

**PAWS for Action – April is Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Month
To run 4/3/2016**

The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals was founded by Henry Bergh, the aristocratic son of a New York shipbuilder, on April 10, 1866. Ever since Bergh's death in 1888, April has been set aside by the ASPCA as Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Month.

Dogs, and even cats, are social creatures who possess highly developed senses of both hearing and smell. It would be accurate to say they are sensitive creatures, both emotionally and physically. For this reason cruelty can take a form so subtle that it may not register with neighbors and friends.

People who don't mean to be cruel relegate their pets to solitary lives in the back yard or home alone for extended periods of time. Imagine the boredom of nine or ten hour days with no other living creature to interact with and no meaningful activity to occupy your mind.

Animals subjected to this life may bark incessantly or become destructive to property. When this happens their plight can be made worse by confinement to a kennel or even a crate. Owners may resort to a shock collar to punish and stop the barking.

I've become aware of more than one situation where animals were confined to a kennel that was rarely cleaned and had to live 24/7 in their own filth.

It is hard to believe anyone could be so lacking in empathy and problem solving skills. Maybe they can't bring themselves to rehome their pets or at least surrender them to a shelter. Surely this would be a preferable outcome. Maybe they are simply unaware of their pet's predicament.

Just about everyone I know loves, or at least likes, animals. One look into their eyes and they captivate us. Their intelligence and seemingly endless capacity to love us unconditionally touches us deeply. What's not to love about that?

The best thing about animals is what they teach us about loving and caring for others. By their very presence they show us how to become less selfish and how to truly enjoy life. When I take my dogs to the park I not only receive the gratification of watching their ecstasy, I get outside to enjoy nature myself.

Those of us who work in animal sheltering love to see our animals go home. We hope they go on to live enriched lives but the reality is that they may not always get what we would hope for them. It is a fact of life that can cause us to lose faith in humanity, but this doesn't help our animals.

The best we can do is to be willing to suspend judgement for a moment. We don't always know the whole story behind an animal we believe is suffering from neglect. We can take the risk of entering into those difficult conversations with neighbors or friends in order to see what can be done to help them and their pet.

Maybe they will have a change of heart toward their pet and rekindle the relationship they intended to have when they made the decision to bring the pet into their home. Or maybe they can be encouraged to help their pet get the loving home he deserves.

This is advocacy in the truest sense and will take us farther than animosity and conflict when it comes to changing our world.

Bobbi Yeo lives in Opelika, AL. She is the CEO of PAWS Humane in Columbus, GA, an animal shelter and veterinary clinic offering low-cost spay/neuter and other services to the public. Email her at byeo@pawshumane.org with your comments and story ideas.