

On the Positive Side

The true value of humane education

By Jean Gilbert Special to the Sun-News

Posted: 04/26/2009 12:00:00 AM MDT

Living with a companion animal has tremendous rewards, beyond the scope and joy of serving as owner-guardian. The strong bond formed during the life of a beloved pet is what leads to respect and some of the values we hold true as adults in our treatment of "other" animals, including human beings.

I was fortunate to grow up with this type of humane ethic, learning responsible pet care at an early age with the oversight and instruction of parents to watch closely over our pug dog, "the only dog we would ever have."

Happy was certainly pampered by my sister and me, dressed up in baby clothes for dog shows/contests and pushed around in a doll buggy or on a leash alongside us for most every play activity. Spay-and-neuter awareness was not common in the early 1950s, but Happy was spayed during that era on the advice of a neighborhood veterinarian. She never had puppies. She lived to old age, and died near the time I completed college.

Not all people have the advantage of living with a pet — nor do all children have the opportunity or the environment for learning humane treatment of animals.

For this reason, humane education is important in our schools and youth clubs, in all settings where children are served. Humane education is part and parcel to character education, teaching youth the fundamentals of good citizenship with lessons/activities in kindness, fairness, respect, responsibility, integrity, and other areas.

Humane education takes many forms. It includes presentations on special topics or themes (safety, training, pet care with an animal guest if desired), a field trip to a rescue center or animal shelter, formation of a "critter club" or doing a special project for animals.

Humane education includes outreach efforts and presentations by animal control officers and other organizations or individuals working in the field of animal rescue and welfare.

The goal of humane education is central to good character development, teaching kids to care and learning to act to help animals. The Humane Society of Southern New Mexico offers free presentations on a variety of animal topics, geared to the interest and ability level of youth in schools, clubs, and other settings.

In addition, the Humane Society of Southern New Mexico has been an active chapter of Roots & Shoots for the past two years. Affiliated with the Jane Goodall Institute, the HSSNM chapter offers a companion animal program at the Las Cruces Boys & Girls Club.

The club members volunteer at the animal shelter, fulfilling the service learning aspect of Roots and Shoots.

Contact HSSNM at (575) 523-8020 or (575) 522-2529 to schedule a free presentation or to learn more about humane education.

Jean Gilbert is a retired elementary teacher and humane educator with the Humane Society of Southern New Mexico. She directs the work of Roots & Shoots for HSSNM and leads the service learning efforts of youth from the Boys & Girls Club at the local shelter.