



SUNDAY, DECEMBER 7, 2008

A gift for puppies in a pen

If any of you are pet owners, and I'm almost sure most of you are, I know you will identify with this column. But even if you aren't a pet owner, I hope it will make you think a little bit more about the world around us.

The day after Thanksgiving, my husband and I said goodbye to our beloved chocolate Labrador who we called simply "Brownie." She had taken a fall about a week before when her hind legs gave out, and she struggled to get up several times after. Her



Generations

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health declined quickly in the next couple of days after the fall. The last time I sat next to her on the floor was on Thanksgiving as I tried to feed her some brown sugared ham that she loved so much every holiday. She didn't eat much and that told us that we needed to do what we had to no matter how difficult it was.

At 12 years old, which is considered a decent life for an active Labrador, the very last memory I have of her is looking into her large brown eyes as she turned her head up toward me in the veterinarian's office. I stroked her back and smiled down at her as if to tell her it would be OK and that soon she would be out of pain. I then gave the OK nod to our trusted, compassionate veterinarian.

My husband and I cried in each other's arms when Brownie stopped breathing. Brandy, our sweet boxer, had passed away in March of this year at 13 years old. We'll place Brownie's remains and headstone next to Brandy on a piece of land cleared away next to our home. It's on a lovely hill with a panoramic view of the mountains, a place where they both frolicked and played during very happy times.

Her eyes', just like Brandy's last look in my direction before she passed, will be embedded in my heart and soul forever.

I know that life must go on even though our two beloved pets will no longer be with us, so I dove back into work on Monday. In the evening, my usual time for Friends for Animals Humane Society of Burke County projects, I re-read FFA's annual donation drive letter of appeal. FFA hopes, as I do, that even in this dismal, tough economy, people will continue to open their hearts and make a contribution so that FFA can continue to save animals. Since its inception, FFA has saved more than 10,000 animals but, of course, too many others have been lost.

Reading some of the grant applications turned in for 2008, I once again face the numbers that you, the public, don't hear much about. Words like euthanasia are used in all grants — the killing of unwanted, abandoned cats and dogs that FFA can't take in because of an already overcrowded shelter. One of our volunteers is gathering much needed statistics on animals turned into Ani-

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mal Control so that we can apply for a grant next year that will target the vital practice of spaying/neutering all pets. This, in turn, will reduce the animal population so that litters aren't discarded, abandoned, euthanized. She began the project in March of this year and the number of animals euthanized in 2008 will far surpass 2007's final number of 4,000.

Taking a break from grant review, I checked my e-mail and received yet another e-mail about a case of animal cruelty in Burke County from FFA's animal cruelty investigator: I open up the attached picture of a dog almost starved to death, its neck bound with a heavy chain, and I wonder about the owner of this dog who has been indifferent and oblivious to the animal's basic needs. Why? I wonder about the people who come into contact with the owner. Do they not see what I see? Or do they wear blinders because they choose not to get involved?

Another e-mail shows me a picture of an old rusted pickup truck. In the back of the open truck are puppies. Chicken wire keeps them from escaping from the truck. They are left outside in the freezing cold, rain or

shine, hungry and afraid. I tossed and turn that night and every night since wondering how the puppies are coping with the cold. And again I wonder how an owner can treat God's creatures this way.

And then, just when I think I can't take anymore, I shut down my computer and my thoughts turn to a pen of puppies I had seen a few months earlier.

The day was warm and inviting and FFA was setting up tents outside for one of its fundraisers. Volunteers had constructed a dog run and made it into a large pen and placed it on a grassy area near the tents. Soon, the pen was filled with at least a dozen cute-as-a-button puppies. I smiled as I watched them scampering around, jumping on each other, wrestling with rubber toys and chew bones.

"Adorable, aren't they?" one of the volunteers asked.

I nodded. "Their energy is amazing."

"It's hard to believe that these poor dogs have never felt grass under their feet until now, isn't it?"

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"These little pups were in cages from the moment they were born until we took them in. The cages were stacked

high, one on top of the other. No fresh air, filthy, no running, exercise or playing. No human contact and plenty of whimpering. We saved them from a puppy mill operation."

"Oh," I said softly, remembering the atrocities that I had seen during my trip to Washington, D.C. at a Humane Society of the U.S. conference and rally against puppy mills.

And I thought to myself as I watched the puppies continue to play on that absolutely beautiful day that puppy mill operations happen all over, even here in our beloved Burke County. These pups were safe and sound, awaiting good, loving homes. But what about all the other puppies in similar situations that have to endure such treatment?

I know in my heart, as do all the staff, volunteers, Board of Directors and supporters of FFA, and other humane agencies and shelters all over the world, that all animals deserve to feel the soft green grass beneath their feet just as they need good food, water, shelter and, equally important, love.

And as I end this column, I hope that you all will not only generously help support FFA in their 2009 donation drive, but that you will watch out

for animals wherever you go and speak up if you see an injustice. Let that be part of your 2009 donation because without that part, animal cruelty will continue.

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