

Rescues, Rescues Everywhere Till Not A Dog In Sight by Roger Hild

In considering how to approach a subject like dog rescue, it is important to recognize the potential for controversy as it relates to the facts and the conclusions one might arrive at. It is with this in mind that I write; acknowledging the risk that the points I am trying to make might be misinterpreted. Therefore, let me state clearly that I admire and respect those who dedicate time and effort to dog rescue. When addressing any topic where passions are high, one can be sure the feelings that are touched lie just below the surface. In fact, as I will discuss later in this article, it is these very passions that are sometimes played with, manipulated and preyed upon in driving an agenda that is very much anti-dog.

While I generally support the work of many rescue organizations, I do have concerns with how some operate. A list of those concerns might look something like this:

- An attitude of save 'em all at any cost
- Poor utilization of scarce resources
- Bad matches resulting in wrong dog placed with wrong family
- Agendas driven by idealism interfering with effective and efficient operation
- Animal Rights proponents infiltrating, taking over the cause, reframing the issue and driving the agenda. Many, if not most, of the issues on that list are connected to some degree though they manifest in different ways.

Those who participate in rescue are understandably passionate about saving dogs. Some would say "All Dogs" - even those dogs that are unsalvageable and cannot safely be rehomed. With the growing move toward "no kill" shelters and rescues, some dogs are simply being locked away indefinitely at a very high cost and sometimes already tight budgets get stretched to a breaking point. The fact is, you cannot save them all and in trying to do so, pressure is being allowed to build up within the rescue/welfare system that helps fuel the concept of crisis...a concept that is then being used to fuel the support of some anti-dog agendas.

For some unscrupulous folks, people's concern for animals is something that can be exploited and the rescue concept can be used as a political and/or a business opportunity. Not long ago a couple dog owners contacted me to help train their dog Nikki. Nikki is a handsome medium sized dog of unknown mixed parentage. His owners, a young professional couple, report, "Nikki is a wonderful dog, he just has a few issues we must get under control."

As it turns out, Nikki has a propensity to get into fights with other dogs, runs off any chance he gets, steals stuff, can be very destructive and is almost impossible to walk. His owners inform me that they got Nikki through a rescue organization in the mid-west USA and that he got there from someplace in Mexico. Noting my puzzled expression, they explain that even though they know there are dogs available locally, they wanted to contribute to a larger cause and help a dog from more difficult circumstances.

Nikki is not unique in my experience. I've had clients tell me of the hundreds of dollars they paid for the Bouvier that was "rescued" from a puppy farm in Quebec - they got him by arranging to meet some guy on the side of the highway. The dog was transferred from his van to their car and the deal was sealed by them handing over a considerable sum of money "to help defray expenses." Or how about the Chihuahua obtained from someone's basement in Toronto for several hundred dollars. They were told the place was a foster residence and the money helped cover costs - they were also told they could pick any kind of small dog they liked and the foster residence could get it for them. They believed the story that all the dogs were rescues and therefore they were doing a good thing. From the dogs reportedly rescued from the puppy mill in northern Quebec to the side street operations in Toronto, it is becoming more and more common to see 'rescue' dogs being shipped far and wide...sometimes with exorbitant price tags attached to boot.

Every year millions of concerned citizens mistakenly believe they are helping, to take care of pets in need, by donating millions of dollars to Animal Rights organizations (some posing as animal welfare groups). Fact is that while most front line rescue groups have almost no money, very few resources and rely on donations from patrons within the community to survive, outfits like HSUS have their coffers full and very little ever finds its way back to actually helping the animals. What do such groups use the money for? While I don't have access to their budgets and can't give a full accounting, there seems to be plenty of evidence that a good portion of it goes to fund political activities in line with promoting the AR agenda. Some of the money goes directly into funding unreasonable restrictions on dog ownership, dog care, reproduction and various other anti-dog type laws - all with a view to first restrict and ultimately eliminate the ability to own and enjoy the company of a dog.

When considering the very limited resources that some rescues are faced with, it always amazes me to see some of the spending choices that are made. Excessive numbers of man-hours and finances will sometimes be dedicated to single projects resulting in even less to go around to those other equally worthy dogs that remain. It's not just a case of poor financial choices either. I've seen many cases where rescues, crying they are overcrowded, because of some questionable idealistic criteria, refuse perfectly good homes. Multi page questionnaires complete with reference requirements, home-visits, contracts limiting ownership, requirements and restrictions concerning training that are permitted and even

the physical structure of the home are often cited as reasons an adoption was turned down. Some rescues criteria would rival that of any child-adoption process.

Earlier, I gave an example of a “long-distance” rescue that happened to be a problem dog. Of course not all long distance rescues are problem dogs – many are just “normal” dogs with nothing to distinguish them from any other dog found in any other place. Many, if not most of the problem rescue dogs ending up in people’s homes come from local rescues.

It has been my experience that some rescues are much better than others at screening out dogs which should be placed very carefully or not be placed at all. For example, one rescue that comes to mind has repeatedly placed dangerous dogs in the homes of unsuspecting families. Zealously operating from a viewpoint that suggests all dogs must be saved, they will place dogs with serious bite histories in a succession of homes (taking it back after every incident and then rehoming in a different unsuspecting household).

All the concerns I’ve noted so far represent challenges that can be overcome by knowledgeable individuals that are committed to strengthening the dog-owner relationship and are dedicated to this cause. Unfortunately, these difficulties are also proving to be fertile ground for the much more sinister agenda of the Animal Rights movement.

“When an enemy tells you he is going to kill you believe him.” This quote, attributed to Congressman Lungren, is based on a holocaust survivor that, when asked the one thing he learned, reportedly said, “When your enemy says he will exterminate you, believe him.” When exploring the efforts of those that would see us lose our right to own and train our dogs, it is worth keeping this thought in mind and not minimize the intention and efforts invested by such individuals.

The Animal Rights movement has been both insidious and relentless in their efforts to successfully infiltrate and distort the principles of animal welfare. Rescues, shelters and pounds have not been immune from this onslaught. Indeed, many of the initiatives and legislative pushes (behind restricting/eliminating dog ownership) can be found in the way these well meaning groups have been vulnerable to exploitation and manipulation by the Animal Rights agenda.

It would be impossible to fully discuss the Animal Rights agenda in an article such as this – indeed whole books have been written on the subject that I’d encourage each person (reading this) to seek out and read for them self. Briefly stated, however, the AR movement seeks to end all use of animals and/or ownership in any form. They’d like to see the extinction of any animal that is domesticated or “man made,” and with respect to our pets and companion animals...they would sever that relationship entirely.

If this is indeed their agenda, what factors (within the shelter movement) might they distort and exploit? The most obvious is the “overcrowded” conditions and lay the blame for it at the feet of the dog fancy. They also use their own peculiar take on this to push for the mandatory sterilization of dogs. Their hope is to slowly drain the gene pool until it is dry. Recently they have become emboldened in their attacks against those breeding and showing their dogs – painting all with the image of “puppy millers.” All “man made” breeds are at risk as they push for creative ways to limit/prevent breeding. They use everything from pushing mandatory spay/neuter laws, to laws that outright ban or at least unreasonably restrict breeding and they couple this with the liberal use of the puppy mill label. In their use of these initiatives, they use every opportunity to pit those involved in rescue against those who participate in the dog fancy.

The fact is however, that of the millions of dogs that end up in the shelter/rescue system, very few are purebred dogs produced by responsible breeders within the dog fancy. Indeed, among the main reasons that dogs are given up to shelters or rescues are behavioural issues.

The following is quoted from the “Dog Owners Guide” an online magazine for pet and show dog owners (<http://www.canismajor.com/dog/surrend1.html>). A bit of research reveals that numerous articles support these same conclusions. To illustrate the point, here then is the quote:

“Several years ago, the Humane Society of the US initiated a “voluntary breeding moratorium” to urge dog breeders to stop producing puppies until all dogs in shelters were adopted to new homes.

“Until there are none, adopt one,” the slogan said.

“Thoughtful and caring dog breeders were put on the defensive, pet stores were vilified, and all commercial kennels were lumped together as “puppy mills” no matter how they provided for their animals.

“A new study that examined the reasons dogs — about two million each year — are surrendered to animal shelters has shed new light on the problem. The main reasons dogs are surrendered is that owners fail to obedience train or have unrealistic expectations of their pet; the dogs at highest risk of surrender are those acquired at low or no cost, especially those that do not visit a veterinarian regularly.

“Gary Patronek VMD, PhD, one of the principle investigators on the study, presented the results at the NAIA Purebred Rescue Symposium last March. The work was published in the Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association on August 1, and is corroborated in another study reported in the August 15 issue of the Journal.

“Patronek and his Purdue University colleagues concluded that dog owners who pay more than \$100 for a dog, take him to a veterinarian more than once a year, and participate in obedience classes are more likely to provide a long-term home for the animal.

“Veterinary care and obedience classes may reinforce the bonding of pet and owner, the researchers wrote “. . . by allowing the owner to experience and appreciate the positive aspects of pet ownership such as companionship, affection, entertainment, and security without overreacting to or being distracted by disruptive or unwanted behavior.”

“Their conclusions challenge the assertions of activists that breeders directly and indirectly produce an “overpopulation” of pets and provide testimony for early intervention through education, a solution that breeders, breed clubs, kennel clubs, and the American Kennel Club have promoted for years.”

If well trained, mannerly dogs are way more likely to remain happily in their homes and out of the shelter system, why is so much emphasis placed on neutering and very little on training? I can think of a few possible reasons:

1. The AR movement is not likely to promote strategies that are more likely to succeed and are at odds with their agenda and basic views.
2. Poorly mannered dogs help create an overall negative view of ALL dogs in the eyes of the public. This negative image can then be used to support and promote all sorts of anti-dog legislation.
3. Related to number 2 is the concept of “Untrainability.” In researching what (if any) training various AR groups might support, I found the sorts of training declared “acceptable” are among the least effective. The kinds of training that the most difficult and the most dangerous are unlikely to respond favourably to. If they can “show” training to be unreliable (and/or cruel) they can maintain the overall negative view of keeping dogs.

If we are to maintain our relationship with “man’s best friend,” a relationship that has survived for thousands of years, we must do something to effectively address the problems of unwanted and abandoned dogs. We must not allow ourselves to be sucked into the emotionally laden arguments of the AR zealots – arguments that are designed to ultimately see the end of this valued relationship – but instead, we must be prepared to offer a wide array of solutions that work. Education and training top such a list of solutions. This factor alone should be viewed as both an alarming challenge and an opportunity to effective dog trainers everywhere.

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