

# PET NEWS

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## **Pet Emergency: Where to Go in the Valley**

Although unlike Anchorage, the Valley does not have a pet emergency clinic, local veterinarians have joined together to provide this service to area residents and their pets. Here is the information you need in case of a pet emergency:

Palmer Vet Clinic (745-3219), Wasilla Vet Clinic (376-3993), and All Creatures Vet Clinic (376-7930) share emergency duty to provide 365 day/24-7 emergency care for Valley emergency needs. Veterinarians take turns handling the emergency hours.

**Emergency Services:** Big Lake Veterinary Hospital provides 24-hour, 7-days-a-week emergency service at our facility. Individuals who have pets that need emergency treatment should call the regular hospital number (892-9292).

## **Microchipping: A New Technique for Locating Lost Pets**

Microchipping has come to the Valley.

The wonders of technology have finally reached the dog and cat world; in fact, it reaches right under their skin.

Microchips are injected simply and quickly under a pet's skin, according to Dr. Marion Varnam of All Creatures Veterinary Clinic. Each microchip "is a permanent form of identification which cannot be lost, altered or unintentionally removed," said Varnam. "It contains a unique number that can be scanned by a radio signal and then be used to reunite your pet directly with you."

About the size of a grain of rice, microchips are inserted under the pet's skin with a needle and can then be read with the use of scanners, which Valley veterinarians and animal control have. Pet owners can list their pets with a national registry in case they are moving or traveling with their pets.

"Many dogs are getting chipped," said Dr. Hilary Petit of Wasilla Veterinary Clinic. "It's a permanent ID. Dogs can lose their collar or tags, but tattoos or chips are permanent. We've had a couple dogs brought in recently that we've checked, and they were chipped." The dogs were returned to their owners.

Pet owners can check with their veterinarians or with animal control to get their dogs "chipped."

## **The Art of the Litter Box**

By Lori Jo Oswald

If your cat is "missing" his litter box, there might be a medical problem. Have your veterinarian check him for urinary tract disorders and other ailments.

But often, the litter box problem is a simple one to fix.

The first thing to remember is that cats are very clean, and they like clean places. Some won't use a dirty litter box. Simply change the litter box at least once a week—don't simply "scoop" (although fussy cats will want you to scoop out any waste daily). Rinse out the box. Replace newspapers or the liner underneath the litter. But most importantly, use fresh clean new litter. Often.

If you have a kitten that was taken away from her mother too early, she might not have learned how to use a litter box, so you'll have to teach her, though this is very rare. Put her in the box about 15 minutes after she eats. Praise and reward her after she's done. You can also gently show her how to cover the waste with her front paws.

Make sure the box is easy to reach, yet private. If you have a large house or more than one cat, you may need to provide two litter boxes.

You might need to try moving the location of your current box and covering a favorite off-limits spot with foil or plastic wrap, according to Purina, or consider changing the litter brand to one your cat seems to prefer.

## Allergic to Cats? What to Do

By Lori Jo Oswald

We've all heard of it—people who are told they are allergic to pets and so dispose of them in one way or another. But is it necessary? Perhaps your physician doesn't understand that your cat is a member of your family. Getting rid of pets "should be considered only as a last resort if other treatment methods fail," said Dr. Aaron Katcher.

It may be as simple as bathing your cat once a month. Researchers at the University of Washington School of Medicine found that after 8 months of soapless baths, "most of the cats were producing virtually no allergens." Cleaning furniture, rugs, and bedding also helps. If your cat gives you trouble during bathing, use a professional groomer. But keep up the monthly baths to keep allergens down.

Other tips:

- ✓ Insist on thorough testing—more than just a "scratch test."
- ✓ Buy a high-quality air purifier.
- ✓ Reduce mold around the house. People who are allergic to pets (actually pet dander, not the pets themselves) may also be allergic to dust, pollen, grasses, molds, air pollutants, perfumes, smoke, and even certain foods.
- ✓ Keep your house clean of dander, fur, and dust. Wet-dust rooms twice daily, and use a damp mop with a disinfectant on floors to prevent mold spore growth. Vacuum daily while airing out each room.
- ✓ Give your pet a little vegetable oil to lesson the dryness of the skin (about a tablespoon weekly).
- ✓ Groom your pet daily.
- ✓ Use a low-dust cat litter.

More good news: People often build up a resistance to their own pets, Katcher said. Tell your doctor your cat is a part of your family and that you want to try methods other than eliminating him or her. Be firm, and ask for recommendations.

All Creatures Veterinary Clinic's Dr. Marion Varman said that "a lot depends on how sick people become from cats. But if it's a mild sort of thing, you can take antihistamines, vacuum frequently, or use products such as Low-Shed to reduce the amount of shedding." Varman agreed that bathing cats can

be very effective, but she suggests even more frequent baths than once a month, if you and your cat can tolerate it, and using distilled water. It might be necessary to keep your cats from a confined area, such as a bedroom, if your allergies are severe.

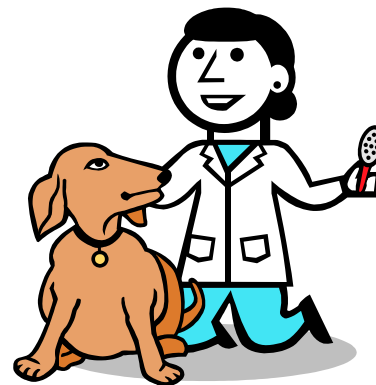
## A Valley Dog Groomer Offers to Tips for Fluffing Fluffy

By Lori Jo Oswald

At the bottom of the list of things to do in a day. That's how Tony Salomone describes the way most people seem to feel about brushing their dogs. Salomone, owner of the Soapy Dog, a self-service dog wash and full-service grooming shop located on the Palmer-Wasilla Highway, said, "The biggest thing I see here is that people need to keep their dogs brushed."

Longer-haired breeds especially need good, regular brushing, Salomone says, because "once they get matted, they can get skin irritations and infections."

Another thing he recommends is that pet owners visit their veterinarians regularly. "I see a lot of things on dogs – lumps and bumps." Sometimes those might be serious, such as tumors. When people groom their own dogs, they would see those problems themselves earlier on, Salomone said.



Perhaps even more important is the joy of grooming, for both the pet and its owner. "It's just a good bonding thing with your pet, and it keeps him healthy and his coat in good shape."

Salomone also recommends introducing puppies to as many experiences and noises as possible, including grooming. "The more stuff he's exposed to, the less traumatic it is for him. Get him used to the grooming process early on. Just sit him down and brush him." Puppies used to loud noises and more experiences are more likely to handle them calmly later on.

What about shaving long-haired dogs? Salomone says he gets this request quite frequently in the summer, but he encourages people to have their pets' coats trimmed and brushed instead because

the hair insulates and protects their skin from the hot sun. "This is where brushing comes in. Especially in the summer, a ton of undercoat will come out" with a good brushing, he said.

Scheduling a professional grooming every 4 to 16 weeks, depending on the breed of dog you have, is a good idea. Contact one of the Valley pet groomers for more information.

## A Puppy's Point of View on Housebreaking

By Kerri Lynch

*Kerri Lynch, who shares her life with Starbuck, a Doberman the size of Mt. McKinley, sends us this wonderful story that provides lots of terrific dog training tips. Pass it along to those who are getting a puppy. They will thank you!*

I am an 11-week-old puppy, and today I will be going to my new home. After a bath and a lot of brushing and fussing, my breeders have agreed that I am ready. They had a hard time with me when they turned on the hair dryer; that noise scared me to death until I learned it would not hurt me.

My breeders spent a long time telling my new owners about me when they picked me up. They were told to hold and pet me, and reassure me, to keep me calm during the trip home.

They were also given housebreaking instructions to "potty train" me. I was a little concerned when the lady picked me up, because she was a stranger. But she was very nice, and I relaxed and licked her face to tell her I liked her.

Then they took me to the station wagon. It looked scary. My new mistress decided she didn't want any hairs on her clothes, so she put me in back. The back was a strange place with many different odors, and I was busy sniffing when I heard a roar that made me jump. It reminded me of those unpleasant trips to the veterinarian when I was vaccinated.

I was not comfortable enough to lie down, so I stayed standing while the car moved. The swaying and stops and starts made my tummy uncomfortable. I started vomiting. I felt bad, but I was also scared. I didn't understand what was happening. And I still couldn't find a safe spot to lie down. After a while, I relieved myself in the corner. The people stopped and were talking loudly as they cleaned the rug.

"We should have followed the breeder's advice and held the pup all the way home," the man said. After that, the woman held me on her lap, and there were no more surprises.

When we arrived, they brought me into the house to show me off to their children. Of course, that was a mistake, because the breeders had told them to put me outside until I relieved myself so they could praise me and get the idea of housebreaking across to me.

The kids and I had a good time running around the house playing. I had the urge again and relieved myself in the middle of the living room. A few minutes later the lady noticed it and yelled, "Bad dog!" She picked me up and took me outside. I did not understand. I had forgotten what I had done a few minutes earlier. After all, I am just a baby.



The lady left me in the backyard for a long time while she read the housebreaking instructions. When I got bored I went to the door, but when they ignored me, I barked and barked until they let me in.

They gave me some food, but I was too nervous to eat. I really didn't know these people who yelled so much, and I really wanted to go home to my mother and brothers and sisters. I was thirsty after all that panting from the excitement and the playing, though.

After the lady saw me drink she put me outside. I played with the kids, and after a half an hour the lady got bored and went inside. I stayed outside, played and wet and explored the grounds until I got tired. I went to the door, barked and was quickly let in. Thank goodness I taught them to open the door when I barked. Maybe that would work for other things.

A short time later I needed to go again. I had learned that I'd better not go on the living room carpet, so when nobody was looking, I went to relieve myself. Later when I was playing in the kitchen, I heard the lady call her husband to come and see the mess. She picked me up, showed me what I had done, and called me a bad boy. As she put me out, I wondered why she was so mad; I

didn't remember doing anything bad. I heard her husband tell her, "The instructions say to block the pup in the area where you are going to be so you can watch him and put him out in time."

This time she went outside and watched me. While I was walking around sniffing I decided that I would mark this area to remind me and others that it was mine. As soon as I wet, she came running over and pet me, calling me a good boy. I could not understand why she was so excited because just a little while ago she had been angry. Who can understand humans? Maybe she only wanted me to wet outside? Could that be it?

The rest of the afternoon was just fine. They kept me in an area that was blocked off so they could watch me, and every time I started to look for a spot, they took me outside. When I relieved myself outside, they praised me and loved me.

When it was 5 p.m., they took away my food and water. That night, just before going to bed, they put me outside. They decided that I should stay in the bathroom at night. I hated it all by myself, and I wanted company. I started barking and howling to make sure they heard me.

Apparently the howling worked, because they decided that the breeder's housebreaking instructions were right. They took me to their bedroom and put down an old comforter for me to sleep on right next to them, so that when I began to get restless and sniff around, they knew to take me outside and to stay with me and praise me when I finished.

Now that I have learned that she wants me to relieve myself outside, I will try to let her know so

she can put me out when I have to go. I hope my story will help other puppies and their owners get started on the right paw.

To help remind new owners, here is a summary of housebreaking instructions:

- ✓ If you take the pup home in the car, a second person should hold him to keep him calm and to avoid motion sickness. A pup left on his own may also get nervous and relieve himself.
- ✓ Put the pup outside after meals and wait for him to relieve himself. Don't get up and leave, or you will miss a chance to praise and shorten the housebreaking period.
- ✓ Praise the pup several times after he relieves himself outside, saying "Good dog."
- ✓ Remove water and food by 5 p.m.
- ✓ Put the pup outside just before bedtime.
- ✓ Keep the pup next to you, either tied near the end of the bed, on the bed, or in a crate. Dogs do not relieve themselves where they sleep. This is the only time I recommend tying a dog.
- ✓ If you followed all the instructions and the pup wakes up at 1 a.m., reassure him and he should go back to sleep. But if he persists, take him outside.

If you find the pup had an accident and you did not see him do it, forget it. He will have forgotten it already and you will only scare him.

## DOG INCONTINENCE: VETERINARIAN ROUNDTABLE

By Lori Jo Oswald

**READER'S QUESTION OF THE MONTH:** *I have read with interest your first two newsletters. I, too, am dealing with a beloved dog about 15, who is having "bathroom" problems in the house. It is just old age catching up with her. My carpet is pretty stained. I always took good care of it until now. It is heartbreaking to watch a pet age, wondering how many days are left in our relationship. My dog had to be put in the garage while I am at work (winter only); I can no longer leave her alone in the house for an extended period of time. I drive home for lunch every day to visit and encourage her to eat and relieve herself outside, but I have to clean up a lot of accidents in the garage because as they age they just cannot hold it in. It's back to the paper, but she doesn't always go on the paper. I wonder if other dog owners have experimented with diapers. Have you heard any advice? Maybe pet lovers will write in with their experiences. I don't know how I will survive the pain of losing her.*

**ALASKA PET NEWS RESPONDS:** Thank you for being so caring about your dog. We have been researching your problem and have sent your question to Anchorage veterinarians and dog trainers. We are also printing

your question in case any of readers have some suggestions. In the meantime, here is some information we found on a web page, responses from veterinarians, and a response from a member of a dog chat line.

**FROM THE INTERNET:** "The most common occurrence of incontinence is in the older spayed bitch. Most often this is due to a hormonal imbalance and as such is easily treated by one of two drugs. The traditional way is with doses of DES (estrogen). Typically, the dosage is varied until the incontinence stops, and often the dosage can be later reduced altogether. Another method of treatment is with phenylpropanolamine (PPA, brand name Dexatrim) which tightens all the muscles. DES replaces the hormones, restoring the hormonal balance. PPA works independently of the hormones and as such, may introduce new problems. Both drugs are known to cause problems and side effects, although typically, the level of dosage that DES is administered at for incontinence will not cause problems. At high dosages, DES is thought to be linked with breast cancer and obesity. Since PPA tightens all muscles in the body, it can potentially cause serious side effects, especially with the heart. There is speculation that PPA is often prescribed at dosages too high for dogs. In humans, PPA is not advised when thyroid levels are low; this might also be a problem with dogs. Which drug is safer for your particular spayed bitch depends on the particular dog and her particular veterinary history. What's best for one dog might be bad for another, depending on what other veterinary conditions or susceptibilities she has."

**FROM A VETERINARIAN:** Thanks for your question regarding the 15-year-old female dog having urine accidents. As people are taking better care of their pets with regular veterinary care and good nutrition, pets are living longer. Therefore, we are beginning to see more geriatric problems. The first thing I would recommend for this old girl is a thorough exam at her vet's. Her veterinarian will also take a history (background information) of the problem. With most urinary problems I suggest having a urine analysis done to rule out kidney problems, infection, diabetes and other problems. Other labwork might be indicated from the physical exam findings. Sometimes older pets that are arthritic have a hard time getting up to get outside in time.

If the history, exam, and labwork correspond with a diagnosis of incontinence, I discuss treatment options with the owner. As you mentioned in the newsletter, there are two medications commonly used. DES, the estrogen supplement, and phenylpropanolamine. I have used both with success. I discuss possible side effects of each medication and if any follow up labwork is needed (for instance, I recommend monitoring dogs blood counts yearly if they stay on DES). I haven't had any experience with diapers for dogs, other than the little pads that folks sometimes use for dogs that are in heat. I hope this information will get the owner pointed in the right direction. It sounds like she loves her old girl very much, but urine and stool accidents can be very frustrating for both the owner and the pet.--Lorelei Lamere, Veterinary House Call Services of Eagle River

**FROM A VETERINARIAN:** First she should have a urinalysis to check for urinary tract infection. UTI is the most likely cause or related factor. Hormone-related incontinence is the next rule out. I usually just send home a test Rx of estrogen. Another possibility is low thyroid. Older dogs with low thyroid often appear senile, spaced out or fearful. Correcting a low thyroid can at least help or improve the incontinence.--Dr. Thomas, Chester Valley Veterinary Hospital

**FROM A DOG CHATLINE:** Have you had the old girl to the vet lately? Is it a lot of #1 or #2? If it's #1 the diapers will work; just cut out for her tail. Make sure she doesn't have an infection. Is she drinking more? Does the urine smell strong? Diapers and #2 can be messy if she's got loose stool. Try using a crate; she won't have the freedom to move around as much and won't need to go as often. Watching your pet get to the stage that your old girl is at is very hard, but the time you've had together will always be with you. With our pets we have the choice to relieve them of their pain. When she gives you that look of how sorry she is that she made the mess and she tries so hard to please you but doesn't have the strength to do so. It's never easy but you'll know in your heart when that time has come. Because she's lived such a great life and it hurts you more to see her in such condition. It's not going to be easy but you'll get through it and then you'll find a new bud. New buds never replace the old ones but they tend to ease the pain and the loneliness caused by the other's departure. Good luck and God bless.—Jo



## Should You Spay or Neuter Your Pet?

By Lori Jo Oswald

The answer is simple: yes.

Why? Because **dogs and cats are killed every day in animal shelters around the country because there are too many of them.** The number of dogs and cats killed annually in the U.S. is estimated to be about 4 to 7 million. (Spay programs are having an effect: 20 years ago the estimates were 13 to 20 million. In the late 1970s, Anchorage was euthanizing almost 10,000 pets a year at the Animal Control Center in 2000 – 2,725 adoptable pets were killed).

It is one of the great tragedies in our country—barely mentioned, rarely thought of.

If you doubt it, go to the shelter. Look into the eyes of those who will be killed.

Recently, a sheriff whose office took over animal control duties shocked his community by showing pets being euthanized on television. I applaud him. People who want their pets to breed should first observe a euthanasia session at the local animal shelter. If the Mat-Su Borough Animal Control shelter aired the killing of dogs and cats on television, perhaps we would be the first borough without pet overpopulation. And wouldn't that be a wonderful thing?

2,725 adoptable pets were killed at the Anchorage Animal Control Center in 2000

I first began volunteering for humane societies in 1977, when I was still in high school, because Anchorage's Channel 7 aired a program on the local animal control situation. At the end of the program, the camera silently showed the slow deaths of a dog and a puppy in a decompression chamber (which has since been outlawed in Alaska as a method of euthanasia). It was shocking, cruel, horrible. And it was the best thing for the community to see. At that moment I knew that the only puppies or kittens I would have in my life would be ones I had rescued. My pets would not breed.

What about just one litter? The Humane Society of the U.S. said, "It's hard to imagine that letting your pet have one—or even two—litters causes a problem, especially if you find homes for most of your pet's puppies or kittens. **But the fact is that 'just one litter' does cause pet overpopulation.** In less than a year, all of the little ones in your pet's litter could be having litters of their own. Every day, thousands of healthy puppies and kittens must be euthanized—and each one of those thousands came from 'just one litter'.

Spaying and neutering won't harm your pet; your pet will still be the same—only perhaps less inclined to run away or fight. And most importantly, **you will be doing the right thing.**

### Spay and Neuter: Excuses, Myths, and Facts

By Lori Jo Oswald

I am one of those lucky people to be surrounded by pets—dogs, cats, and horses. My dogs and cats have gone up and down the Alcan with me several times.

All of my pets have been rescues, and my dogs and cats are always spayed and neutered. Once I experienced the "joy" of a cat in heat, and another time a dog in heat. I can only describe it as suffering for all concerned, especially them. My dog was in a frantic panic to run away; my cat was yowling in misery for over a week until I gave up and had her spayed during her heat cycle instead of waiting it out.

To help explain what spaying and neutering are, and what they are not, I asked the Humane Society of the U.S. and a local veterinarian. Basically, as HSUS explains, spaying means the removal of the reproductive organs of dogs and cats. Male dogs and cats are neutered by removing their testicles. "In both cases, the operation is performed while the pet is under anesthesia. Your pet usually goes home the same day as the procedure."

Dr. Marion Varman of All Creatures Veterinary Clinic said that it's not always intentional that people let their pets breed. "A lot of people don't think far enough in the future about it until it's too late." In particular, she notices that male dogs aren't neutered as often as female dogs are spayed because pet owners don't see the results – i.e., puppies – from their males' roaming. But the males are definitely contributing to the overpopulation problem.

Following are the myths HSUS commonly sees, as well as comments by both HSUS (in italics) and Dr. Varman.

- ✓ *"My pet will get fat and lazy."* The truth is that most pets get fat and lazy because their owners feed them too much and don't give them enough exercise.
- ✓ *"It's better to have one litter first."* Medical evidence indicates just the opposite. In fact, the evidence shows that females spayed before their first heat are typically healthier. Many veterinarians now sterilize dogs and cats as young as 8 weeks of age.

Dr. Varman said along with thinking their pet should experience having a litter, a lot of people believe pets need to go through one heat cycle before being spayed. Actually, she said, **"it's a lot better for female dogs not to go through the heat cycle"**. Female dogs can have mammary tumors, and if spayed before first heat cycle, the risk is reduced by almost 100 percent." Spaying also **"eliminates the possibility of uterine or ovarian cancer"** in pets, HSUS said.

As for male dogs, neutering reduces some forms of cancer, but the greatest advantage is in the reduction of prostate problems. "Older male dogs who haven't been neutered can be prone to bad prostate infections and disease," Varman said. "We see a lot of that."

- ✓ *"But my pet is purebred."* So is at least one out of every four pets brought to animal shelters around the country. There are just too many dogs and cats—mixed breed and purebred.
- ✓ *"I want my dog to be protective."* Spaying or neutering does not affect a dog's natural instinct to protect home and family. A dog's personality is formed more by genetics and environment than by sex hormones.

A lot of the characteristics that you like in your dog, Dr. Varman said, are going to be there whether he is neutered or not. She said some clients have expressed concern that their sled dogs won't want to pull if they are neutered. She responds, "They pull because they like to pull, not because they aren't neutered." Other pet owners fear their dogs won't be as protective as they were before neutering. "That's not true either," Dr. Varman said. If they are protective dogs already, they will continue to be after neutering. Neutering does not change their personalities. What it will do is help cut down on certain problem behaviors related to testosterone, particularly when around females in heat, such as roaming and aggression against other dogs. Neutered male dogs are much less likely to get into dog fights.

- ✓ *"I don't want my male dog or cat to feel like less of a male."* Pets don't have any concept of sexual identity or ego. Neutering will not change a pet's basic personality. He doesn't suffer any kind of emotional reaction or identity crisis when neutered.

My own experience with this is that I have seen absolutely no change in personality in my pets after they were neutered. Buddy was still Buddy; Woody was still Woody. And of course the same goes for spayed females.

Dr. Varman said, "As far as with cats, unneutered male cats will usually start spraying to mark their territory. The sooner you have them neutered the better." Neutering has a "very high success rate," she said, in ending the spraying problem.

- ✓ *"It's too expensive to have my pet spayed or neutered."* Spay or neuter surgery is a one-time small cost when compared to all the benefits. It's a bargain compared to the cost of having a litter and ensuring the health of the mother and litter; 2 months of pregnancy and another 2 months until the litter is weaned can add up to significant veterinary bills and food costs if complications develop. Most importantly, it's a very small price to pay for the health of your pet and the prevention of the births of more unwanted pets.

Dr. Varman said some people want to spay or neuter their pets, "but they are letting the money issue affect them." She mentions that there are plenty of low-cost options in the Valley for those in need, including the SPCA mobile spay clinic. "It's not that difficult to budget the money." Also, although it may be fun to have puppies and kittens around – well, at least kittens, since they are less work than puppies, Dr. Varman said, "but what about when it doesn't go fine? What if the mother has a hard time giving birth? A caesarean can cost \$400 or \$500 on up." Considering the food, vaccinations, and advertising costs for those litters can also help a pet owner determine whether it would be less expensive to spay.

- ✓ *"I'll find good homes for all the puppies and kittens."* You may find homes for all of your pet's litter. But each home you find means one less home for the dogs and cats in shelters who need good homes. Also, in less than 1 year's time, each of your pet's offspring may have his/her own litter, adding even more animals to the population. The problem of pet overpopulation is created and perpetuated one litter at a time.

What I tell people who say they have homes for all the potential puppies or kittens is that they should then go to the animal shelter and adopt a litter instead of having their dog or cat bred. Then they can save lives and give the shelter pets to those wonderful homes, instead.

Most of the Valley residents she has met are actually quite responsible about spaying and neutering their pets, Dr. Varman said, and it only seems to be getting better. "For a lot of people, pets are more like family members."

### Tips on Placing Animals

By Lori Jo Oswald

Humane society and animal control employees followed the following guidelines for those trying to find good homes for pets.

1. Have you ever had a cat or dog before? If so, what happened to it?
2. Do you plan to have the animal spayed or neutered? (If they say no, don't place the animal with them because of pet overpopulation.)
3. In the case of a dog, ask if they have a fenced yard. **If no fenced yard, do not place the animal.**
4. Be careful when placing an animal with people in the military; if they are transferred, they may not take their pets with them.
5. **Always find out if they have very small children.** Never give a pet to people who are just getting the pet for their children. Too often an animal that is just for the children is not taken care of by the children, and is resented by the adults.
6. Cats should never be placed with people who just want them as mousers.
7. Make sure no family member objects to a new pet. Resentment may cause mistreatment of the pet.
8. Cats and kittens should always be taken to a new home in a carrier.
9. **ALWAYS** get the name, address, and phone number of anyone who adopts a pet from you. Check up to see that the pet is okay.
10. **Find out whether the pet will be a lifetime commitment and allowed indoors.** I never adopt to those who have abandoned a pet at the pound, or had a pet euthanized because they didn't want to care for it long term. It is also unfair to leave a pet outside all the time.

11. **Will the pet be a part of the family?** You can ask many questions to determine this. Do the potential owners understand the expense and time involved in owning and training a pet?
12. Have the adopter pay an adoption fee to cover spaying/neutering and shots, and then **make sure these are done!**
13. Have them sign a contract stating that they will return the pet to you if they decide not to keep it.

### Rentals and Pets

By Lori Jo Oswald

E-mail [petnews@alaska.net](mailto:petnews@alaska.net) for reprint requests

**Editor's note:** I remember when I moved to Oregon to graduate school and had to live in my car with my two big dogs, Bob and Dane, and my cat, Emily, for several weeks while I tried to find a rental. Fortunately, I finally did find one that allowed pets. After 2 years as her tenant, as I was moving, she handed me back my "nonrefundable" pet deposits, telling me that me and my pets had been the best tenants she'd ever had, and the house and yard looked better than it had when I moved in. But even with that wonderful experience, I was to find over and over how difficult it is to find a rental that allows pets, especially when I had added three stray cats to my "family." Many of us pet owners have struggled with finding rentals that allow pets. We hope these two articles help provide you and potential landlords with tips that will guide you in your search for a home. It seems the worst, most unnecessary reason for abandoning pets at the "pound" is "Moving. Landlord won't allow pets." Somehow, even if it required living in the car for a few weeks at a time, I have always eventually found a rental. If you have additional ideas or experiences for this article, please send them to the Alaska Pet News for future publication.

More and more landlords are enforcing a "No Pets" policy when faced with renting to pet owners. The Peninsula Humane Society of San Mateo offers the



following suggestions on ways renters with pets can approach the problem of a “No Pets” policy:

- **BE HONEST** with the landlord! The landlord will find out that you have a “secret” pet, or that you have three cats instead of one.
- When seeking a new place to rent, discuss your pet with the rental agent or landlord. Landlords are more likely to rent to a pet owner who can prove that the animal has been spayed or neutered, is housebroken, or is small enough to fit into apartment life happily. Another factor that will work in your favor is if someone is home during the day to care for the animal.
- Ask the landlord if you may introduce him or her to your pet. A well-behaved pet may be able to convince the landlord when all talk fails.
- If you have rented with your pet before, produce letters from your previous landlord indicating that you did act responsibly with your pet.
- Offer to negotiate an addendum to the rental agreement or lease, indicating exactly what your landlord will expect of you and your pet, and agree in writing to pay a specified additional security deposit to cover the cost of any pet-related damages.
- Offer to accept a short-term trial rental period, during which the landlord can see if you and your pet will be acceptable long-term tenants.
- If the landlord agrees to rent to you and your pet, be sure to get all the specifics down in writing. Anyone can have a change of heart, so make sure that a landlord’s change of heart does not result in an unplanned change of residence for you!
- If you decide to adopt a pet while renting, discuss it with your landlord first. If your landlord says “No” to a dog, he or she may say “Yes” to a cat.
- If you find a landlord who will accept you and your pet, the most important responsibility you have next to the loving care of your pet is to set an excellent example to your landlord. Do not allow your pet to damage the rental in any way. Keep your dog from barking and keep your cat from roaming. If your pet causes any property damage, tell your landlord

immediately. Pay for the damage and make all arrangements to repair it.

- Remember, only the responsible pet owner can turn the tide in favor of a “Welcome Pets” rental policy.

## **Checklist for Landlords for Screening Pet Owning Tenants**

By Peninsula Humane Society, San Mateo, CA

The potential tenant who answers yes to all these questions should be a perfect pet owner, says the Peninsula Humane Society. And a responsible pet owner will almost certainly make a responsible tenant. These questions are offered to help guide you in opening up your rentals—and hearts—to pet owners.

- **Is the pet spayed or neutered?** (A spayed or neutered pet is less likely to wander, fight, spray, attract other animals, or create a nuisance.)
- **Is the pet housebroken?** (For cats this is no problem but dogs need to be housebroken and the owner should take the dogs for walks or arrange for a friend or neighbor to do so.)
- **Does the pet have all its current shots?** (A pet owner who keeps a pet updated on shots ranks high as a responsible pet owner.)
- **Has the pet owner rented with a pet before?** (Ask to see a letter of recommendation from or call the previous landlord.)
- **Does the owner travel a lot?** (If the pet owner plans to be out of town find out how the pet will be provided for during his/her absence.)
- **Does the pet owner have a regular veterinarian?** (This shows responsible ownership, and you can call the veterinarian for a recommendation.)
- **Is the pet owner willing to pay an additional pet deposit?** (A responsible pet owner will be willing to do so because he/she knows the pet won’t cause any damage.)
- **If the pet is a dog, is it trained?** (You can ask to meet the pet in person and observe how it responds to commands.)
- **How old is the pet?** (A 10-year-old pooch or 12-year-old kitty will be no trouble at

all—in fact, it will probably spend most of its time sleeping.)

- **Does the dog owner have a “pooper scooper”?** (Responsible dog owners clean up after their dogs.)
- **Does the dog have a current license tag?** (Obeying the law is another positive sign of a responsible pet owner.)

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

By Lori Jo Oswald

Published in The Frontiersman in 2001

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.

**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.**

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 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.

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.

## Truck Beds Are for Cargo, Not Collies

By Lori Jo Oswald

Palmer resident Gregory Drummond was driving east on 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue in Anchorage on the way home one afternoon. As the traffic stopped at a red light, he saw a dog leap out of the pickup truck in front of him. “The light turned green, the driver drove on, and the dog disappeared in the heavy traffic,” Drummond recalled.

An estimated 100,000 dogs die every year in the U.S. from falling out of pickup trucks, according to the American Humane Association. According to E. Nakashima in Good Housekeeping, “In a recent survey, 71% of veterinarians reported treating dogs for injuries sustained by falling or jumping from cargo areas of pickup trucks. This percentage does not take into account countless dogs that were killed and not treated.”

The problem seems to be especially predominant in the Mat-Su. Valley veterinarian Marion Varman said, “We once, while driving, saw a dog in the back of a truck, and said, ‘That’s an accident waiting to happen,’ and sure enough, the driver slammed on his brakes, and the dog went tumbling out of the truck.” Another time while driving in the Valley, she saw a dog that had fallen out of a truck and had died. At All Creatures Veterinary Clinic, Varman has seen several dogs brought in because of injuries sustained from falling out of trucks. “I once saw a puppy only 3 or 4 months old. Luckily, he survived.” But many don’t.

Another problem is eye injury, which can “seriously irritate mucous membranes,” AHA said. Pieces of grit can lodge in a dog’s eye and even cause permanent eye damage.

Weather becomes another problem for a dog in an open pickup bed. “Rain, snow, and freezing temperatures are obvious problems, but even warm days have their dangers,” AHA said. “Hot sun can heat the metal floor of a truck bed high enough to burn a pet’s paw pads.” Dogs are highly susceptible to heat stroke, too.

Then there’s the liability issue, the store and your dog happens to



Varman said. “What if you’re parked at bite someone who walks by the truck?”

The solution is simple: let your dog ride inside your truck cab or leave him at home. If your dog has to ride in back, then put him in a crate that is secured to the walls of the truck bed. Chaining or tying a dog in a truck bed is not recommended because of the obvious danger of hanging or choking.

## Introducing Your Baby and Pets

By Lori Jo Oswald

"Baby coming -- must get rid of pet." This is the reason sometimes given by people who leave pets at the animal control shelter.

Most people who bring a baby home to a house with pets don't have any problems. In fact, a child and a pet can create their own special bond that lasts through the life of the pet. Here are some tips to help make sure that bond is strong from the moment you bring your infant home from the hospital.

Before your baby arrives, you can prepare your pets, said Jennifer Cameron.

- ✓ If your dogs or cats have not been around children before, have your friends with children come by for brief visits to help your pets adjust to the sounds and activities of children.
- ✓ Let your pets investigate the baby's nursery.
- ✓ Before you bring your baby home from the hospital, bring a blanket that has the baby's smell on it home for the pets to investigate. "Leave this blanket around so your pet can adjust to the baby's scent," Cameron said.
- ✓ Now might be a good time to take your pets to a veterinarian for their health check-up, to be sure vaccinations are up to date and to see if your pet is free of parasites.

On the big day, feed and exercise your pet before bringing home your baby. When you come in the door, both you and your spouse should greet the pet. Slowly introduce the pet. "Do not panic or pull the baby away when your pet approaches," Cameron advised. "You could be sending the message that the baby is a threat. Keep this initial greeting short, then try to go on with normal activities."

Even though your life has changed now, try to spend some time with your pet, playing and walking. "This will reassure your pet that they have not been 'replaced' in the household," Cameron said. If you just don't have time, hire a dog-walker or pet-sitter to come help out.

Recognize that the pet has been with you longer, and that the baby represents a change, advises Dr. Hilary Petit of Wasilla Veterinary Clinic. "So the animal has to make an adjustment. Help the animal make the adjustment by not displacing them too much. If you can, include them in supervised interaction with the new infant so that they don't feel pushed out of the home. It is good to supervise them until they are comfortable."

Once your child starts crawling and walking, watch that she doesn't inadvertently hurt the animal through falling or grabbing. "A number of small animals are injured that way," Dr. Petit said. "It's nobody's fault; it's a complete accident. Parents need to supervise more closely."

If you see any signs of aggression or other behavioral problems, talk with your veterinarian or a dog trainer about the best ways to handle this. Dr. Petit said, "The child could be near the dog's dish or toys, and the dog could view that as a challenge. Some dogs will never act like that and some will." If you know that your dog has behavioral problems, work with the dog before bringing the baby home. Dr. Petit recommends using a baby doll to show the dog that "when I'm holding this baby, you have to sit," for example. "Then the dog can understand what is asked of them."

From the beginning, teach children to be kind to the family pets. "Praise your children for kind and gentle treatment of the pet," Cameron said. "Correct them immediately for rough or inappropriate behavior. Do not allow your child to play with the pet while it is trying to eat or sleep." The American Animal Hospital Association says that to teach children to respect animals, "They should know that pets feel pain and get lonely when no one is around -- just like people do. Praise your children for gentleness and correct them for rough and unkind behaviors toward your pets. Children should also learn that dogs naturally chase, herd, catch, and fetch. Playfully grabbing a tail or running in the yard may be a dog's invitation to chase and jump-a very natural response for a dog." Dr. Petit agrees. "Things that stumble, cry and run might encourage the dog's instinctive desire to chase."

Finally, remember, in many instances, your pets were your "babies" first, Cameron said. Let them share in this wonderful change to your family.



## Whose Crib Is That? Cats and Babies Can Get Along Fine

By Lori Jo Oswald

Even an animal professional can be confused by the myths about children and pets, particularly when it comes to cats. A friend told me he took his cat to the vet recently, and the vet told him that because he had cats and a baby in the house, the baby was in danger.



Where does this fear about cats and babies come from? I certainly don't see any problems in my house, where I have four cats -- and four dogs -- and a 10-month-old son who is fascinated by them and loves to pet them.

"You're more likely to have damage done by a dog," Dr. Hilary Petit of Wasilla Veterinary Clinic said. But she too says that the "legend" that cats will suck the breath out of a baby's mouth has some people frightened. Perhaps a baby died of crib death a long time ago, and a cat was in the crib. Who knows where such stories begin? What is a concern is when people feel they have to abandon their pets because of such myths.

"Cats love warmth," Dr. Petit said, "and babies are often in a warm, snuggly bed. It's very common for cats to lie on top of people because they are warm. Also, cats are furry and long-coated." In addition, newborn babies are usually not as heavy as cats or coordinated enough to push a cat off or away, so if you're concerned about that, "just don't let the cats sleep in the cradle with the baby," Dr. Petit said, although she knows people who have.

When I mentioned what the veterinarian told my friend, Dr. Petit said that cats are territorial to a degree, and they may have some conflict with another cat, but not with humans.

What parents should keep in mind is that "cats are well-armed; they scratch and bite," Dr. Petit said. "Parents need to be vigilant and teach the children not to pull their tails, squeeze, them, lay on them, or whack them. Teach children how to pet nicely," she advised."

There's certainly a happy ending to my story. Clover, Bibs, and Sylvia, the cats I've had for 14 years, who had no experience with babies before, have all accepted Winston just fine, although Clover was a little surprised that the warm, soft crib was for him, not her. Now if only they could learn to get along with each other as well as they have with my baby.

## Jerry Springer, Snoring Dogs, and Title 17 Revisions

Editorial by Lori Jo Oswald

It is one of those late nights when I have too much to do to sleep but am too tired to function. I am lying in bed, watching Seinfeld and Cheers and CNN and whatever else I can flip to. It's a bad habit--this late night cable flipping--useless and wasteful and not something I will look back on with pride when I'm on my death bed.

But still...I flip...trying to lure myself to sleep with sounds of people talking. The single person's substitute for family.

Suddenly, there he is. Jerry Springer. The downfall of society. The base--the banal. And something worse.

Tonight it's a large young woman shocked by the discovery that her husband is a gay cross-dresser. His lover comes out and kisses her husband and screams at her. She knocks her husband's wig to the floor, then commits the one sin Jerry can't allow--she leaves the stage. "Upset" is too shallow of a word to describe her. The

audience, Jerry, the husband, the lover...none of them care about her feelings. The TV. is loud with cheering and laughter and shouting and cries of "Jerry! Jerry! Jerry!"

My eyes drop down to the three large furry bodies on my bed, and I turn off the TV.

Then I look at them, pet them, talk to them. They are my dogs, and they make so much more sense than anything I've seen on TV.--ever.

There is such a purity about them, such a kindness, such an overwhelming gift of love that we humans hardly seem to merit.

Behind my pillow a cat purrs in my ear; now that the "Jerry!" rants have stopped, I can hear her, this friend I've had for over a decade.

I am blessed with the friendship of animals. All of them were unwanted, abandoned, tossed out,



unappreciated. All of them were a burden I didn't need or want. All of them are the treasures of my life, and I cannot imagine the emptiness of a life without them.

What is far more terrifying to me now than Jerry Springer is that a small group of people--the animal control advisory board--has the power of life and death over my family, over all pets in the municipality. For months they've been debating the words that go into Title 17; now it is nearing the end, and I am seeing little improvement in a code that punishes instead of understands, that emphasizes "control" rather than compassion.

Oh, my dogs and cats...they have carried me through great losses, career changes, moves. I never have to worry about them cross-dressing, cheating, or going on Jerry Springer. I have the absolute knowledge of their complete loyalty and love. I know in their hearts they are *entirely good*.

So why I am so frightened by Title 17's little words? Because every one of my dogs--Eb, Schatzy, and Buddy--could be impounded and even killed based on those words. Anchorage has one of the worst-written, most anti-dog ordinances I have ever read. Neighbors are using it against neighbors. Dogs are dying because of it.

Take Eb, my old arthritic lab, who refuses to move from the door until I return, who sits under my feet when I type, who for 10 years has followed my every move through the house or during our daily walks, who even blocked a moose kick probably meant for me and suffers from a bad liver because of it. Eb loves me. Eb never had to, but I know he would protect me if someone tried to harm me--as he *should*. The problem with Title 17 is it doesn't try to see things from a dog's point of view, or to consider dogs as individuals, or even to consider particular situations.

The first time Eb saw 3 things in his life, he barked, blocked me, and then charged or tried to chase the object away from me--that makes him a vicious dog. What were those 3 things? A bike, a motorcycle, and skis. Because there were humans attached to those things, animal control would have no choice. Old Eb would be gone. Eb--who wouldn't let me lose myself in my despair after my parents died. Eb--whom I owe and love so much.

All it took was for me to take Eb up to a bike, a motorcycle, and skis--just one time for each--and show him that these things were okay, that they wouldn't harm us, and that he never needed to bark at or chase them again. And so he never did.

That's Eb. I know him. I know he's smart and obedient and is simply looking out for me. That's his job.

But suppose that biker called animal control? They would have to impound old Eb, and if they saw anything during his week in a cage--and he's never been in a cage in his life--to make them think he's dangerous, my "boy" would be killed.

What kind of planet am I on, where people on Jerry Springer purposefully emotionally batter each other, yet these dogs I am so lucky to share my life with--who are absolutely incapable of emotionally battering anyone--could be killed for merely being dogs?

A neighbor called animal control recently on a friend's dog because the dog ran out the door barking at her. No harm was done, except to a poor dog, who lay in a cage, terrified, unable to eat or drink, for a week. Why?

Years ago I briefly worked for animal control, and I can't blame the people there. Many of them got involved because they love animals--try to imagine what it's like to work around death-row pets every day. I know there are laws and rules and always someone "higher up" emphasizing enforcement first. I also know that as many complaints that they receive from people like me, there are probably more from people like the one who wrote me after seeing my pet newsletter: "The day I see an officer out quickly to deal with problems is the day I believe enforcement is real. Yes, I have had responses, but usually the workers are confined in what they can do because of the ways the laws are written." She advised me: "Remember," your dogs "ARE still animals."

I know what she means, yet I don't know. Yes, they ARE animals. I'm just grateful they're not animals like the ones on Jerry Springer.

The letter writer complained that in her neighborhood, dogs "enter yards, poop and pee, causing damage to yards and personal property. They cause accidents" by running loose. I feel for her, and she's right. These animals need to be controlled. When I find a stray in my neighborhood, I try to find its home, and it is often a one-time mistake--a gate left ajar by a child, for example. If it "goes" in my yard, I merely clean the yard. If it barks at me, I say hello, and dogs are usually friendly when they know we are. I've met many hundreds of dogs over the years and all but one were nice; the one was owned by a fellow who

pointed a gun at me, so I've little question why the dog was unkind.

When there is a problem--a real problem, not a dog merely barking, "Hey, you're not supposed to be here! It's my job to tell you that!" or a dog chasing a bicycle because it's coming right at him and he's never seen one before--then can't we be understanding? (I know--dogs should never be out where they can chase a bicycle or anything else, but my point is it happens and the dog should not be impounded or killed if it only happens once; please think of poor old Eb. And yes, I am thinking of the poor old bicyclists--God forbid your dog should do it a second time. Take him to obedience training instead of bike paths for a while.)

How did Title 17 become so strict and unforgiving? It didn't just happen in Anchorage. The 1980s national press exposure of vicious dog attacks on children led to an anti-dog furor, which spilled into our laws and affected even good dogs. Humans kill at least 20 million dogs and cats annually in the U.S.; dogs do unfortunately kill a few humans. One dog in millions is going to be bad, but such attacks are by creatures made insane by bad breeding, abuse, or neglect. Actually, I'm surprised that every poor dog left out on a chain or ignored in the yard night and day doesn't go crazy. And there are far too many of them "living" like that in Anchorage.

Dog fighting, dog neglect and abuse, pet overpopulation, strays, and truly vicious dogs should be the things Title 17 is concerned with, not my snoring labs, although if the advisory board wants to make a law that forces them to give me more room on the bed, here's to you. But please give me back my right to walk in the woods with them off-leash, running circles around me. We won't bother you; we probably won't ever see you or anyone else. But I really don't want to break the

law; I was raised to respect laws. I just want to have fun fear-free walks with my dogs like I did until last year's Title 17 version.

Also, allow for some exceptions and individual considerations when you rewrite this title. Remember that the lives of our pets are in your powerful hands. If a dog is good and an owner is good, forgive them a trespass or two--like Eb barking at skis or a bike the first time he saw them. And--here I'm going to make some people very mad, and I'm very sorry about that, maybe we can talk about it on Jerry Springer's--even allow for a bite under certain circumstances! Let's not call all bites the results of a vicious dog, as Title 17 now does.

I'll end with one more true dog story to illustrate this. It may shock you, but my hope is that you'll consider it with compassion, and realize that the way the law is written, the dog should have been killed. But that would have been a great moral injustice.

A man I knew died. His family, friends, visitors, and his dog were in the house a few days later: a house filled with mourning, noise, and people. The dog did not know where or why the human he loved was gone. A child was left alone with the dog. She later--years later--told me that she stuck her finger in the dog's eye. The dog bit her. The child was not hurt or scarred. The dog was not reported. Everyone took it calmly; therefore, the child took it calmly. The dog has lived for many years since with a family with 3 young children, who crawl all over and poke her. The dog has never been anything but a loving house pet ever since. She was forgiven and understood and given another chance. She was a lucky dog. Today, in Anchorage, she would probably be killed.

## **Aging Pets and Homeless Pets**

By Lori Jo Oswald  
E-mail: [petnews@alaska.net](mailto:petnews@alaska.net)

Sometimes I envy my friends who have children instead of pets. No, not because of the tax deductions, but because--God willing--in most cases, their children will outlive them. But my "children" will die long before I do. And it never gets any easier when they go.

After every loss, there is that period of shocked disbelief--of reaching, dreaming, even calling your pet's name, wanting to forget you'll never see him again. I read once that people who love their pets can find their loss the hardest to take because that pet is so key in their lives and others don't often understand this.

Lately, I've seen signs that old age is going to take more of my companions.

Sylvia, the black cat I found in 1986 in a mall bathroom, barely big enough to contain the squeaks coming out of her kitten body, sprouted her first gray whisker this week. And a few nights ago, Eb, my old black lab, did something he's only done once before in his life, and it broke my heart. Because I knew what it represents.

What he did was, he struggled his arthritic body off the bed, got down on the floor, went into the closet, and urinated on the floor.

### **Training Eb and Woody: A Study in Contrasts**

Eb only did that once before, when he was a silly little black puppy who first came home to live with me 10 years ago. He "tinkled" on the floor, I said no, picked him up, carried him outside, and explained that this is where he was going to go from now on. Now, most puppies require further convincing—my other pup Woody took about 4 months to agree with me on this outside thing—but Eb saw my point immediately.

I decided Eb was a genius, while Woody—although pure love—was a little slow. Take the command "shake" for example. Woody kept forgetting even though he desperately wanted to remember because he loved the treats involved in this confusing game. But Eb—he was a dog trainer's miracle. One time for everything: shake, sit, lie, come. And only one "accident." Until now.

### **The Shock of Old Age's Effects**

So the other night, I was shocked and he was shocked. We looked at each other embarrassed after it happened.

It seems unfair that he grows old so much quicker than I. His body--and perhaps a little bit of his mind—is breaking down while mine is still building up (although Christmas candy will no-doubt build it up in ways I don't quite intend).

I pulled myself together, "No, Eb, you go outside for that!" I started to lead him to the door, but he panicked and ran back to the bedroom. I thought about it as I cleaned up, and how my initial feeling was how could he be so bad and how he should be TOLD he was bad, and then I thought, of course he knows he wasn't supposed to do that, and he's as confused and scared as I am over this.

So I hugged him and talked to him about it and assured him it's okay and that I love him and will do everything I can for him through this tough old age. Slowly he relaxed and managed to jump on the bed (which gets harder for him every day), and snored himself to sleep.

It hasn't happened since, and I have vowed to try to be more careful about taking him outside more frequently—for very short periods since, like many dogs, the only time he enjoys going out is when I go along, on a walk together. He wants to be with me as much as possible, especially now that he is growing older and weaker.

### **Bad Pet Owners Who Think They're Good**

Then I started thinking about some people who wouldn't try to see this all from the dog's point of view. There are those who would actually punish a dog for this little mistake. How will they handle it when their parents or grandparents make a similar mistake?

I remember listening to Robert telling me about his old dog who suffered a slow death. He bragged what a caring pet owner he was because he took his dog to the vet a few times and put fresh straw in the dog house.

"Your dog lived in a dog house?"

"Yes, my wife wouldn't let him in the house."

For 11 years his dog lived out back on a chain, except for the rare occasions when Robert took him on walks. Robert could afford a \$300,000 house but not a fence for his poor dog. And he certainly couldn't afford the time it would take to vacuum up dog hairs once a week--so why let the dog inside?

As I listened to him, I wondered how Robert even felt he had an ethical right to have a dog. Then he said he missed him and wanted another. Despite my discouragements, he did get another dog—and the lucky pup even gets to spend her days and nights inside—in the garage.

One day Robert came to work and said the puppy chewed on his car and his sheet rock and made messes in the garage at night. I said, “Wouldn’t you if you were locked in a garage?” He didn’t get it.

## How Can Good Pet Owners Handle the Pain?

A lot of people don’t get it, but a lot of people do. I have received some wonderful calls and e-mails regarding the first issue of this newsletter. Alaska has some terrific animal-loving, caring people.

I think of another co-worker, Bill, who clearly loves dogs. He was so hurt by the death of his Golden Retriever, whom he’d shared life with for well over a decade, that he won’t get another dog. I understand that hurt, but I also think of this sadly, because here is a perfect dog owner who could make an unwanted dog so beloved. Bill says he can’t go through the pain of losing a dog again, but, even as Eb gets weaker and Sylvia gets gray, I try to remember that the most loving, kindest thing I can do is to make room in my heart and home for someone who needs me. As frightening as it is to see pets age so quickly, we must keep in mind all the happiness and love we have given them and they have given us.

So if you are like Bill, perhaps you can find a way to rescue one of the homeless animals listed in this month’s newsletter. But if you’re like Robert (and you probably aren’t or you wouldn’t be reading this), keep your garage for your car, your wife happy, and your dog house empty.

## The Nurse, the Patient, and the Springer Spaniel

*By Lori Jo Oswald  
Published in Chicken Soup for the Cat and Dog Lovers  
Soul as “Obedience”*

For 7 years my father, not yet old enough to retire, had been battling colon cancer. Now he was dying. Tumors had blocked off his intestines and filled his stomach; he could no longer eat or even drink water. Some infection forced him into the hospital, which was the only thing he’d ever complained about, and even then, not really. I just sensed that he wasn’t happy with the way he was ignored or basically told--by his doctors--to give up and die already. One night he had no luck summoning a nurse, and tried to reach the bathroom on his own, but fell and gashed his head on the nightstand.

Seeing his deep scar the next day only added to my frustration and helpless anger. Why isn’t there anything I can do, I thought, as I waited for the elevator.

As if in answer to my prayers, when the elevator opened, two dogs greeted me.

Dogs? In a hospital? Personally, I couldn’t think of a better place for dogs, but I was shocked the city laws, hospital codes, and heavy-handed orderlies let them in.

"How did you get to bring dogs here?" I asked the owner, as I stepped in.

"They are therapy dogs. I take them up to the 6th floor once a week, to meet with the patients in rehab."

An idea grew stronger and stronger as I walked out of the hospital and to my car, and then drove home to get my two dogs and my parents’ dog, a Springer spaniel named Boots, to take them for their walk.

My dad had bought Boots for my mom for a Christmas present a few years before. My mother insisted that she wanted a dog, and it had to be a spaniel, my dad had explained as he asked me to go for a ride with him up to Wasilla to pick out a puppy.

I realized the genius of my mother’s plan immediately as I saw the tension ease from my father’s face when he picked out that wriggly kissy puppy. The dog was not for her; it was for him; it had to be a spaniel so he could have the hunting dog he’d never had since he was a boy.

Growing up in Alaska, all children want to do is leave for the "lower 48" or the "Outside," and many of them never move back. I was one of those children. My brothers and sisters had moved away, also, although one brother moved back to Alaska--but was at this time living in Fairbanks, over 400 miles away--and the other was soon to. But Boots

became the perfect child my father never had. She was an eager, loving, obedient pal and hunting partner for him.

In fact, she seemed too obedient to me. Unlike my spoiled dogs who didn't know the word "No," Boots was not allowed on the bed or any other furniture, and she never broke this rule. Sometimes I wanted to tell my dad when he was lying on his sick bed, "Call Boots up here! She'll give you love and kisses and hold you like I'm too restrained to do...and you need it." But I didn't. And he didn't. And Boots didn't. Instead, she sat near his bed, watching him protectively and lovingly, as the months rolled on and he could no longer walk or even sit up without help. Once in a while he would get very sick, and go to the hospital, and she would await his return hopefully. But I never knew until this day how much they meant to each other.

That day during my walk, I decided that if I could give my dad nothing else, I was going to give him a few minutes with his beloved dog. So I went back to the hospital and asked a nurse about it. She told me that if I was to bring his dog in, she would not "see anything." I took that as a yes.

Later that day, I came back for another visit, but this time with Boots. All I told my dad was that I had a surprise for him, but it was in my car. I went to get her, and the strangest thing happened.

Boots, who had never been anywhere near that hospital, and who was perfectly leash trained, yanked me across that snowy parking lot to the front door, then dragged me down the hall to just the right elevators (I could never find the right ones myself), and then, when we reached the fourth floor and the elevator doors opened, pulled me harder than ever down the hall, around two corners, down another hall, into his room, and jumped on his bed! Ever so gently, she crawled into his arms, not touching his pain-filled sides or stomach.

For the first time, Boots was on a bed, just as she knew she should be. And for the first time in a long time, I saw my father smile.

## **A Message to Wayne**

By Lori Jo Oswald

I saw you there many mornings, some afternoons. We had both discovered a secret place, a private parking lot surrounded by woods, where we could let our dogs out of our respective vehicles.

For a long time we hardly spoke to each other. It's as if we were afraid. I know what I was thinking, Is

this going to be one of them? One of those dog owners that I'd only recently started encountering the last couple years, who didn't want any other dog near theirs, who screamed angrily at those whose pets ran off-leash even though theirs were often off-leash?

But you were not one of them. In passing, those mornings, we would nod at each other, maybe say hello, little more.

But over time, we came to trust the common bond we held, and talked a bit more.

The common bond was our old labs. Your chocolate brown one--his face now splattered with rich gray and white hairs--slowly eased himself beside you, his tail wagging as slowly as the rest of his body. He was a gentlemen, it was clear, just as you were. I loved to watch the two of you; you'd obviously shared many years and much love between you. You had that human-animal bond that bespeaks true friendship and trust and devotion, of a quality so rarely found in life.

I had an old dog too, not nearly as old as yours but aging quicker due to permanent internal injuries inflicted by a moose kick in 1994. Plus his arthritis and hip dysplasia troubled him from time to time. Still, Eb expected his walks, no matter that they got shorter and shorter.

We looked at each other--you and I--with the eyes that said volumes: We each have an old dog, a dog we love fiercely, a dog who is losing his grip on this life more and more each day, a dog we value so much that we bring him at least once a day to this place--this parking lot--this little spot of freedom where no one will yell at us, or cite us, or tell us to put a leash on our old friend, or report us. Here, in our hideaway, we can just walk our friend like in the "old days," up to a couple years ago, when people weren't afraid of an old dog, and new laws weren't preventing walks like these.

And so now, Eb is gone.

And just this summer I have learned, Wayne, that your old friend is gone too.

I miss him, even though I never really knew his name. What I knew was enough--he had the old labrador soul: faithful, grateful, and full of love for you. You gave him a good life, a beautiful life, and a glorious dignified old age. Don't you ever feel bad about his leaving. In my humane society work I have seen too many old dogs left to die in animal controls--"pounds"--or taken to a vet for a quick shot long before their time, just because the dog



could no longer run with a bicycle or needed a few hundred dollars of vet care.

You and I, we know differently. We know that an old dog--no matter how expensive, no matter how much "trouble"--is the most glorious of creatures. We watched our old dogs age away, and it broke our hearts, but it strengthened us too. We learned from their courage and faith and devotion.

I was so lucky to meet you, to see you those mornings in the parking lot. And your old friend, he was luckiest of all, to have an owner who so cared about him as to drive him every day to a place where he could ramble about, sniffing the trees and grasses, put his eyes and head up into the wind, and feel the freedom in his bones of his youth.

## From the Editor

By Lori Jo Oswald, Ph.D.

Remembering Madeliene Cibil, Leslie Smith, and Connie Spencer...three ladies who made a difference...and remembering Anchorage in the "old days" (pre-Spay Clinic)

Sometimes I think of them. The women--for all three were women--who inspired me the most through their dedication to animal welfare. One was in Anchorage; two were in California. At least two have passed away now--many years ago--and probably very few remember them and even fewer know how they devoted their lives to strays, cats in particular.

I consider myself a writer, but how does one even begin to describe the beauty and passion and honesty and sincerity--and ... dare I say almost angelic quality?--of those who give so much of their lives to help the helpless?

### The Unpopular Cause

And could there be a more unpopular cause? If these women--Madeliene Cibil, Leslie Smith, and Connie Spencer--had volunteered their hours instead to a popular cause focused on the human animal, such as Save the Children, would they have been subjected to the ridicule, threats, and taunts that those of us who help animals sometimes are? I remember, for example, when I was in high school, and was circulating petitions and writing letters and going on TV and radio and before the assembly, and hanging out at the animal control center which was then run by the SPCA, all in a frantic attempt to get a spay clinic in this city. It was my first campaign, and I learned lots of lessons. And one of them was that animal causes are not popular causes. More than one person said to me something to this effect: "It's so wonderful to see such dedication in someone so young; it's just TOO BAD you don't put it to good use, for a GOOD cause," i.e., a "people" cause.

When I was 17 and brash I would turn to the nay-sayers and respond with the same tone, "Oh really? When was the last time YOU gave a dollar to Save the Children?" But as I got older I tried to explain that this was what I felt called to do, that this is what I am best at, that we all should do what we can for who we can, and that in my view, we can't be kind to each other if we can't be kind to animals. But as I got even older, I stopped responding at all. There was no point. A brick will always be a brick, and a blockhead will always be a blockhead--one that blocks information and ideas.

### 1977 and the Anchorage Spay Clinic Drive

Eventually--actually pretty quickly--a spay clinic did come about, although not the one I'd originally fought for, but probably a much better one after all. I had envisioned a city-sponsored spay/neuter clinic. I saw no reason for any animal to come out of the shelter without being spayed or neutered; moreover, I saw no sense in a city that would pay to kill animals but not to prevent that killing.

Unfortunately, I had to quickly learn about underhanded politics and secret meetings. A few Anchorage veterinarians, in particular, fought the formation of the spay clinic ravenously, and they won, for a time. But the SPCA's Ethel Christianson kept the ball rolling. They lost the animal control center contract not much later (and I was part of the group that thought it was time and would be for the best, I admit), but this too might have turned out to be a good thing, for all of their energies were put into the spay clinic drive. There is no doubt that thousands and thousands of animal lives have been saved because of that very same SPCA spay clinic. They have been saved--if this makes sense--because they were never born. Killings at the Anchorage Animal Control Center have dropped drastically in the 23 years since I first walked into

that "shelter" and said, "We need to do something about the killing going on. What can I do to help?"

### **Madeliene Cibil: Anchorage's Cat Lady**

One of the best things about my experience during those days when I was in high school and on a spay-clinic mission was meeting Madeliene Cibil. One day, Ethel Christianson drove me (I didn't yet have my license or a car) to a liquor store in downtown Anchorage, in the same building as the old Bread Factory on L Street. It was the first time I'd ever been in a liquor store, and it certainly wasn't where I expected to meet one of the best, purest, kindest people I was ever to know.

Madeliene had white-blond hair, was slender, was perhaps in her late 40s or 50s, and very very French. She was strikingly beautiful; her personality was pure passion; and she was surrounded by strays--cats and people. The cats were many of every shape and size and mostly street-cat black in color. They looped themselves over bottles, warmed themselves on the cash register, covered the counter, wandered the floor, and enjoyed a buffet of some 12 bowls with varieties of cat food, whipped cream, and other delicacies that Madeliene foraged for them.

The other strays were various street people and others who made Madeliene's liquor store their unofficial home; in exchange for her kindness and perhaps an occasional bottle of something to keep them warm, they helped her feed Anchorage's strays. Soon I was one of her "enlistees," although I didn't ask for a bottle of spirits in return, only her company and inspiration when I could get it.

Every night for years beyond count, Madeliene Cibil had fed Anchorage's stray cats, and as far as I've been told, continued to do so until her death sometime in the late '80s or early '90s, while I was away at graduate school. She had some 20 stations set up around Anchorage--downtown and Mountain View in particular, and late at night, after the liquor store closed, this brave and dedicated lady was out filling the plastic bowls with food for the wild, starving cats of the city.

That's not all she did. Madeliene was a realist as well as a lover of cats. She knew that it did no good to let them breed...it only meant certain death for the kittens, maybe after a few months of struggle and misery...and sometimes worse. I remember when she called me crying because she'd found some children beating a kitten to death in a trailer court near where the Northway Mall now is.

Whenever she could, she found homes for the cats and had them spayed and neutered to prevent more addition to the terrible overpopulation problem. But there was another solution, one she and I were to end up doing together after I went to Sacramento for eight months and received my true initiation in humane society work. That is where I learned that those who love animals and volunteer to help them sometimes end up partaking in the killing of them. It was the biggest shock and tragedy of my life, and it took away a huge chunk of my heart. The only thing that got me through it was to know that the three women I most admired did it. They were my teachers and guides.

### **Leslie Smith and Connie Spencer**

After graduating from East High School, like many Alaskan youth I wanted out of the state, off to adventures and college. I moved to Sacramento to live with my sister, and there I volunteered at Pets & Pals, a tiny humane society that had a spay program through the local veterinarians, and was run by two women: Leslie and Connie.

While I ran the office and answered calls and sent out spay certificates in the afternoons, Connie and Leslie disappeared doing "field work." It was several months before they let me come along to see what they did in the afternoon.

What they did was trap stray cats and take them to the Sacramento SPCA to be killed; then they'd collect their cages and do it all over again. Every single day it broke their hearts and spirits.

They were called by social agencies and others to come take care of a problem they had no part in making. I only went with them two or three times, and each time was a horror. The first house had walls that were so thick with flies they were black. Another house had cat feces piled everywhere; the elderly lady who had kept dozens of cats in her house didn't provide them with a litter box. At all the places we went, the stories were the same. A cat had shown up a year or two or three ago, a person had started feeding it outside, it had kittens, the kittens had kittens, etc. etc. so that by the time we were there we had over 100 cats to trap, many deformed and slow-witted due to inbreeding. Inbred cats are easy to catch; they don't learn from the others' mistakes; one by one by one they walk in the traps. On the other hand, when wild cats aren't inbred they are clever and suspicious and if one cat is trapped, it can take weeks to trap another one. They learn.

I was shocked to find out what Leslie and Connie did in the afternoons. Shocked. But I admired

them. I had to adjust my thinking. We had long talks about it. They hated everything about what they did, but they also felt it was essential. Anything they could do to stop the flow, to slow down the overpopulation problem, to prevent more cats from being born when there were no homes for them...they would do. Including having them killed.

"I wish there were no animals on Earth," Connie once said. Connie was older than Leslie, settled, married, well-to-do, perhaps almost single-handedly supporting Pets & Pals despite her husband's disapproval (I guessed).

"How can you say that?" I asked her, my 18-year-old self horrified by the thought of such an empty world.

"Because then no one could hurt them," she said, her voice edged in sadness over all the things she had seen and perhaps had to do.

I remember arguing with her that no, things could be changed, things would be changed, people would come to care, the pet overpopulation problem was a simple thing to fix...and it would be very very soon.

That was over 20 years ago. Sometimes I wonder if Connie was right.

### **Back to Alaska**

Madeliene kept writing me desperate letters when I was in Sacramento. Things were getting out of hand here. She needed me back. She would write lists of terrible things going on.

I knew that I must help animals; it was my calling; and it seemed after my tenure in Sacramento that Madeliene was right. Sacramento had coffee clutches of women getting together to discuss ways to help animals; we would go together to the Capitol Building and lobby for animal-friendly laws; we had access and support. Alaska seemed to have none of that. If there was one place animals needed me the most, it was back home.

I packed my bags and loaded up the dog--Bobbie--I'd rescued (I think she rescued me, actually, as dogs tend to do) from the Sacramento SPCA and headed back to Alaska.

I didn't know then that Madeliene was always in a panic, and if I'd been older and wiser my life would have taken a different path; I probably would have finished college in Sacramento and perhaps--like many Alaskan youth who leave for college in the

states--never moved back. But I was home, and Madeliene and I decided the best thing to do would be to start a humane society, to start a spay program working WITH the vets like Pets & Pals did in Sacramento, to educate, and to feed strays. We never discussed it, perhaps, it was unsaid, but we also knew we'd end up trapping strays too.

### **The Alaska Humane Society**

Together with another animal lover, Jerilee Carroll, Madeliene and I started the Alaska Humane Society, and began our daily and nightly volunteer missions to rescue, spay, and trap animals. We started the spay program with the veterinarians; we published lots of educational materials; we fed strays; we found homes for many abandoned pets; we fought the good fight.

And every night, as I became more and more swamped in paperwork, letter writing, campaigning, working to get laws passed, as well as attending meetings where I was a board member--the first Animal Control Advisory Board and Citizens for Animal Responsibility and Education (CARE) Alaska--Madeliene was out feeding the stray cats of Anchorage, as she always did.

She didn't understand paperwork and meetings, never did, never would. To Madeline, the real struggle was on the street, and those were the animals that had to be helped. What good did it do to debate animal control policies for 4 hours a night? True animal lovers should be out feeding.

She also didn't understand compromise. Why was I working with the dog and cat breeders in CARE Alaska, she demanded? They were contributing to the problem. The idea of it upset her.

I knew she was right, but I also knew she was wrong. Sometimes compromise is good, I told myself. For example, these same people helped in my fight to outlaw the decompression chamber to kill dogs and cats in Alaska; I felt that at the very least, these poor doomed pets could die gently instead of violently. But I needed them and their connections and letter writing to get that enacted into law. At least that's what I told Madeliene.

To the end, I'm sure, the beautiful Cat Lady saved as many strays as she could, and made the short lives of downtown cats a little nicer. When I heard she had died, I felt a great sadness. Not only is she a great loss to this world, but hers is a loss that few will understand or recognize. A paid politician can shake a few hands or attend a summit and receive Time's Man of the Year and the Nobel Peace Prize,

but are the true heroes like Madeliene, Connie, and Leslie ever recognized? Millions in donations will go to popular causes involving humans, but animal causes receive so very little. Instead, the media and public relations directors of human-centered causes use the idea that people might help animals as a horrifying example, and they do it dishonestly. For example, I have heard the following repeated over and over and over: More money is given to animal shelters in this country than to women's shelters. Well! How can the two even be compared? Animal "shelters" exist to take in and As these things tend to happen, my letter-writing slowed down as I got busier and busier, and instead of weekly, then monthly, the letters were mailed every few months.

And one day one of my letters to Leslie came back. She had died of cancer, so young. She was perhaps in her 30s, maybe 40s. She lived alone; her life was Pets & Pals and helping animals as best she could. Those days in the office, before she'd go out in the field with Connie, she'd teach me about humane society work, and we'd go through her files that revealed the animal movement's history over the last decade or so.

### **Salaries Versus Volunteers**

Leslie received a small salary for working at Pets & Pals, and I remember being shocked by that. I had never taken a dollar for my animal work; to this day I still have not. Even the little stipends I received for being on the Animal Control Advisory Board went right to the Alaska Humane Society. But now I don't see that as a plus. If it wasn't for people like Leslie working full time to help animals, how much would be accomplished? Her salary allowed her to devote herself to this job only. Sometimes I imagine what I could have done for animals if only I had the time to devote my life to them solely. Perhaps not more than I have. But perhaps more indeed.

So over the years I came to see that Leslie did nothing wrong by being paid to help dogs and cats. And perhaps "all-volunteer" is not as important as I thought. Maybe what this movement needs are more professionals, paid professionally, who dedicate themselves to changing things for animals for the better.

kill unwanted animals. Do women's shelters take in and kill unwanted women? It's a ridiculous and cruel comparison.

Once again, I've digressed!

After I moved back to Alaska, I wrote Connie and Leslie regularly, telling them about Madeliene's and my work, filling them in on the Alaska Humane Society's progress, and wishing them well in their own endeavors.

### **What Is the Point?**

Leslie's life was so short, I pondered. What was it? What did it mean? She gave up a career with any kind of pay or status, she sacrificed her social life, she had no marriage or children...because she wanted to help animals. She gave up so much, and what did she receive? If she was anything like me, and she probably was, she went home from her day with a tremendous amount of grief and guilt over what had taken place...how those animals she set out to save were being killed, and how we--who felt so called to help--were somehow a part of it.

It is not until now that I've realized this, but perhaps Leslie's death, and the questions it raised for me about the purpose of her life, was one of the factors that led me to walk away from direct hands-on humane society work. I could just not tolerate the trapping and killing of cats; I saw no reason why I should be a party to it. I wanted to use my pen to prevent, not my cage to punish.

There were other things as well; one very determined lady whom Madeliene met convinced us that I should give up the Alaska Humane Society directorship to her, as she was a retired teacher and could devote herself to it full time. I had been running it some 4 years at this point; it was a full-time job as well as my "real" jobs to support myself, and I was attending college full-time as well. So I passed AHS to her; from what I heard, she only lasted a few months, though. Perhaps she didn't have the drive and spirit and intense love for animals that made three women devote their lives to the cause. Those three women--Madeliene, Connie, and Leslie--inspire me always.

## **Bobbie: Endings and Beginnings**

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When I first saw Bobbie have a seizure, I was standing on the roof of the "tree barn" Glenn the plumber had built for me, showing it to Butch.

I'd proudly showed him the work I'd done on the roof and turned to survey the view of the mountains and trees and pasture when I saw her.

"Oh my god, Bobbie!" I yelled, but it seemed a whisper, just as the rush to the edge of the roof and down the ladder and run to her seemed to take hours instead of seconds.

I was holding her then, saying, "Bobbie Bobbie Bobbie Bobbie" over and over, rocking her in my arms, her slobber covering me, trying to press the sharp seizures out of her body. I checked her tongue and pulled it out, as I'd been told to do back when I was a child and Mrs. Brockman used to have her multiple-sclerosis caused seizures. By the time Butch and I carried Bobbie into the car, the seizures had stopped; they probably lasted a few minutes, but we went to every vet in town trying to get someone to look at her. It was Saturday, and our search was futile. By then she seemed okay. But it was the moment I knew my dog was going to die.

Dogs die. They die first. That's just one of the things they do. But this would be my first experience of losing a dog to death; the first two from childhood disappeared in other ways.

Not only do dogs die, but in general people do not understand your loss the way they should. Only someone who has loved a dog and accepted that dog as family can understand what that loss means.

It means the end of the perfect relationship.

And one of the ways in which the attitude of those who cannot understand is expressed is by telling you to "Put her down; it's the humane thing to do." Put her down. Euthanasia is not taken lightly when it comes to human beings. It involves court cases and fights and moral questions and debates. It involves a pure question of right versus wrong. And yet, when a dog begins to near death, the dog "owner" is told by others, as I was, that it is "your duty" to have that dog put down.

In fact, I have always felt guiltiest over Bobbie's death in that I listened to someone else, a young man who was visiting me when he witnessed one of her seizures and became upset and left, telling me, "It is cruel to keep her alive."

It is cruel to keep her alive. All Bobbie wanted was to be alive, to be alive for me and with me. She struggled to live long because she knew I needed her, I honestly felt. I had saved her once; I needed her now more than ever before, and now her body was failing her duty and purpose.

Bob, unlike Dane, who was "put down" the next year, struggled even the needle, even the fluid that delivered death as it poured into her veins, and I grabbed the needle and said, "No," but it was too late.

She wanted to live, and I will never forget that, nor can I think of her or remember her without this guilt overtaking all the glorious perfect happy years we shared.

But I listened to others who said, "It is time, do it, do it now, you are cruel to keep her alive." Especially that last sting. You are cruel to keep her alive. You are cruel, you are cruel. There is nothing in life I have tried to avoid more than being cruel. There is nothing in me that could ever accept that I have been cruel to any one.

So I had her "put down," and for the first and only time in my life, I felt cruel.



I met Bobbie in 1978 in the Sacramento, California, "dog pound." Dog pound is an appropriate name for these death chambers designed to hide and efficiently destroy a human-created problem--the problem of pet overpopulation.

I was eighteen years old, just graduated from high school, and recently moved to the "lower 48" from a childhood in Alaska, to live with my sister.

Loneliness was my life there, but I didn't mind so much, because I had a bicycle. Then it got stolen. So I borrowed my brother-in-law's bicycle, and continued my ten-hour-per-day bike rides on the trails and city streets and out into the countryside in and around Sacramento. This was my life: riding my bicycle to cemeteries, malls, movies, flute lessons, Old Sacramento, pastures where horses lived so I could wish and stare, and especially every day to the secret ponds and favorite river banks I had discovered.

It was dusk when I pulled into a parking lot one day; I heard dogs barking. There was nothing I missed more than my dog, Snoopy, back home. I wanted to make my own life, wanted to escape my parents' house, but every night I missed the dog I'd slept with since I was eight years old. So when I heard this dog, I rode my bike up to the sound, and there I saw them. Wooden drop-off boxes with locks on them to seal after you put your dog in them, marked "Sacramento Animal Control." Out of convenience, Sacramento had provided dog owners with the perfect way to eliminate their problems without even going to the pound or facing any other human being with their conscience. I petted two beautiful Irish setters through their cages, trying to calm their confusion and fear, trying to find some way to break through the locks that had been attached after proper disposal. I rode away frustrated and ashamed for being human that night.

Then my brother-in-law's bike was stolen. I tried to walk, but summer had by this time become cruel and angry with me, piercing into my Alaskan-born skin with its fury. There was no cool wind of the bicycle speed to protect me.

I took to riding the bus out to the mall to get giant bags of chocolate chip cookies, then back to my sister's to eat them, gaining weight and losing hope in the air-conditioned house where I was the silent witness to the end of a marriage.

I still had no friends; one day I rode the bus on its route for hours because the bus driver said hi to me, finally ending up with her at eleven at night in a parking lot filled with busses that reminded me of pictures of where dinosaurs used to go to die. She gave me a ride home in her car.

One day I sat down with myself and made a list of what was important to me, what made me happy and what I felt I had to do in life. One of them was volunteering to help animals. I had started a spay-clinic drive in Anchorage a year before, and it was the most fulfilling time of my life for I was doing what I felt I was supposed to do. So this day in Sacramento I called up a humane society listed the phone book, and soon started working at "Pets & Pals" in the office every Friday, while Leslie and Connie went out on field calls.

It took them a long time to bring me into the field with them, and I understand it now. I was an idealist; even with what I'd witnessed in the humane society work I'd done in Anchorage, I didn't believe in dogs and cats being killed just because people overbred them; I felt there was a cure for pet overpopulation and it was merely that people should get their pets spayed and neutered. In Anchorage at the time 26 dogs and cats were killed every day (the first thing I learned the day I walked into the shelter to volunteer was not to use the euphemism "put to sleep" ever again), and I believed that if people just knew what was happening they would quit breeding their pets.

Connie and Leslie, just like me, got into humane society work because they cared about animals--I don't mean we were blind "animal lovers"--I mean we saw each dog and cat as the individuals they were, with a right and desire for life as strong and meaningful as our own.

But Connie and Leslie had accepted that their role in saving animals was being involved in their destruction. Years of witnessing cruelty and worsening pet overpopulation, despite all their efforts, had taught them that killing was an important part of their work. (Indeed, I remember being shocked--but later in Alaska temporarily agreeing with her after a horrendous day of witnessing animal abuse--when Connie told me, "I wish all animals were dead so there

could be no cruelty.") Just as I was later to do with the Alaska Humane Society, a good part of their job was to capture feral cats in live traps, take them to the pound, and then wait for their cages to be returned empty. Then they would return to the scene of the captures. At the first house call I went on with them, for example, one referred to them by the local welfare agency, there were over 80 cats to be trapped and destroyed. Why did they destroy them? To prevent the situation from getting worse. Let me explain what that situation was.

Two years before, a stray cat had shown up on the property of this elderly couple. The woman was bedridden; the man was barely able to function himself, and was certainly unable to care for his wife by the time the welfare officer arrived. When I walked into this house, I never stopped looking at the wall, for it was moving. I thought my eyes had given out on me somehow--the wall was black and alive and changing and shimmering before me. Then I realized that it was covered with flies.

They had begun leaving food for the cat; soon she gave birth to a litter of kittens. Within two years, there were over 80 of them, wild about the place, sick with disease and deformities and starvation, but still breeding. It was an easy place to trap because of the inbreeding; smart wild cats will learn from witnessing the capture of one or two; inbred cats stupidly come into the traps one after the other.

During that first trip to the animal shelter ("shelter" being the ironic term when we consider what is done there), I learned something else. I learned that wild cats, unlike tame ones, never make a sound when they are trapped. If you are delivering one in a trap and you hear a "meow," you have someone's pet, recently abandoned or not. The wild-born cat waits silently for its fate.

Its fate is death.

You are waiting for your cage to be returned, and it is as if you love nothing more in the world than children and respect nothing more than the fetus's right to life, but are having an abortion. You got involved in humane society work because you loved animals, and you care, and want to help them, but you are delivering them to the needle that will end their lives. You try not to think, or you try to justify that you didn't cause this situation, and this is the only way to keep it from getting worse, to prevent other cats from being born into this unfair obscenity. You are "killing to save," as I later titled an article which tried to explain this reasoning.

I did something else while we waited.

I walked through the animal shelter, and tried to pet every doomed animal in it, caress it, talk to it, comfort it.

Maybe I felt it was my duty in this purgatory to make amends for what was happening to those cats in the back room.

Maybe it's because I missed my dog so much.

Maybe it's because I loved each animal so much.

I knew one thing: it was unfair--what had happened to them, what would happen to them. I looked in each one's eyes, knowing that soon, long before me, they would know what death was, what it meant, what it felt like or didn't feel like.

They would know an answer I wanted to know, long before they should rightfully know it.

There were hundreds of dogs in the shelter this day, the day I met her, and I petted all of them. Except for one.

She wouldn't come to the front of the cage.

All the other eight dogs crammed in there came up to receive my finger strokes through the wires, but she would not move.

"Come here," I said softly, "come here and let me pet you."

Slowly, carefully, slightly, she raised her head, just enough to look me in the eyes with her own caramel-brown ones, and then let it fall back to the cement floor.

I was crying then, because she had communicated more to me in that brief look than any other being--human or non--ever had.

Her eyes told me a life, and it also explained a death.

Her eyes told me that she had been there long enough to know there was no point in coming to the front of the cage anymore. Her eyes explained to me that she knew exactly what was going to happen to her here. Exactly. There was no doubt at all; she knew it and I knew it and she wasn't coming up to see me and pretend to be a dog for me and to comfort my guilt.

It was pointless, that's what they said. You are pointless, they explained. But it was more that she was pointless. There was a broken heart in those eyes, and she gave it all to me with one glance, everything that had happened to her.

So I wasn't surprised when I looked through my watered eyes at her yellow card on the cage to see that her owners of three years had dropped her off and wrote "Can't afford no room." They also wrote "outdoor dog" and "good with children" (which turned out to be a lie--Bobbie detested children, and this was not a surprise to me either).

I saw her life in that instant: she'd been chained, never allowed in the house, left alone out back for most of her life; there were children, it was a filthy yard and a filthy family and one day they'd taken the "goddamn dog" to the pound.

I stumbled away shocked and crying from what I had just experienced, back to Leslie, back to the front of the pound, away from the cages and the victims of human cruelty, into the car, away away, trying to think how I could get her.

My sister hated dogs; she hated all animals, really. I don't know where it came from--the same family, two opposites. I felt it had to be based on fear from somewhere. My childhood experiences with animals had all been good; hers had been, to her, bad. She'd been thrown by a horse and had broken her arm; my brother's escaped hamster ate through the floor in her bedroom; the neighbor's cat had dropped off dead mice outside her window. She had never known the joy of having a pet; she had never wanted one. I hadn't ever seen her pet Snoopy. He didn't exist to her, I suppose. I could not know her mind, but I knew mine. I knew I had to have this dog.

It was a difficult afternoon, but she finally drove me back, yelling at me all the way, to the shelter to get my dog. She was furious, but I had to have this dog. Her eyes had told me something today; I spent the ride praying I was not too late.

I almost was. She was destined to be killed that night, after fourteen days in the dog pound, which was just about to close when we arrived. I ran back for her, I found someone, I told him to bring her out, I was taking her home.

The kennel worker walked in the cage, and the dogs who'd recently arrived came up to him eagerly and curiously; those that had been there longer pushed themselves back against the walls, watching him intently. Bobbie was still lying in the same place, refusing to move, but she was trembling.

Death was coming, she knew it, oh how I will never God I promise forget those eyes. Those eyes are what have kept me working to help animals when I didn't want to fight anymore; those eyes are what keep me telling people they should spay or neuter their pets when they try to give me free puppies and kittens even though they never are kind or caring when I talk to them. Her eyes looked up at him, though her head flattened more against the floor. I know, they said, exactly why you are here, and it is not right.

She was wrong, but she didn't know it then. She didn't know it when he attached the leash and pulled her trembling body out of that cage. She didn't know it when he brought her before me, and still she cowered, and her body shook worse than ever.

He handed the leash to me, and I knelt down to explain to her that she was wrong about what I was here for, and she did something which made me know absolutely that I had made the greatest decision in my life, that I was about to meet one of the most interesting individuals I would ever know.

She growled.

It wasn't a growl at me; I understood that, though the kennel worker's immediate and gruff response was, "You sure you want that one?" He was angry with her for not being a "good dog"; I was proud that she was, with all her acceptance and understanding of her fate, leaving the world with a growl to this creature that had only done her wrong.

The kennel worker would never understand; he and the rest of them spent the next fifteen minutes as she was given a quick health check ("She has a high fever; she might have kennel cough"), her shots, and I was given paperwork (I gladly signed and paid to have her spayed within a few days) to convince me to adopt another dog instead. But I had never felt so absolutely unashamedly right in my life. I would have taken her if she'd bit me, even if she'd bit me furiously and shredded my arm.

Why? Because she had every right to bite me. I already knew what her life had been for her eyes had told it all to me, but now her paperwork and her body confirmed it. She was completely emaciated; I saw every rib and hardly anything else though she was a Labrador/beagle cross the size of a black lab. She cowered and trembled at the bare movement of a human hand, and yelped in pain if her back was touched (injuries I assumed and veterinarians later supported, since she was sensitive in the back and hips the rest of her life, were due to kickings and beatings). Her encounters with humans had been wretched, and I was going to show her that another type of human/animal relationship was possible in her life. But she couldn't know this yet, and if she wanted to growl at me--yes, even if she wanted to bite me--in the transition, I would more than happily accept it.

No one in this world was happier than me, age 18, sitting in the back seat of my sister's car holding a trembling terrified dog, listening to my sister scream about what the hell did I have to get a dog for and it damn well never be in her house.

I petted Bobbie and talked softly to her and held her and tried to calm her trembling (how this memory brings back my same actions during her seizures ten years later, bringing her into life, trying to help her through the final passage out--and somehow it allows me to forgive myself a little for that ending that so troubles me), and I noticed she lifted her head two or three times to look out the window during that car ride--the first hopeful gesture I saw her make. Then she quickly put her head back down each time, trembling again.

"In the back yard!" my sister yelled, slamming the car door, furious that I was changing all of our lives by insisting upon having this dog.

She didn't have to be pulled or dragged this time, though she still cowered as she followed me through the gate. She cowered still as I took off the leash and said, "This is it! You're home!" She looked up at me, questioning, disbelieving, and I was lucky again to witness hope cross those round caramels. Tentatively she walked, still hunched to the ground, explored, sniffed, looked back at me. I watched her, smiling and crying and so happy with life and the future we would have, ignoring the slamming doors inside my sister's house.

Then, she saw it. She looked at it, surprised, and turned her head to look back at me. "Yes, it's yours, go ahead!" I encouraged.

For the first time, Bobbie's tail wagged, just a little, just a half-wag, as she picked up the Frisbee. I watched her trembles smooth away, and saw her eyes give up their fears and death in an instant, as she brought it to me and raised her paw and placed it into my outstretched hand.

## His name was Eb...

By Lori Jo Oswald, Pet News Editor

I met him in a veterinarian's office reception area. I had to say goodbye to him in a veterinarian's office reception area.

I called him my "boy."

"How are you doing, Eb?" I'd ask as he walked next to my knee during our daily woods walks. It was courtesy and habit, and in the last few years, worry.

Four years ago, during one of our winter walks, a moose came charging out of the woods. Eb and I didn't see him until it was too late, until his right front foot was kicking forward, hitting Eb in the stomach, and barely missed me. I didn't know if the moose was aiming for Eb or me, but Eb got it, and so his life became a battle ever since.

Hundreds of vet visits, many nights in Pet Emergency, many days on I.V.s in vet clinics.... I became his nurse in that March of 1995, and despite the stress, strain, expense, and tears, it was the most rewarding job I ever had. Many nights I stayed up with him. It was very little compared to what he gave me. When a loved one is gone, you look back of the moments that seemed drudgery and think, "Why couldn't I enjoy that?" But I had already learned my lesson from two dogs grown old, from my father dying in my arms. When Eb needed me, I did everything I could to spend every minute I could making his life wonderful.

I remember a job interview I had, not so long ago. It was exactly the job I wanted and loved—technical editing. But I told the committee that although I was a thorough, dedicated editor, I had to work some of my hours at home because my old dog was ill. I didn't get the job.

I don't regret it now, because it was more time with Eb. I knew his time was coming, even though I kept telling myself, "He's too young. He has to have many years left. He's only 10."

Ten years ago my "Ebbers" came to live with me, my dogs (Woody and Dane), my three cats (Sylvia, Clover, and Bibs), and my two horses (Dusty and Jeffers)—in my cabin in Oregon. My old dog Bobbie had died, and it took me a



while to go back into the veterinarian's office where she'd been "put down" to pay the euthanasia bill. While I was standing at the counter, a silly black lab-something puppy came up to me, his tail as long as his body, wagging and wriggling and smiling. The police had found him wandering the streets; the vet staff members were trying to find him a home. They called him "Mac."

I knew there was no way I was going to get another dog. Two was a perfect number, and I couldn't go through the pain of losing one again. No way. I left the office and ran some errands. On my way home I drove passed the vet office, and stopped in just to say hi to that happy puppy.

Oh, the kisses he greeted me with! It's like we had been best friends for years. It's like he knew I was going to take him home and love him for the next decade. He just knew. But I didn't. Not yet. I left again. Later, I had to meet a former student for a late lunch in town. This student, Allan, was 70-something and a true character.

During lunch, I kept talking about this silly black lab I saw at the vet's, and Allan agreed to go there with me to meet him. That was the third time I was there that day, and that was the time I adopted him. He rode home with me just as he knew he was supposed to, happy and content. At home he immediately bonded with Woody and began wrestling with him on the cabin floor, and—unlike Woody—gave old Dane the respect and distance she wanted. Woody liked to chew on her paws and make her growl.

I liked the name Mac; I liked it a lot. I didn't know why, but that night in the cabin a new name came to me. Eb. Maybe it's because he was the color of shiny ebony. But I think the real reason was he reminded me of Mr. Haney's goofy young neighbor in Green Acres—Eb. Whatever it was, I began calling him Eb. Later that night, Allan called and said, "I came up with a name for your new pup." I said, "I already have a name for him." "Well, mine is better," he retorted, reminding me of what he was like in the classroom. "What is it?" I asked, in spite of myself. Allan replied, "It's Eb."

Many circumstances led me to finally leave my cabin in Oregon and head north up the Alcan. I had to leave my horses behind with others to care for them.



I felt bad about the horses, but I found a home where—I was told—they would never be used for breeding, were in a large herd on 80 acres, and would never be sold. I could visit all I wanted, and if the couple ever had to sell for any reasons—they assured me they would not—I would get to buy them.

I went back to Oregon in 1995 after my parents died, to sell my cabin, get my things, and check on my horses. I drove down the Alcan so Woody and Eb could be with me in their most favorite of activities—car rides. As much as I dreaded the long drive through Canada, having them with me always made it some sort of fun, because they enjoyed it so much. And I always felt safer when they were with me.

I went to see my horses; they were gone. The man said his wife sold them all and moved back to Florida, and no, he had no idea where they were. I was especially worried about Dusty, because she was a registered quarter horse who had been used for breeding so much she was worn out at the age of 8 when I first got her. She constantly tried to escape and go back to the place where her last colt was, but they no longer wanted her and had sold him. I promised her it would never happen to her again.

For now, I had other things to deal with, and I vowed to find Dusty and bring her home, as soon as I figured out where home would be.

Eb and Woody were best friends. They loved each other so powerfully that I can't think of anything else like it. Both Eb and I worshipped Woody; he was our hero, our leader, our everything. The bond between Eb and me was really the bond of being in love with Woody.

After my parents died, I ended up leaving Alaska for a while. I took a teaching job in Washington and found a home in the woods, but on a road I didn't care for. People drove much too fast, often drunk, and seemed to enjoy aiming for animals—wild or tame. Every day I would see cats, opossums, raccoons, squirrels, and sometimes dogs dead on the road. It wasn't a populated area, but it was the kind of country road that the police miss and young drivers especially enjoy going 80 or 90 on.

But Woody and Eb knew the boundaries of our land, and never went out the gate without me. Twice a day we crossed the road together to take our walk in the woods across the street.

One morning I took them for their walk, and Woody befriended a pit bull whose owner seemed to be camping in the woods. The pit bull walked with us, romping ecstatically with Woody. Eb just stayed next to me, as he always did, watching his beloved Woody, and “smiling” at me. Eb never cared to play with any other dog but Woody; Woody played with every dog.

That evening when I came home, for the first time in years, I didn't take Woody and Eb on their walk. I was nervous about a surgical procedure I had to have the next day and all the medication I had to take for it the night before. I think they were confused, as it was our ritual, our routine, but dogs seem so understanding about these things.

About 9 p.m. they wanted out in the yard, and I let them out. I didn't know it was the last time I would see Woody alive. When I called them about 15 minutes later, Eb came running up to the door happily, but Woody, for the first time ever, was not with him.

“Woody!” I called. Was that when he was hit? Hearing my voice, turning from the other side of the road where he'd gone to visit his new pit bull friend? It was black out and I heard nothing. The driver never stopped.

Another driver came along and found him, trying to crawl home, blood pouring out of his mouth.

It was 2 hours before I returned home, after desperately trying to get Woody to Pet Emergency when it was too late from the moment he was hit.

I walked in and collapsed on the stairs just by the door, where Eb was waiting for me, confused. He hadn't known Woody was hit, but he smelled me up and down, and the blood and hair and smell of Woody's death on my clothes and hands told him the whole story. We had both lost our best friend. He looked away from me, into the sheetrocked wall, and didn't look back for a long time. Dogs don't have tear ducts like humans do, but I have no doubt that I wasn't the only one crying.

Eb no longer wanted to sleep on the bed, for he always slept next to Woody there. He stayed in the far corner and wouldn't eat. Our walks were different now; we didn't know what to do. We kept looking at each other. Where's our fearless leader?

The next Monday I had to return to work, and when I came home and let Eb out, he stepped over the threshold, looked up at me, and then collapsed in a seizure. The vets could never find a reason for the

seizures, but I knew that these were caused by a broken heart.

They continued until one day when I brought home a pest of a puppy—a lab-Shepherd just like Woody—and named him Buddy. Eb pretended to ignore him and growled at him from time to time, but he began eating again, our walks perked up, and the seizures stopped that very day, and never returned. Eb probably would have preferred it if I hadn't found Schatzy, a yellow lab mix someone abandoned at a Fred Meyer's parking lot, not long after, as she took instantly to Buddy and claimed him as her own, but somehow Eb and I became much closer than we ever had. Buddy and Schatzy walked and played together; Eb and I walked and played together. Eb's job became "staying-between-'mama'-and-that-obnoxious-yeller-dog," and as he aged so quickly, mine became "making-Eb's-days-as-happy-and-painfree-as-possible."

Hip dysplasia, arthritis, seizures, moose kick repercussions such as liver and pancreas problems, and eventually diabetes... Eb seemed to have all the health problems a dog could have. But still he always knew how to live. He took such joy in the simplest of things—an ear rub, a brushing, chunks of ice to chew on, rawhide and squeaky toys, and walks in the woods. But most of all, he loved to soak in a lake. Just ease his tired soar body into the cold Alaskan waters and groan in pleasure.

All this past winter I worked hard to keep him alive, hoping he'd have his lake soaks again, and he did. Every night we'd walk to the park, and I'd break the ridiculously strict Anchorage leash law as usual, letting the three of them run and splash into the water. While Schatzy would chase sticks and Buddy would chase Schatzy, Eb would just soak with pleasure.

Maybe it was the lake where he caught pneumonia. Maybe it's just that an old dog with so many health problems couldn't fight it, no matter how many antibiotics we put him on that last week. But I think it was just his time; I think he was finally ready to go. He died very bravely, with great dignity. He seemed to wait for me to return to the vet office that last day. I wasn't going to put him down there; I was going to take him home to die, if it wasn't too painful.

"Do you want to go home Eb?" I asked him, trying not to let him hear the pain and fear in my voice.

He got up from the hot dark cage where we'd tried to give him oxygen as a last resort, and followed me

out the back door, urinated outside politely, followed me to the car, but then circled around and wanted back into the front door of the vet office. I opened the door for him, as he wanted me to, and we went inside. That was where he decided to die. He looked up at me, his front legs collapsed, and he bravely and quietly let go.

It was a tremendous circle, his life, our life. Our saying hello and goodbye in vet reception areas took place 10 years apart, perhaps to the very day. When he left, a whole past went with him...a whole history of people and animals and places I have known.

For the first time in several years I don't have constant nursing duties, and I don't have to worry and watch him every minute, and ask, "How are you Eb?" just to make sure he is still alive. I miss that so much.

My walks with Buddy and Schatzy can be much longer now, much more vigorous, but somehow they seem emptier.

I have moved to a new home in the woods, one I was trying to rush into because I wanted Eb to live here, but he didn't make it.

But . . . someone else did.

Now outside my window, I see an old horse, a horse who needs me, who was not treated well the last few years of her life, who is now 21 years old and has seizures and Cushing's disease and is bordering on foundering, and who will need to be cared for for the rest of her life. But she is happy, and she has her son with her, and she will never be mistreated again. Her name is Dusty, and years ago in Oregon, when I brought home a little black puppy named Eb, he and Woody would run alongside her during our many rides through the forests. I had promised her I would find her again, and though it took much longer than I thought it would, I did.

And I think how in some mysterious ways, circles do come together again, and things do work out. And once in a while, you can find true love in life, and even the pain of loss cannot destroy the strength and beauty of that love. I have been so blessed to know so much love from friends, from family, from animals. And sometimes we have the grandest of opportunities to find pure love in the simplest of ways, like rescuing a silly black puppy or recovering someone we lost a long time ago, like an old black mare.

To you Eb. Thanks for giving me 10 years of your | precious life.--The End

## How to Find Your Lost Pet and What to Do if You Find a Pet

By Lori Jo Oswald  
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### Preventing the Disappearing Pet Act

Losing a pet is distressing to both the pet and its owner. There are many dangers for stray pets, including cars, starvation, research laboratories, and disease. A lost cat or dog can't "phone home," and many pet owners have known the terrible grief of losing a pet forever. However, there are also many pets and owners who have been reunited, and there are ways to prevent your pet from disappearing, as well.

- ✓ If you don't already have one, order at least one identification tag for your pet's collar today. ID tags are inexpensive. You can usually buy one at a pet store or pick up an order form at your veterinarian's office.
- ✓ You should also purchase the required Mat-Su Borough license for your dog. This is an excellent identification clue for others to locate you if your pet should become lost. The cost is only \$5; purchase licenses at the animal control shelter.
- ✓ Another useful key to preventing pet loss is to get your pet microchipped, said Betty Vehrs of the Mat-Su Animal Care and Regulation Board. The Mat-Su Animal Control shelter does microchipping for \$20 for a pet with a license and \$25 for one without. Also, check with your veterinarian: many vets are also providing microchipping services.
- ✓ Don't let your pet stray.
- ✓ Your dog's collar should fit properly. To find this out, you should be able to fit two fingers between your dog's neck and his collar.
- ✓ Cat collars are still a debatable issue with some pet owners and veterinarians. The Alaska Humane Society recommends that you keep your cat indoors, but if you do let your cat out, be sure to provide it with a proper stretch collar so if it gets caught it has a chance to escape without choking.
- ✓ It is also not a good idea to leave your pet unattended in your car for long. Certainly, in the summer months, this is especially important, since just a few minutes in a hot car can kill an animal. If you do enjoy traveling with your pet on cooler days, take precautions so that your pet is not stolen and does not escape. Your pet should have his or her collar (with identification) on, and you should keep a leash in the car in case you need it.
- ✓ Be sure all your windows are screened to keep your cat in.
- ✓ If you have to take your cat outside, transport her in a carrying case or on a leash. Cats often panic when carried and escape this way.
- ✓ Don't tie up your pet and leave him alone. Don't let him run loose. Sadly, some pets are stolen and sold to laboratories for experimentation. Some are stolen for other reasons. Also, if you do have a dog that you tie out a lot, the Cottage Grove (Oregon) Humane Society said, "you should question whether you are providing a good, loving home for this pet. Is he really a part of your family, or is he just a 'nuisance,' kept out of your sight? Please treat your pets with the love and kindness they deserve."
- ✓ Have your pets spayed and neutered. This will reduce their tendency to wander in the first place. According to Pets & Pals of Sacramento, a male animal will travel many miles to visit a female in heat.

### What to Do if You Lose Your Pet

- ✓ Immediately upon losing your pet, begin to look for it. Check in your neighborhood. Ask children, for they are often the first to know if a new pet appears.

- ✓ Go to the Mat-Su Borough Animal Control shelter and look through the cages. Betty Vehrs, volunteer coordinator at the shelter, said to return to the shelter every day to check. "We get over 300 animals a month, and the shelter is not responsible for matching lost and found animals. It is the owner's responsibility to come down and look visually."
- ✓ After the visual inspection, fill out a lost report for the lost pet notebook up at the main counter at animal control. Vehrs advises pet owners to bring a picture of their pets to put in the notebook.
- ✓ Also, while at animal control, check the section of the same notebook that contains found animals that is located on the front desk.
- ✓ Also check the DOA (dead on arrival) records, located in the same notebook as the lost and found records, at the Mat-Su Borough Animal Control Shelter.
- ✓ Check with the local police department if you lost your pet in Palmer.
- ✓ Check with area veterinarian clinics to see if your pet has been brought in or reported found.
- ✓ Place an advertisement in the lost and found section of the local newspaper (the Frontiersman, 376-5225, offers free listings for lost and found pets; Anchorage Daily News 376-4101; Talkeetna Good Times, 733-8463). Radio stations will sometimes announce lost and found pets for free. KMBQ Valley Radio (99.7 AM), 373-0222, keeps a lost and found list but doesn't air them. KJNP, Big Lake, 892-2216, airs them on the Trading Post Bulletin Board but it will be quicker if you call the North Pole number at 907-488-2216. KTNA (88.5 FM), Talkeetna, 733-1700, airs them. As for Valley television, Rogers Cable System does not currently air lost and found pet ads on its community access channel.
- ✓ Make signs or flyers with a description of your pet (dog or cat, breed, age, size, sex, and any distinguishing marks). If you have a clear photograph of your pet, include this. Photos usually copy pretty well, and color copies are now available, although they cost more. In your flyers detail the date lost, the area the animal was last seen in, and your name, address, and home and office phone numbers. Place these signs on local bulletin boards and stores where your pet disappeared and where you live. (Check with the store owners to be sure it is all right to put your flyer up, and date your flyers.) Place some also at the animal control shelter and veterinarian offices. See if you can put some up at local schools and churches.
- ✓ Ask your mailman, your newspaper delivery person, and anyone else who frequently visits the neighborhood to keep an eye out for your pet. You might also ask neighborhood children to keep an eye out for your pet.
- ✓ Put a bowl of your pet's favorite food outside your door in case he returns while you're gone.
- ✓ Dogs often latch on to people, but cats are even harder to find when lost. Humane societies recommend looking up and down when you're searching for a lost cat. Call your cat by name, checking trees, under cars (sometimes cats hide under car hoods to keep warm), behind garbage cans, under trailers and houses, and any small place your cat might have crawled in, up to, or under to hide.
- ✓ Most importantly, do these things immediately. Remember that animal shelters are so overcrowded due to the severe pet overpopulation problem that they can often only hold strays for three days.

### What to Do If You Find a Pet

- ✓ If you find a pet, place advertisements in newspaper and radio stations (see the lost pet article in this issue). Leave information with veterinarians, humane societies, and animal shelters.
- ✓ Go to or call the Mat-Su Borough Animal Control Shelter and fill out a form to put in the "Found Pets" notebook.
- ✓ Make flyers for nearby stores, veterinarian offices, local bulletin boards, etc.
- ✓ If you find a dog that's been groomed, check with dog grooming shops to see if they recognize him.
- ✓ Never turn an animal loose. After several unsuccessful days or weeks of trying to locate the owner, try to find a home for the pet. If you are unable to keep the pet in your own home while searching for a good home for it, take it to the Mat-Su Animal Control shelter.