

ON THE POSITIVE SIDE

It takes a village to advocate for chained animals

By Jean Gilbert

Feb. 20, 2015

Kids say the darnedest things. Their expressions of naivete can be very funny. I was amused by a little boy's comment in a recent Critter Connection session. He was asking about the 18-year-old dog resting in my arms.

"Is she people's age?" he wondered. "Yes, 18 is the number of years she's been living, but Dali is really older because dogs grow up faster and age quicker than people," I chuckled. "I carry her on walks now because she's blind and too old to manage by herself."

Using standards on a chart, with size/breed (toy poodle-mix) and weight (20 pounds) as references, Dali is the equivalent of an 88- to 96-year-old person. Adopted from our municipal animal shelter as a young adult, she's been a celebrated companion — comfortable at the Humane Society of Southern New Mexico's education sessions meeting children and happy at animal welfare events like "Lobo to Lassie," where she won best talent for catching the balls to song "Take Me Out to the Ball Game." She was even featured in "Bark Magazine" with a winning, smiling dog photo.

I wish all dogs were as celebrated and cherished as Dali. This year marks the 13th season of the Dogs Deserve Better "Have a Heart for Chained Dogs" campaign. Children and adults in the HSSNM's education programs have offered their artistic talents and voices to help improve lives for chained/ tethered dogs through a mailing program. Our intent is to help DDB with its goal of reaching 10,000 chained or penned dogs at residences in the United States through the mailings — some of them living in Las Cruces and Doña Ana County.

Chaining is not only inhumane for dogs isolated and left alone in the elements, but it has taken a toll on our nation's children. During a 10-year period spanning through July 2014, there were at least 395 incidences (a conservative report) of children killed or seriously injured by chained dogs across the country. Chained dogs are often not socialized with humans and can become very territorial of their tiny space. A child who wanders into that space can be attacked and killed before adults can intervene.

An attack in Arkansas left a 2-year-old boy dead from head and neck injuries. He was attacked and killed by an unsprayed female chained in the backyard, who had puppies.

"Winter is a good time to reach out to those who chain and pen their dogs, and Valentine's Day is the perfect opportunity to show these forgotten canines a little love," said Tamira Thayne of DDB.

"Every winter our rescuers see dogs freezing in the snow, suffering from frostbite, or otherwise enduring horrific living conditions because of the longstanding misperception that it is OK to chain a dog outside in any kind of weather." The Henry Bergh ASPCA award-winning and heart-warming story "Buddy Unchained," by Daisy Bix, reflects the anti-chaining message of DDB when a small dog, chained in winter, is overcome by hypothermia and is rescued in the nick of time. Several hardback copies of the book will be donated by HSSNM again as part of our work in the annual campaign, bringing the total number of copies to 25 in area school libraries.

Join us in humane education efforts by volunteering in the Critter Connection or Diggity Dog Learning programs or in the Cans 4 Critters project involving youth and clubs in litter clean-up with aluminum cans saved for reclamation to help animals.

Jean Gilbert is on the HSSNM board of directors and is a humane education coordinator. She may be reached at jean@hssnm.org or 575-522-2529. Interested guest authors may contact HSSNM at 575-523-8020.