

No Pet Should Ever Be Homeless

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Our Companions Domestic Animal Sanctuary, a nonprofit organization, is a leader in the movement to end the unnecessary euthanasia of pets in Connecticut. We are building a domestic animal sanctuary, providing low-cost training and educational services and creating a statewide partnership among animal welfare agencies to address the root causes of pet homelessness.

Quote of Compassion

Compassion is the basis of all morality. - Arthur Schopenhauer

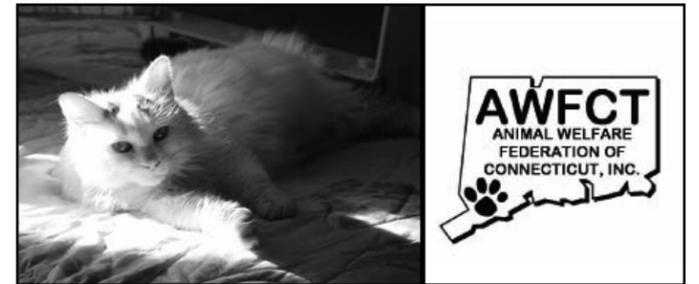
Partnering for Animals

By Susan Linker, CEO, Our Companions

Across the nation, 575 pets are euthanized each and every hour for an annual death toll approaching 5 million. With numbers this staggering, it's evident that the homeless pet issue is as great as it is complex.

While those numbers are disheartening and troubling, twenty years ago the number of pets euthanized annually was more than triple today's figures. So progress has clearly been made. But we still have far to go and no one organization can address all of the causes of pet homelessness.

There is strength in numbers. After researching other successful programs across the country, the founders of Our Companions were integral in the creation of the Animal Welfare Federation of



Buttercup, a semi-feral cat available for adoption. To read more about Buttercup, see page 7. The care of cats like Buttercup is one of the primary focuses of the Animal Welfare Federation of Connecticut (logo featured to right).

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Connecticut (The Federation). The Federation, a partnership of animal welfare advocates, is dedicated to improving the status and well-being of companion animals. Its members recognize that no single organization can remedy all the logistical, social and economic problems facing companion animals.

By working together we believe that we can make a considerable difference in improving the standard of care for pets in Connecticut. Following are some examples of how partnerships are working elsewhere:

Coalitions In Action. The Mayor's Alliance for New York City's Animals is a unique public-private partnership between the City of New York and more than 90 non-profit animal organizations with the goal of making New York City no-kill within the next five years. The founders of the Mayor's Alliance have turned the traditionally contentious relationship between the animal control and rescue communities completely around, making the saving of pets lives a win-win for everyone. This is particularly important in New York City where, every year, more than 50,000 animals find their way into the city's shelters and almost half are euthanized. And New York City, as the largest city in the U.S., is a leader for other communities.

The Mayor's Alliance has been in existence nearly three years and has achieved amazing results. Most notably, Maddie's Fund, a foundation whose goal is to create a no-kill nation, has pledged \$15 Million to the Mayor's Alliance over several years to fund adoption, education and spay/neuter programs.

In other parts of the country, progressive partnerships like The Mayor's Alliance have been shown to dramatically drop the euthanasia rate in their communities. For example, No More Homeless Pets in Utah, a coalition of veterinarians, shelters and animal rescue groups, has brought about a 59% increase in adoptions and a 22% decrease in euthanasia rates - in only four years.

Partnering for Animals, (cont.)

Thirty states in total have created coalitions. While the programs vary widely in scope, they demonstrate that collaborative efforts are the most effective way to accomplish animal welfare goals. By pooling resources and combining efforts, the individual partnerships can leverage their influence as one group. Another reason that partnerships are successful is that they have focused on the root causes of pet homelessness, usually spay/neuter.



All about cats - the first-ever statewide spay/neuter event for cats called May Spay was a huge success.

Inspired by these successes, Our Companions is proud to be in a leadership role in Connecticut's first coalition, the Animal Welfare Federation of Connecticut, and is committed to producing the same type of results in our state. This year, the Federation is sponsoring two statewide programs.

May Spay. May 1-7, The Federation has coordinated the first-ever statewide spay/neuter event for cats. For the entire first week of May, low-income families and seniors were able to spay or neuter their cats for \$25, half the typical cost. The event was amazingly successful and will be the first of many to come.

Connecticut Cares for Cats. This November, The Federation will host a conference called Connecticut Cares for Cats. Featuring national experts, the conference will educate attendees about humane, non-lethal solutions for addressing the feral cat issue in Connecticut. For more on this event, please read below.

To learn more about The Federation, please visit www.ourcompanions.org or www.awfct.org.

Connecticut Cares for Cats Conference

With numbers in the tens of millions, feral cats are an issue for communities across the country. Often viewed as destructive, disease-carrying nuisances, feral cats have traditionally been trapped and killed. Yet decades of research shows that this approach simply does not work - when a colony is trapped and destroyed, another group of cats will likely move to the vacant territory and begin breeding all over again.

Animal control officials are stuck in a never ending cycle of trapping and killing - with the cat population never diminishing. Not only is it unjust to kill these cats, who are in the wild through no fault of their own, this approach is just not cost-effective. A better, more humane approach is Trap/Neuter/Return (TNR), where feral cats are humanely captured, spayed/neutered, vaccinated and returned to their territory to live under the watchful eyes of neighborhood volunteers. TNR is a method that has worked in communities across the country and it's time Connecticut fully embraced it.

On November 12, 2005, Our Companions and the Animal Welfare Federation of Connecticut are bringing together nationally renowned experts in feral cats and TNR for the first-ever conference of its kind in the state, Connecticut Cares for Cats. The impressive lineup of speakers will include: Becky Robinson, Executive Director of Alley Cat Allies, the national leader in TNR; Ed Boks, Executive Director of NYC Animal Control; Bryan Kortis, Executive Director of Neighborhood Cats; and, Holly Sizemore of Best Friends Animal Society in Utah.

The topics will appeal to animal control officers and animal welfare organizations as well as concerned cat lovers. To the right is an excerpt from the program flyer which highlights some of the topics that will be covered at the conference. To find out more about this ground-breaking conference, visit www.ourcompanions.org or call (860) 242-9999. Stay tuned for more information and we hope to see you there!

The Program

Welcome/Opening Remarks: *Esther Mechler, National Director, SPAY/USA*

Keynote Address : Vision, Persuasion, Success! Caring For Cats Through Trap-Neuter Return (TNR): Cats outdoors. It's a fact of life. It doesn't have to be a sad fact.* Hear from the nation's leading feral cat expert about successful campaigns to achieve the goal of a better life for feral cats. *Becky Robinson, National Dir., Alley Cat Allies*

The State of the State. ASPCA's Debora Bresch provides a comprehensive overview of the spay/neuter programs and resources in Connecticut. *Debora Bresch, Legislative Liaison, ASPCA*

Publicly Funded Spay/Neuter Programs: Making It Happen In Your Community. Peter Marsh, the founder of Solutions to Overpopulation of Pets (S.T.O.P) shares his expertise in securing public funding for targeted spay/neuter programs. Learn about the strategies that have been successful in other states and how you can develop a campaign for your community. *Peter Marsh, Esq., Founder, Solutions to Overpopulation of Pets*

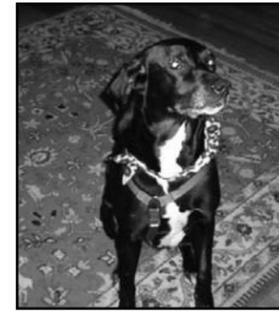
Innovative, Life-Saving Programs for Cats: Learn from a visionary in the field how Animal Control can take a leadership role in helping cats and hear how you can work more effectively with your local Animal Control agency. *Ed Boks, Executive Director, NYC Animal Care & Control*

Successful Regional Programs For Reducing Feline Overpopulation. Introduction by Anne Lindsay. Holly Sizemore and Stacy LeBaron share the secrets of their amazingly successful TNR programs. Learn how to jumpstart your TNR efforts and how to empower your community to take an active role in reducing feline overpopulation. *Anne Lindsay, President, Mass. Animal Coalition; Holly Sizemore, Feral Fix Program Director, Best Friends Animal Society/NMHP Utah; Stacy LeBaron, President, Merrimack River Feline Rescue Society.*

The True Meaning of No-kill, (cont.)

No-kill in Action. Not only do we believe that every pet deserves life and love, we believe you think so, too! Educating you about the rewards of adopting a more challenging pet is essential to the no-kill ideals. Following are several cases of the no-kill philosophy in action.

10 Senior Cats: Recently, a friend of Our Companions passed away, leaving her 10 senior cats at risk of being destroyed. Some of the cats had age-related conditions such as renal failure, hyperthyroidism, and heart problems. We realized that placing these senior cats would be challenging but were adamant that each cat's life was precious. If we worked hard enough, we would find loving people to give them a good home for the rest of their days. Because we cared so much, it inspired others to do the same. All of the cats were placed in new, loving homes, including Annie (see right).



Sally in her new home with the Rosen family.

Sally the Senior Lab: Annie and Larry Rosen contacted us after reading about Sally, an 11-year old lab mix abandoned by her family, on our website. Because the Rosen family already included 3 dogs and 4 cats, nearly all rescues, the Rosens weren't sure if Sally would be a good fit. But following a home visit, they knew Sally had found her "forever home." According to the Rosens, "We are so glad Sally's story was featured by Our Companions...She is a true joy and we are thrilled she has become part of our family."

Crickett: Sometimes rescuing animals introduces you to really special people. Crickett needed help and literally banged on the window of animal lover Cherie Ramsey. Cherie took her to the vet immediately to have her examined. The vet determined that Crickett tested positive for both Feline AIDS and Leukemia. Despite the vet's advice to euthanize Crickett, Cherie contacted Our Companions. Through our Rescue Outreach Program, Crickett was placed in a home as the only cat. Cherie was so inspired that she became the writer for our Rescue Outreach Program and has subsequently saved countless other pets with her compelling words.

Buttercup: A caring business owner named Ken contacted us after finding several feral cats suffering outside his business this winter. Ken contacted Our Companions who trained him in Trap/Neuter/Return (TNR) and helped to finance the rescue. One of the kittens, Buttercup, was deemed "semi feral" and placed in a foster home. Like the flower she's named after, Buttercup is blossoming in her new environment but still needs a forever home. (Buttercup's picture is featured on page 1). Please contact Our Companions if you're interested in adopting Buttercup.

These are just some of the many animals that Our Companions has helped. These success stories prove that you don't need millions of dollars and a huge facility to save lives. All you need is passion, creativity and an unwavering belief that the lives of our animal companions are worth saving.

Update on the Unsound Pound

A few months ago, Our Companions exposed the deplorable conditions at the Windsor Locks Animal Pound in this newsletter. As a direct result, the town received many calls from concerned citizens in favor of building a new facility. Despite this support, it appeared that the town's Board of Finance was not going to include any funding for a shelter in its 2005-2006 budget. Because the budget was subject to public approval, we asked for your support at the budget approval meeting on May 3rd - and we got it!



Front of postcard that was mailed to all licensed dog owners in Windsor Locks.

Weeks before the meeting, we mailed a postcard (see left) to the licensed dog owners of Windsor Locks detailing the conditions and asking for their support at the hearing. Not only did nearly 150 concerned citizens come, nearly every local media outlet was on-hand to cover the story.

After demands from residents, the Board of Finance voted to include \$172,000 in the town's 2005-2006 budget to *finally* build a sound pound for the animals of Windsor Locks and one very hardworking and dedicated Animal Control Officer, Janet Orio. Thank you for your support and we'll keep you posted.



Mona, the volunteer who handled the rescue of the cats and her new friend, Annie.



Crickett, smiling for the camera.

The True Meaning of No-kill

The term "no-kill" in reference to an animal shelter would seem to have an obvious meaning. However, no-kill is just one more expression that those in animal welfare use - often to the confusion of the general public. Because Our Companions is so dedicated to the ideals of no-kill, we thought it was about time to clear up the meaning of this often misused and misunderstood term.

We're a No-kill Shelter! Unfortunately, some shelters use the no-kill term for marketing purposes. And like all marketing slogans, the term no-kill is defined exclusively by the organization that makes the claim. Some organizations maintain that they are no-kill yet they still kill healthy pets. Why is that? If we look a bit deeper, they really say that they don't kill healthy or "adoptable" pets. The key way to distinguish whether an organization is truly a "no-kill" organization is to understand how the organization defines which animals are adoptable.

Who's Adoptable? With millions of pets squeezed into very limited shelter space, many traditional shelters have had to make really tough decisions about which animals can be saved and which cannot. These shelters, although well-meaning, are operating within an animal welfare system that is being challenged and radically changed by the no-kill movement. Traditional shelters are having difficulty putting the no-kill ideals into action. The closest that many can come to actual no-kill is to not kill "adoptable" pets. To this end, organizations have criteria that pets are judged against when entering the shelter and that determine their adoptability - those that fail die and those that pass have a chance at life. The criteria include:

- **Temperament testing.** Some organizations conduct extreme temperament tests in which 70% of the dogs who take the test fail and are immediately killed. Tragically, the reasons most fail these tests are easily solved behavioral problems.
- **Illness.** Illness is another discriminating factor whereby pets with manageable illnesses are deemed unsuitable for adoption. An example of this would be cats who test positive for Feline Leukemia or Feline AIDS. After testing positive, cats with absolutely no symptoms are killed - even kittens at 8 weeks of age. These cats, in the right environment, could live long healthy lives.
- **Age.** Some organizations believe that elderly animals are not adoptable even though they are perfectly healthy and are often better companions for people who aren't suited for young pets.
- **Domesticity.** Because they aren't suited for the indoors, feral cats are often killed instead of neutered, vaccinated, released and then cared for in managed outdoor colonies.
- **Breed.** Organizations will limit the types of dogs they permit in their shelters to exclude such breeds as pit bulls, Akitas and Rottweillers. They are either turned away or admitted and destroyed.
- **Ease.** In some cases, an organization's definition of adoptability can be as simple as how easily they feel they can adopt the animal. This "easy to adopt" mentality prompts these organizations to dramatically limit the types of pets they accept. Many then claim to have a 100% adoption rate because they limit the pets they accept to those that are easy to adopt.



Does there really have to be a choice?

True Meaning of No-kill. No-kill is a movement not just a fundraising slogan. Fundamentally, the no-kill movement is about preserving the lives of some of the neediest animals - the millions of companion animals that are killed every year within the very system that should be protecting them. True no-kill organizations do not kill healthy animals; they take special care of the neediest, most desperate pets.

Furthermore, organizations truly committed to ideals of the no-kill philosophy see beyond their doors. If one organization has a 100% adoption rate yet pets are still being killed in neighboring shelters, then the organization is not fulfilling its mission as a no-kill agency. No-kill also means working in partnership with other organizations to maximize resources and put an end to the senseless killing, together.

Our Companions Commitment to No-kill: At Our Companions, we believe that every animal is a beautiful creature, deserving of life and love. We are committed to ending pet homelessness and the wanton killing of healthy animals in our state. And Our Companions will be the first organization to offer a pet resource center and sanctuary in Connecticut, among many other life-saving community programs. We also believe that no-kill means creating a no-kill community and making life better for all animals, not just the ones that pass through the care of Our Companions.

In Business for Animals - Animal Friend, John Gagnon

Doing what you love, being successful at it, and making our world a better place all at the same time - many would consider that a model life. A friend of Our Companions, John Gagnon, is living that life.



John and Nika - picture perfect.

Nearly fifteen years ago John started as a positive reinforcement trainer. After a number of years, John leveraged his success and reputation as a one-on-one trainer to start John Gagnon's Pet Resort, "an all inclusive pet facility" in Colchester offering boarding, daycare, grooming and training services. Formerly John Gagnon's Dog House, it has grown to be a successful business and an example for others.

John's success is due in part to his skill in utilizing positive training techniques to work with some of the toughest behavioral issues trainers can face. He is also a savvy business owner who has tapped into the growing pet care services market. But what really makes John unique is that he is a business leader who proves that those who give the most, often gain the most.

John has been giving all he can to the animals of Connecticut and to Our Companions. Here are just a few of John's contributions: he operates a rescue out of his business; donates training; mentors trainers for Our Companions; is an Our Companions volunteer; and is a generous contributor. He was also integral in the donation of land to Our Companions that will hold Connecticut's first domestic animal sanctuary.

The Dogman Classic Golf Tournament. This summer, John will further support Our Companions by hosting the first-ever Dogman Classic, a benefit golf tournament to be held at the Portland Golf Course on June 30, 2005.

If you would like to play, be an individual or corporate sponsor, or donate a raffle prize, contact Our Companions directly at (860) 242-9999. More information is also available on our website, www.ourcompanions.org.



Volunteer Spotlight - Angela Pugliese

Ever wonder how our website gets updated or how the Rescue Outreach newsletter gets put together and sent out? Well, you're about to find out.

It takes dedication, serious computer skills and time - all things Angela Pugliese, one of the many volunteers we would like to clone, has as our webmaster. She's the proud mom of two beautiful cats that keep her company as she toils on updates and uploads information to our website and creates the Rescue Outreach e-mails.

In order to keep www.ourcompanions.org updated and interesting, copy is sent to Angela and she transforms it into the beautiful and informational pages you see. The Rescue Outreach gets created in a similar fashion; but with the Outreach, Angela has a wonderful partner, Cherie Ramsey. Cherie is responsible for writing the heart-gripping copy and Angie works her Photoshop magic to put the faces to the story.

Being a webmaster is no easy task. Not only does Angela spend much of her spare time updating our web site, she also attends our events so that she can take pictures. These pictures are then used for the website and for promotional material to help spread the word about Our Companions. So, next time you're at an Our Companions event, look for our favorite webmaster hidden behind her camera and let Angela know how much we appreciate her.

Visit www.ourcompanions.org to see some of Angie's handiwork. While you're there, don't forget to sign up for our bi-weekly Rescue Outreach e-mails.



Angela Pugliese, www.ourcompanions.org webmaster, and Meeka.

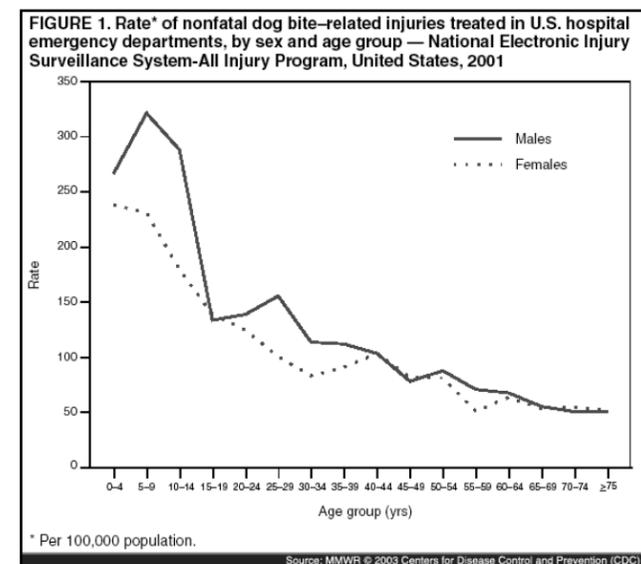
Responsibility and the Case of Max

Max, a Golden Retriever belonging to the Pyon family of Watertown, CT, bit a child for the second and last time earlier this year. Though once given a reprieve, Max's second bite cost him his life and another child a lifetime of physical and emotional scars. Many questions surround this case but we think the most important questions are: why were there *two* incidents of children being bitten; and ultimately, why did Max have to die?

Max's Tale. Max first bit one of the children in his family as a puppy. When he was subsequently ordered to be euthanized, not only did his family rush to save him, but people across the country supported his release, including then-Governor John Rowland and Attorney General Richard Blumenthal. For seven months, Max was held in confinement by the Milford animal control officer who tested and observed Max in a variety of situations with adults and children. She was quoted in a *New York Times* article saying, "I could have gotten a therapy title on this dog, that's how much I trusted him." Although the animal control officer who originally seized Max disagreed, the public outcry for Max's release was so great that he was returned to the Pyon family.

Two years later, a woman visited the Pyon home. Her seven year-old son entered the house, despite instructions to wait in the car for his mother. Because there were no witnesses, the exact details are unknown. But at some point, the child walked to the kitchen where Max was being kept behind a gate and shortly thereafter, Max bit the child in the face. This time, Max was promptly killed.

The Anatomy of a Dog Bite. Like both of Max's victims, children are the most likely victims of dog bites. According to The Humane Society of the United States, 4.7 Million people in the U.S. are bitten by dogs every year. Half of the victims are children under the age of 13; and, children are three times more likely than adults to receive a serious bite, often to the face.



This chart shows that children, particularly boys, are most likely to be bitten by a dog.

Although there is evidence that there is a higher number of bites annually attributed to certain breeds, the data is very misleading. The breeds that tend to be on the top of the list are usually the most popular and more dogs are likely to produce more bites. The data also does not reveal the percentage of the dogs that bite who were believed to be mistreated or abused. Furthermore, bites from certain breeds (e.g. Akitas, Rottweillers, German Sheperds) are more readily reported than those from many other breeds (e.g. smaller or toy breeds). Most experts agree: one particular breed is not more likely than another to bite.

It's Just a Language Barrier. Biting is a normal form of canine communication - the dog's way of saying, "Hey, back off. You're making me uncomfortable." However biting is generally preceded by warning signs that children are not capable of recognizing. Each day, Our Companions receives calls from parents who are shocked that their dog growled or nipped at a child who has just tugged on a dog's ears, taken food from a dog or who surprised a dog while sleeping. The parents seem to think there is something wrong with the dog. Some consider giving their dog up for adoption and others even consider killing the dog. The reality is that this is dog behavior in reaction to a violation of their boundaries. Children are ill-equipped to make assessments concerning dog behavior; so as adults and parents, it is our responsibility to protect children from natural dog behavior and to respect our dogs.

Responsibility and the Case of Max, (cont.)

Who's Evelyn Hernandez? A young woman, pregnant with a baby boy she's expected to deliver in a week or so, disappears in California. Her body washes ashore in San Francisco bay and the man she loves is suspected of killing her. Sound familiar? What if you were told that this case never received much media attention and that the murder had never been solved?



Evelyn Hernandez, age 24, with her son Alex.

Although strikingly similar to the Laci Peterson murder, the case above is actually that of a 24 year-old immigrant from El Salvador named Evelyn Hernandez. While it's curious that the circumstances around the Peterson and Hernandez deaths were very similar and occurred within months of each other, what's really striking is that you've probably never heard of Evelyn Hernandez. Unless you've been hiding under a rock since 2003, you could probably describe Laci Peterson, name her unborn son and husband and rattle off many other details of her life.

Pregnant with the baby of another woman's husband and the unwed mother of a five-year old son, Evelyn's life differed markedly from that of Laci's seemingly charmed life. There was no family pleading for her safe return and no perfect life for Evelyn to return to. While no one can say for sure why Laci received so much media attention and Evelyn received almost none, it can be speculated that the media and the public were attracted to Laci's life, her "all-american" good looks and the love of her close-knit family. Conversely, the public was not attracted to Evelyn's story because she was not our ideal.

Perception and Value. The lack of media attention surrounding the murder of Evelyn Hernandez highlights the disparity between those lives we see as valuable and those we do not. Evelyn's story was not picked up by the media because they knew her story would not resonate strongly with the public. Laci was immediately appealing and drew people to her story. Whether it's intentional or not, our society puts a higher value on certain people; and the same is true for animals.

If Max had been a pit bull, he would have been killed after the first bite. In fact, thousands of pit bulls are killed every year as soon as they enter shelters simply because some people perceive they are dangerous and therefore have little value. Society views Golden Retrievers differently though. Max the Golden Retriever received a second chance. And many are wondering whether or not Max should have received that second chance.

Two Children Too Many. According to the animal control officer who originally seized him, Max should have been euthanized. But other experts, animal behaviorists who studied Max at length, did not find aggressive tendencies. Given the conflicting opinions and Max's history, there was another option for Max which tragically no one considered. He should have been placed in an adult home without access to children. His life would be spared, children would be safe, and today someone would have a wonderful, loving pet.



Many shelters won't even take her. Daisy, a pit bull therapy dog, giving a sniff to Brandon, son of an Our Companions board member.

Who's Responsible? As individuals, our responsibility is to always be wary of other people's pets. Rather than assuming that a dog is friendly, even if it is a Golden Retriever, assume that the dog does not want to be approached. Because children are the most at risk, extra care should be taken around dogs with children present. Children should be monitored around dogs and taught to treat them properly.

As owners, we have the ultimate responsibility for our dogs. Acting responsibly will protect people from harm; and, it will also save your dog from paying for a bite with its life.

As a society, we should take ownership of the dog bite issue and put the blame where it ought to lie - on ourselves. Through thousands of years of evolution and selective breeding, we have shaped the dog - its appearance, temperament and physical health - to meet our own very specific requirements. Although dogs have proven to be worthy companion animals, it seems that they have suffered from an erosion of respect. We have to reverse this trend and realize that dogs have boundaries and that they should be respected.

We created the Golden Retriever and pit bull. Today, the pit bull needs our help more than ever because they are suffering needlessly at the hands of money-hungry backyard breeders, drug dealers and even shelters who are quick to euthanize away the problem. It's time to extend our concern beyond the Golden Retrievers and embrace all breeds.