

On the Positive Side: Ordinary pets often can have extraordinary impact on people

By Frank Bryce / For the Sun News

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Last week's Sunday Sun-News carried a great article by Mark Pendleton about the "ordinary people" that make Las Cruces an extraordinary place to live and I was struck by the parallels with how ordinary pets have also helped make this such a great place to live. I have for some time concerned myself with the "unmiracle animals" who share our homes and often fill our shelter. It is often only when the ordinary companion animal or livestock is showcased due to the saving of a life or being mistreated that the animal's situation gets our notice and then receives "hero" or "miracle" status. Examples are two separate incidents where some time back a family dog remained with the adult gentleman who was lost in the Gila and more recently another remained with a three-year old girl, both in deadly cold conditions and undoubtedly contributing to both surviving their ordeals.

Not all our family companion animals face the challenge of dangers as have been faced by such wonderful companions that become newsworthy. However, there are the innumerable joys most of us share every day with our ordinary companion animals who contribute to the fabric that enriches our lives. I, much like Mr. Pendleton, cannot begin to name all the dogs and cats I know who have given so much love and affection and probably contributed to the welfare of families in so many ways. Again, much as the other story, these are the animals and families I see on a regular basis and have known for some time and in many cases for their entire lives.

However, a small tan Chihuahua named Snooter comes to mind as one of those enriching little ingredients for many in our area. This little girl was literally bought off a street corner in the South Valley and joined a loving home with the existing pack of animals and the family. By odd circumstances, Snooter became the mascot of the former "Free Spay and Neuter Program" and began her long journey to her current status as an integral part of the Humane Society of Southern New Mexico's humane education program. Her story of probable puppy mill origin, rescue by animal advocates, veterinarian care with vaccinations and spay, and life with her family and animal companions has now been shared by many, many local school children and participants of the Las Cruces Boys and Girls Club for almost five years. Snooter is also a facet of the Jane Goodall Foundation's Roots and Shoots International Youth Program. Her story, submitted as part of a project outline for humane education, is endorsed by the Goodall Foundation and considered essential curriculum material by the Humane Society in spay-neuter awareness.

How did this little, almost everyday run-of-the-mill, unmiracle Chihuahua become so important in the effort to teach our local youths about pet care, responsibility and the need to spay and neuter? Well it was the combination of the love and inspiration provided by Snooter and the commitment, dedication and concern of the very same sort of people that Mr. Pendleton took time to write about in our community. It was people like most of you who share your lives everyday with your family and pets and have taken an extra step to help the animals not in the spotlight. Please consider what you can do, in a small or large way, to address the pet overpopulation issues in our local communities and get involved however you can. There are a number of organizations waging an almost heroic effort in this battle and they could use your help.

Frank Bryce is the president of the Humane Society of Southern New Mexico. To schedule a storytelling session about Snooter or related pet care topics, please call the HSSNM office at 523-8020.