

## **On The Positive Side**

**Best policies: Adoption, spaying, neutering**

**By Win Jacobs / For the Sun-News**

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No one has been able to say exactly how a dog or cat or horse feels, though many a besotted human has claimed otherwise. But we do see that they respond to strokes and murmurs, as well as food and water, by coming toward us—or to blows or curses by cringing away from us.

Moreover, there are many instances of the animal intuiting a human need, staying closer than usual to a new widow or a sick child, sounding a danger alert to warn of prowlers or fire. On a recent Sunday, the “On the Positive Side” column in the Las Cruces Sun-News featured a pit bull who somehow sensed an oncoming diabetic coma in his caregiver and woke her in time to save her.

My relationship with my own poodle and lhasa apso leads me to nod approvingly at the phrase “No kill,” and—at first glance—some decrease in the euthanasia rate at the Animal Services Center of the Mesilla Valley. I may not have room for any more animals at my house, but surely others will. Las Cruces is a community of good people, growing in humane awareness of animals as sentient beings.

Regular features in local media highlight and support the work of the several animal welfare groups. As individuals and as a community, we are doing our best to see that companion animals receive good care. Except, when our best is pretty lousy. Except when our good intentions are nullified by negatives.

Animals that are healthy at intake can be sickened by virus-laden air, unclean and/or overcrowded housing at the shelter, literally bored to death by lack of exercise and cuddling.

Animals that are sick at intake can be stacked together, illegally vaccinated (against other ills) anyhow. They can be allowed to linger till they die of “natural” causes or sometimes just through the long day until it’s time for the needle.

Rebecca Dube, an msnbc.com contributor, posted “Animal Shelter Turned into a ‘House of Horrors’” March 16, 2010.

She cites the cases of three animal shelters where custodial cruelty was alleged, investigated by the SPCA and led to legal action against the custodians. (I must add that none of the three was our community).

Whether it stems from apathy or sadism or lack of resources or good intentions run amuck, abuse kills. This can happen even at “shelters” that accept the responsibility of life and death for unwanted animals. A wise person once said, “For evil to triumph, it is only necessary that good men do nothing.”

Pet overpopulation certainly lies at the root of the problem, in Toronto or Memphis or Clarksdale-Coahoma County.

Or Las Cruces, where we live. Humane education (and common sense) stress spay/neuter as the number one remedy. Locally there are subsidies for the procedure available to low income owners; SNAP (Spay Neuter Action Program, 524-9265) is the longest surviving resource, though other groups have stepped up and more may follow.

Some parents may want their children to witness “the miracle of birth.”

But all too often, there is little concern for the results thereof—especially after the newborn creature has lost its “cute.” And then, there are casual roadside sellers and puppy and kitten “mills” continuing to churn out creatures for profit based on quantity not quality. Irresponsible retail pet stores provide outlet for the “product.”

More and more communities are banning retail pet stores; Albuquerque is one. The shop in Mesilla Valley Mall was closed some time ago, not by legal action but (presumably) by lack of profit. At least it’s gone, but roadside sellers are still easy to find, and move around much faster than Codes Enforcement can catch up with them.

Or there is always “the pound.” A policy of free drop-off too often proves irresistible to the irresponsible. “It’s just an animal,” goes the rationale. So the animals stack up, and our tax dollars subsidize the disposition. Overpopulation breeds overcrowding at the shelter.

“Dumb animals” are not stupid. They just can’t speak our language. They do have human advocates—breed-specific rescue groups, fosters, shelter workers, humane educators, veterinarians, even some lawyers. But for too many creatures standing before the bar of reality, the verdict reads “guilty, of being unwanted.”

Question: How to mitigate the problem? Answers: Spay and neuter before the fact. Foster or adopt after. Call Safe Haven (527-4544), a local no-kill resource of great heart though limited funds, if you want to adopt.

Just don’t dump animals at the shelter or in the desert! Finally, if early death must come to an animal, let it be by gentle, quick intention, not by slow withering due to intentional neglect designed to save dollars or serve statistics.

Euthanasia should be competent, accepted, but as rare as possible! “No Kill” is a wonderful goal. For defenseless animals, it must not be a death sentence by another name.

Win Jacobs is a longtime civic activist, a board member of HSSNM, and the grateful pal of two senior dogs.