

## **Sunday Column – Judge Not Lest Ye Be Judged For publication 3.5.17**

An anti-tethering ordinance was reviewed by the Columbus Council last week. It is hard to believe that such an ordinance is necessary. But truth be told, people really do chain their dogs in backyards, leaving them to twiddle their thumbs for hours, even days, on end. I've seen dogs lose limbs and even hang themselves when left unattended on single point tethers.

It is only natural to wonder how anyone thinks this is okay. Why would someone even have a dog if they were just going to leave him tied up all day? We may never fully understand the answer to this question but, true to my Libra nature, I try to see both sides of it. For me this beats the otherwise inevitable conclusion which my husband suggested I refrain from stating publically.

The fact that one-third to one-half of all American households have a dog tells me that we humans love these guys. Most of us consider our dogs to be companions, if not full-fledged family members. My dogs are my fur kids and I am not the least bit embarrassed to tell that to anyone who will allow me to amaze them with pictures and videos of Sam and Tinker. They are intelligent and empathetic beings and for me life would not be quite the same without them.

The citizen who championed the anti-tethering ordinance gave an impassioned speech and presented an emotional video that was hard to watch. Though it was nothing I haven't seen before, it left me with a heavy feeling that I can't quite seem to shake even days later.

Tethering may be an outward manifestation of animal cruelty. Alternatively, it may be the product of extremely poor problem solving skills. You would think those in the latter camp would eventually see the light and be driven by guilt to either correct the issue or surrender their animal to a rescue organization.

There was no need for a presentation at the Council meeting. The ordinance was sponsored by four council members and was supported by the signatures of 19,000 citizens as well as a large crowd at Tuesday night's meeting.

What disheartened me was their rallying cry, "people who can't afford pets should not have them!" Perhaps in an ideal world these people would not have kids either. But they do. That is the reality and we have little choice but to find a way to work with it.

There are still too many dogs and cats and not enough humans to take care of them all. Dogs in particular, do not fare well on their own the way cats do. Those deemed unworthy to have pets under the "affordability test" don't always go looking for another mouth to feed. More likely they find themselves with a pet because there is nowhere else for the animal to go. Not many of us are keen on the idea of taking a stray to animal control if we fear that she will not come out alive.

These folks, by and large, are motivated by compassion to take these animals in. They love them as much as anyone else but they may not be able to spare the extra \$300 to spay their accidental dog. Flea and heartworm preventatives cost hundreds of dollars annually. Lower income folks tend to be renters and not in a position to build a fence to contain their dogs.

We have to accept that we are not likely to end animal suffering entirely but we can try to alleviate it. If we are too quick to judge our neighbors we will lose our chance to establish meaningful relationships with them. We don't always know their circumstances and we may find that with a little kindness and understanding we can do the most good for them and their pets.

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