

The right place at the right time

A couple of years ago, I wrote a column for The News Herald encouraging readers to join the movement to help save homeless animals from being euthanized and, specifically, asking everyone to consider volunteering at local shelters, especially our own Burke County Friends for Animals.

I wrote the column after reading an article in USA Today between airline flights in October of 2004.



Generations

Peg DeMarco

I never dreamed that four years later I would be privileged to sit on the Friends for Animals' board of directors and given the task of

writing grants for much needed funds.

And I suppose that ties into another column I wrote about never knowing where your path will lead you as long as you keep an open mind to the changes that come before you instead of closing the door on an opportunity that might enrich your life and put a little bit more meaning into it.

Grants have taken the lead now and shoved writing my third novel into the backseat of the long limo I like to call my life. And that's fine. The Pulitzer was only a dream and never really in reach, and instead I long to see a check or two come in for the shelter.

The work of Friends for Animals, under the direction of a dynamic woman, Toni Davis, is a tough job no matter how you slice it.

There is no joy in seeing homeless animals left wandering the streets of our great county, visiting Animal Control and taking in animals before they are euthanized, and then trying desperately to find good, loving homes.

Puppies left in a box on the side of the road. Kittens no more than a few hours old left anonymously at the shelter in the cold.

People calling and asking if they can bring their pets to the shelter because "it's just too much trouble to keep the dog" or "we're moving and don't want to bring it with us."

Doesn't happen? Sadly, it does. And the shelter that has been through some tough times in just a few short years of operation continues to face these kinds of crises every single day of the week, month and year.

So, let me share a story with you to personalize the above.

A few days ago, I was meeting with Toni on some potential grants with Marie, co-writer, when there was a knock at the door.

Donna, one of the staff members at the shelter, stood in the doorway holding a puppy in her arms.

It was black and white and lifeless. The puppy was one of a litter that had just arrived at the shelter. Two of the pups had contracted pneumonia as a result of the litter being left out in the open with no care before coming into the shelter.

One of the pups seemed to improve, but the medication just wasn't working on the pup in Donna's arms and every breathe it took was a major effort.

It was also very thin as I could see its ribs and there was a patch of skin that was raw on one of its hind legs.

Donna took a deep breath, trying to control the emotion in her voice, and then asked Toni if it would be possible to take the pup to a local veterinarian — and that she would pay for the treatment herself because she knew funds were

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so limited.

The shelter was at capacity and "room at the inn" was as scarce as extra money.

Marie looked at me — I looked at Marie — and we both looked at Toni.

The decision was only one of many that Toni has to make daily.

With limited funds and plenty of animals to take in, treat, save and eventually find a home for, the decision about extra veterinarian care isn't always a popular or an easy one.

The local veterinarian is a Godsend as his rates are very good, but it still costs money to walk in the door.

My job is a cakewalk compared to Toni's and the other staff and volunteers at the shelter, and I'd be the first to admit it. I can face a computer, forms to fill out and grants to prepare, but give me the eyes of a homeless dog and I just can't take it.

Suddenly, I remembered about some money my boss, Jennifer, had given me as a donation to Friends for Animals when my boxer, Brandy, had passed away about a month ago.

I had been storing it in my wallet, tucked inside a lovely card from Jennifer and her husband, waiting for the right moment to give it to Friends for Animals and forgetting about it whenever I was at the

shelter when my head became filled with grant material.

I reached for my purse and as I was fishing the money out of my wallet, Marie was making out a check like she does every month to help the shelter and this time helping with the cost of treating the puppy.

Donna also contributed financially to the puppy's care and her diligence was something you can't measure in dollars and cents.

I think that's what is meant when you hear someone say, "I was in the right place at the right time."

But it was iffy — would the pup survive in such bad shape?

So far, there's a happy ending to this story, and I can't wait to share it with my boss because she has no idea how her contribution helped save a life.

As of the last report, the pup was put on antibiotics and IV fluids, was breathing much easier and the prognosis was good.

The pup's name is Israel since Toni names a homeless litter using the alphabet and they happened to be up to "I" when this litter made its way to the shelter.

But once Israel makes its way to good health, its journey isn't over.

Toni will keep it at the shelter until it's adopted, but that's the big question mark that every animal faces when left homeless.

There is no substitute for love and all the intravenous feedings, monetary donations and endless grants will never equal finding a loving home for a homeless animal.

That's why I encourage you to join Friends for Animals' volunteer force.

It's at 75 and going strong and there are so many ways you can make a difference, including helping at fundraising events, making adoption trips to PetSmart or Petco, walking the dogs on the shelter's specially landscaped trail, or helping with general care of the animals.

Donations, of course, are most welcome.

Please also check out the shelter's Web site at www.burkecountyfriends4animals.org where the homeless animals are showcased through a link with www.petfinder.com.

Think of it this way — if you get involved, you, too, may be "in the right place at the right time" and someone who offers hope to an animal in need.

I think you'll find that it's a win/win situation.

PEG DEMARCO is a local columnist for The News Herald. E-mail her at pegdemarco@earthlink.net.