

## Editorial about Abandoned Dogs in Alaska (Mat-Su Valley)

By Lori Jo Oswald

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One is a young, brown, chocolate lab mix. The other is a golden retriever mix. Both were abandoned in the parking lot of a medical building on Bogard Road four days ago. There they starve and pant and roam from front door to back, looking for you. They don't understand why you left them. They seem to wonder if they've done something wrong. They think you must be inside the building, and desperately they try to get in. Perhaps you threw them out of your car, but the way they search door to door, over and over, makes me think you left them at one and went out the other before you drove away. They don't know this—it would be too terrible for them to comprehend—but you will never return.

They are only two of many strays abandoned in the Valley this winter. What kind of people would do this to a pet, I ask myself over and over. What values are you teaching your children by leaving your loving dog or cat to die? What values did your parents teach you? And then there are those who refuse to spay or neuter their pets, even though the SPCA has reserved a warehouse near Trunk Road to provide low-cost spay/neuter surgeries three days a week (562-2999 or 745-5082 for appointments). I see you every week at Fred Meyer's and Wal\*Mart, offering your puppies to whomever will take them. I see your advertisements and flyers: Free puppies! Free kittens! What you are doing should be considered criminal.

How can you let your pets breed when Mat-Su Borough Animal Control killed 1,039 dogs and cats in the first six months of 1999? And in 1998, they killed 2,318 of them? What ever could be your argument?

I've heard a few since moving here. "I have homes for all of them," a man at Fred Meyer's claimed. "Then why are you trying to give them away in a parking lot?" I asked. I told another man in the Wal\*Mart parking lot with a box full of lab puppies about the discounted spaying service available, and he insisted he would not spay his dog. "Plenty of people want puppies," he said.



"For every home you find, you have deprived another dog of a home," I said. "And not only that, pet overpopulation is so bad, that for every puppy or kitten born, ten more have to be killed." Plus, what kind of homes are those puppies going to? It may take months to find a good home for a pet—a home where that pet will be loved and cared for the rest of its life, not thrown out of a car in a few months. There is simply no excuse for breeding when it causes the killing of healthy, loving, needy pets. So many people think their pets are special, unique, wonderful, and therefore their offspring should be scattered about the earth. Give me an hour of

your time and I'll show you plenty of special, unique, wonderful animals about to be killed in the Mat-Su Animal Control Office.

If you're considering taking a pet home, please consider saving one who is about to be killed. Maybe two. But only if you're seriously committed to caring for that animal for the next decade or so. If you're going to drop them off on Bogard Road or some other place, don't bother putting them through the torture of being with you for even a day. You should never own a pet—never.

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And a word to Mat-Su Animal Control and the Department of Public Safety that oversees it: try to hold the stray and dumped-off pets a bit longer. Ask the community for volunteers to help walk and wash the dogs and pet the cats. Give the animals a chance—longer than three days—to find a home. Don't consider just the cost of keeping each pet; consider the individuality and love and life of the animal. True, animal controls exist mainly for one reason—to rid communities of stray, unwanted animals. And how do they rid them? Killing is one of the main ways. But let's emphasize the other: finding homes for those strays.

Several times I have sent people to you to adopt a pet, but while Anchorage Animal Control is now keeping their cages full and the pets alive two weeks or even more, Mat-Su's policy is to kill them after only a few days, often leaving many of the cages empty. Each puppy, kitten, dog, and cat left to your care deserves a chance to find a good home where it can give someone love, attention, and friendship for the rest of its life. We need to give people the time to come in and take a look and find that pet.

But I don't want to imply that the blame is with animal control. They are doing a job forced upon them by an uncaring community. A community that has people who are heartless enough to drive off and leave their own pets, their own responsibilities, on the street or in a parking lot. The best people in the Valley are those like the woman who took one of the Bogard Road dogs home tonight, to give him a long and loving life. In my book, she—and anyone who rescues a stray or adopts a shelter pet—are the greatest of heroes. They will receive no citations from the mayor, no "foster" money from the state, no congratulations from their neighbors. But they—perhaps you—are the most loving, good-hearted people, to take in the unwanted, to care for the abandoned. Their reward is the love and gratitude of a pet, which is indescribably beautiful.

If you have read this and still have no feelings about the situation of stray pets, feel that you have no room for another pet in your life, or believe your dog or cat is so special it needs to be bred and multiply, at least do me and the six animals that will be killed today at the local animal "shelter" a favor...go take a look. Drive down the Palmer-Wasilla Highway to 49th State Street and visit animal control. Take a walk through. Take a look. Really look. Open your eyes and your hearts, and try to comprehend why such loving, trusting creatures have to be killed just because you, or your neighbor, are too cheap to pay for a spay.

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