

## **On the Positive Side: When is a Rescue? How Far Will You Go**

**by Dr. Judy Long**

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Every day in Dona Ana County warm-hearted and devoted individuals keep swimming upstream against a tide of animal abuse, overpopulation and neglect. Even when we add in the efforts of Animal Control professionals, the two forces are not evenly matched. What does it mean to save one life when dozens are ending, sometimes horribly?

This is the context for my question, when is a rescue? By which I mean, if rescue means intervening to save the life of an animal you don't personally own, how far will you go in taking responsibility?

### **A ONE-LEGGED GOOSE**

A kind-hearted, elderly farm couple knew that a predator was staging raids on the pen where they kept their fowl. One morning they discovered a young gosling that had had his leg captured by a predator who grabbed it through the wire and chewed it off. They wanted to rescue the bird, but knew he couldn't fend for himself. In the context of life on a farm, he was done for. But they wanted to save him. So they loaded up the gosling and took him into town, where they knew a kindly spirit watched over the duck pond on campus. They left their "rescue" there.

Was that the right thing to do? What if there had been no-one willing to take responsibility for this life? What about the old or disabled? Will anyone meet them halfway?

### **WAS THAT YOUR CAT?**

Driving down Valley Drive at 6 p.m. after a demanding day, my friend saw a black object flying through the air in a downward arc. It landed in the middle of the southbound lane. Sure looked like a cat to this dog lover.

Instead of passing by, my friend pulled over to see what she could do. It was a cat. It had obviously been thrown from a car, and the driver was long gone. My friend, not a "cat person," found that the cat was still alive and could respond. She hustled around to find some cloth to wrap him in and a dustpan to provide a firm surface for transporting him to a vet. Another motorist had stopped and together they checked out the neighborhood. Sure enough, there was a veterinary office nearby, closed at 5 p.m., and for only \$90 extra he would respond to a phone call after hours.

My friend knew that her vet, Dr. Carol Calista, was still open. She knew the compassionate staff would do what they could for the injured cat. They put him on oxygen and struggled to bring down his temperature, from a traumatic 106 degrees that soon went up to 107.

Meanwhile my friend checked in with a local contact of the Las Cruces Cat Lobby. Was there a place the black cat could come to recover from his injuries? What kind of aftercare was available for this wounded warrior? He might recover from his injuries, but it would be a lengthy convalescence, requiring the kind of care only a devoted pet owner would give. Devoted pet lover had fled the scene.

My friend took the final responsibility: she gave permission for the black cat to be put down, and gave him the gift of a peaceful death.

**WAS THIS YOUR CAT?** Are you sorry you tossed him from your car, intending a brutal death for him? Or did you laugh? Does it matter to you that he had no collar, no ID, no microchip, no way for a rescuer to let you know what had happened to him?

I'm sure you're glad to know he spent his last hours in the tender hands of animal lovers who tried to help him on his way.

## ONCE A PET, NOW HOMELESS

The Humane Society of Southern New Mexico operates a telephone Help Line, whose mission is to match up lost pets and the owners who are searching for them.

One night well after bedtime, Bill Smith was awakened by the telephone. A frantic pet owner wanted Bill to find a home for his dog. He was leaving town imminently, and had waited until the last minute to make arrangements for his faithful pet.

Possibly he knew how difficult it would be to find a good home for a adult dog of no particular distinction. Maybe he didn't want to "dump" his dog at the shelter, where he knew the probabilities that his dog would be euthanized. He could always turn the dog out into the street, or just leave him locked up in the apartment to starve. Plenty of people have done that. Maybe he *was* thinking of his dog when he tried to shift the responsibility.

Did he think that this stranger would get out of bed at 4 a.m. and arrive to take the dog off his hands? Was he satisfied to think, "Well, at least I tried?"

The vicious tide of irresponsibility, ultimately, washes up at the doors of the Animal Services Center. Their staff takes the final responsibility for homeless and abandoned animals. That's the ones that have not been eaten by predators, tortured to death by humans, or abandoned to starve.

No answers here, just a question; HOW FAR WILL YOU GO?