

## **PAWS for Action – Why Animals?**

With so many areas of need throughout the world I sometimes have to ask myself why I chose animals. This question came up for me just the other morning on the way to work. While listening to NPR I learned of an Iranian woman who operates a program to help oppressed women in the Middle East. Her story was truly remarkable and her cause was very compelling.

I was raised by animal lovers. There was a time when our home looked a lot like the home of Ace Ventura in the Pet Detective. We liked it that way. Our pets were full-fledged family members. It didn't matter whether they were dogs, hamsters, snakes, or birds.

My mom was a homemaker and was one of those special people who could communicate with animals and bring out their personalities. She passed her love of animals on to her children and I do not even like to imagine a life without pets in my home.

For most of my career I've worked with nonprofit organizations. I made this choice soon after college, finding life in the corporate world to be somewhat unsatisfying. I learned that, for me, it is important that my work be meaningful in terms of the impact I am able to make in the world around me. The paycheck isn't, in itself, a source of fulfillment. I want to make a difference by making things better somehow.

Over a period of years I worked my way up from staff accountant to controller to director of finance and administration. One day, for reasons I can no longer recall, I decided I wanted to try my hand at leading an organization. My interests and experience have ranged from mental health to aging to faith-based programs. I love kids, I have an interest in women's issues, and I have long admired Habitat for Humanity. Yet, I decided to go the route of animal welfare.

With all the things I care about, my greatest passion is for animals of all kinds, but especially companion animals. There is so much work to do and it is so gratifying to see the progress being made all over the world in this field. It is also, at times, heartbreaking. This has helped me to learn about compassion, resiliency and to trust in God's plan.

At this moment I'm sharing my office with Fred, a bright green and red parrot. He is gorgeous and sweet and his owner had to let him go after having him for several years. I don't know why but I know this can be a difficult time for a parrot and I want to do whatever I can to help him get into a home where the needs of parrots are understood.

For the past several months, Dave and I have been caring for Sully, an eighteen month old shepherd/retriever mix with degenerative polyneuropathy. It's something I've never heard of but have gotten a crash course over the past few months. The long-term doesn't necessarily look great for Sully but right now he is a very happy boy whose best friend is Tinker, our shiny black, thirteen pound, two year old dog. They are as inseparable as Mutt and Jeff.

We become better people by caring for others with no expectation to receive anything in return. To some folks that probably won't sound quite right. For others, who have had the privilege of learning this lesson, there is absolutely no other way to live.

Animals can't speak for themselves. They are some of the most vulnerable among us and our world will be a better place when we treat them with the respect every living and sentient being deserves. It is a blessing to have received the opportunity to work in this field.

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