bond that's as strong as iron itself.

Helpless and in need of guidance, a pet is no different from a newborn baby because they rely on us for food, shelter, medical attention and, most important of all, love. But after a stressful day at work, when nothing seems to have gone right, all I have to do is look down and spot those big brown eyes staring up at me to make me feel warm and fuzzy inside. That's usually the moment I wonder how I ever survived without her.

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