

Sunday Column – We’re Not the Crazy Ones **For publication 6.11.17**

I probably first heard the term “Humaniac” within days of entering the field of animal welfare. Little did I understand the full extent of what I was getting myself in to. In Myers-Briggs terminology I’m an ESTJ. Known as “life’s administrators” our modus operandi is to assess a situation, identify the core issues and resolve them.

I wish animal welfare were so simple. On the surface the presenting issues are cut and dried. There are too many companion animals who are not spayed or neutered and they reproduce at an exponential rate, overwhelming the adoption market.

The ultimate solution (do I really even have to say it?) is to make spay/neuter surgery more accessible to pet owners. It could not be more elementary. Still, it is a surprisingly elusive fix, with resistance coming from sectors of our society you would never imagine. It’s enough to turn an ESTJ into a raving lunatic though I like to think I caught myself before it was too late.

This morning I picked up a PAWS Humane dog who was owner surrendered to a local county animal control agency. Sometimes things go wrong for adopters who might otherwise provide great homes. This particular pup is a cute little guy who will have no problem getting another chance at a happy life.

In this case our adopter lived somewhat on the edge financially. At PAWS Humane we don’t decline or approve adoptions based on income. We know that you don’t have to have a lot of money to be a good adopter. Conversely, some people with lots of money don’t want to spend any of it on their pets. Income is not our primary criteria for assessing adopters. We hedge our bets by holding ourselves out as a resource throughout the lives of their pets. To be fussy about income would doom thousands more animals to certain death.

Unfortunately, this story hit the internet and TV news feeds making the adopter out to be a bad person. There are two sides to any story and we actually applaud this adopter’s decision to surrender his dog given his current circumstances.

Some folks seem to get something out of demonizing pet owners when all that really matters is that the animal ultimately gets what he needs. It is a waste of time and energy to do anything other than focus on securing a better outcome for this deserving pet.

Too many animal welfare do-gooders get sucked into the emotional vortex of animal suffering. Their sorrow for animals too quickly becomes anger in search of a villain, thwarting any chance of being truly useful.

This work can’t be about us. To stay emotionally intact requires a dedication to relieving the suffering of both animals and people. Most importantly it requires great faith and trust in something bigger than ourselves that will sustain us in the day-to-day.

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.