

**On the Positive Side: Public intervention can put halt to animal cruelty  
Sun-News report**

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**Dr. Judy Long**

This past Tuesday the Las Cruces Sun-News carried the story of a puppy that was brutally killed by its owner. He carried out his torture over a sustained period of time, perhaps days. On Saturday, according to a witness, the man throttled the dog by the neck, held her against a fence and kicked her until she could no longer cry out. Who could hear her protests, her howls of pain, her cries for help? Can you imagine her cries?

Did she die Saturday? Or the next day? Responding to an animal abuse call on Sunday, the Animal Control officer found the dead dog where she had been dumped in the trash bin. She died from having a heavy weight - presumably a human foot-pressed against her throat, cutting off the airway. The owner, now in custody, claimed the dog's injuries resulted from her being hit by a car.

She was a border collie - one of the smartest dog breeds. You have seen them on TV, winning agility competitions time after time. You may have seen a live demonstration at the Farm and Ranch Museum with a shepherd showing off the hand signals he has used to train his dog. It is uncanny to see how, at a distance and without speech, the trained dog can sweep around a scattered herd of sheep and move them according to the shepherd's directions.

Saturday's dog victim was not how we think of a "pet" - or how we treat our pets. Could she have been delivered from the hell she lived, and the agonizing death she died?

Neighbors and witnesses are a very important part of the animal "safety net" in Las Cruces. They are the first line of defense for abused animals. Indeed, someone must report the abuse to Animal Control; they cannot act without a complaint. Someone has to let them know when an animal is being tortured, abused or killed.

Don't be afraid to call Animal Control. They are fully equipped officers, prepared to confront a range of situations. They can intervene where a neighbor might not. I can understand why a person would want to avoid trouble with the neighbors. And we tend to respect property rights. We would like to turn away. But cruelty and abuse call out to us. It is hard to ignore. And hard to witness.

If we can ask the public to overcome fears and doubts about reporting, we should be able to expect a timely and appropriate response from authorities. Emergency and help lines need to be functional and fully staffed. According to the Sun-News, extreme cases of animal cruelty such as the one this past weekend should be reported to the police emergency number 911. Las Cruces Animal Control phone lines, however, are staffed only 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. After the workday, calls are automatically rerouted to a (non-emergency) number at the Mesilla Valley Regional Dispatch Authority. If the caller waits through the recorded message, it is possible for him or her to leave a message, but there is no assurance when the message will be monitored or what response can be expected. This is a point where the animal safety net needs to be strengthened.

There will be a public outcry about the delay in responding to this animal's need. And many of the public will want to attend the trial, and see for themselves how the justice system handles this kind of tragedy.

Dr. Judy Long is a retired professor of sociology and a board member of the Humane Society of Southern New Mexico.