

Adopt, Adopt, Adopt!

by Liesl Hall

Photo credit: Liesl and Landon Hall

If you have been outside lately, you'll hopefully have noticed a few things. And, if you're still in hibernation, here's what you're missing:

- 1 The snow has melted (well, for the most part anyway!).
- 2 Plants and flowers are beginning to pop up.
- 3 Birds are beginning to chirp and the whole Earth feels alive again.

Yes, folks, spring is finally here! The air is warmer and new life is beginning. Love is in the air but that love doesn't stop with humans. Spring is typically when animals come into "mating season" as well.

I'll preface the rest of my article with this: I have very strong opinions on why people should spay and neuter their pets and why people looking to adopt pets should very seriously consider adopting animals from rescue shelters. To those of you who prefer adopting purebreds solely for reasons such as severe allergies...okay, this article does not apply to you. There are always going to be cases where a person with severe allergies would like to adopt a dog and there simply is no other way to absolutely know FOR SURE that they would not have a life-threatening reaction than to find a breeder who breeds hypoallergenic dogs. But the rest of us who are able should really consider the rest of this article. And here's why:

Fun fact: Did you know that up until about a hundred and fifty years ago, purebred dogs didn't even exist? Up until then, dogs had gone centuries breeding with other types of dogs purely on survival instinct. Dogs were healthy and their mixed heritages created beautiful and unique combinations of looks and personality that eventually became what we call "purebreds." Fast forward to today where purebred dogs have a slew of health issues, mostly because years and years and YEARS of inbreeding have caused severe physical defects. Breeders often mate purebred dogs with members of their own families, causing purebred dogs to be so inbred that it's hard to believe that they actually are able to survive. These are NOT LITTLE health problems, either. 60% of Golden Retrievers die of cancer. 95% of King Charles Spaniels have skulls that are too small for their brains. Great Danes are so huge, they get bone tumors from supporting their own weight. Bulldogs' noses are so squashed that they can barely breathe; their heads are so big that they almost always have to be born via C-section; their tails can become ingrown; they

basically all have hip dysplasia and their average life expectancy is SIX YEARS. These dogs, evolutionarily speaking, shouldn't even be alive.

I haven't even mentioned the puppy mills where dogs are forced to breed litter after litter in horrid living conditions so that puppies can be sold in pet stores.

Did you also know that approximately 6.5 MILLION dogs and cats enter animal shelters in the United States every year? Did you know that 56% of dogs and 71% of cats that enter animal shelters are euthanized which means that they are killed or "put down" to make room for the other animals that are being brought in? That's more than HALF of the animals that are brought to shelters which includes the 25% of dogs in the shelters that are actually PUREBRED.

Translation: Half of the dogs and cats in shelters won't ever see a home. People think they are breeding animals that are "superior" (even though they have so many more health issues) and there are literally millions of healthy animals in need of homes dying in shelters. The really sad part is that 25% of dogs in shelters are specifically bred, given up and then killed. People think that once they give up their purebred to the shelter, they'll get adopted quickly because they're purebred but the truth is, they don't. Once dogs are in the shelter, it's a one out of two chance that they'll live out the rest of their lives.

Which brings me to my second point: Despite popular myths, there are no health benefits to allowing your dog to have a litter of puppies or go through a heat cycle before spaying. Overall, spayed pets live longer, healthier lives and actually fit better within the family environment in which they live. In six years, one unspayed female dog and her offspring can produce 67,000 dogs. A male can literally father thousands. An unspayed female cat, her mate and all of their offspring, producing 2 litters per year, with 2.8 surviving kittens per year, can total 11,606,077 cats in 9 years. That is a LOT of animals that will most likely end up in a shelter. Monetarily speaking, according to the Doris Day Animal League, "In this country tax-payers spend \$1 billion dollars annually to pick up, house and euthanize homeless animals." That is a lot of money to spend fixing a problem that we are able to prevent.

You might be asking to yourself, how is it even possible to make a difference? How can we fix this problem and how can NOT buying from breeders help?

Well, in the long run, if a significant number of people stop buying from breeders and pet stores, then the puppy mills (who just pump out newborn, purebred puppies as fast as the pet stores ask for them) will slow down. It's really as simple as supply and demand. On a

smaller, more personal scale, just choosing an animal from a rescue shelter will save a life. That animal that you've adopted won't be put down just because there's just no room for it in the shelter.

Unfortunately, there is no way that every single person who owns an animal will spay or neuter their pets. That's just a given. "I don't have the money for spaying or neutering." "I want my children to witness the miracle of birth." "I don't have time to deal with it." "I'm careful to make sure she doesn't mate when she's out." "I thought I would make some easy money selling the puppies." "I just couldn't take away Rover's manhood like that." "I just didn't know." And so, the list goes on and on. There is no way that that number will EVER reach zero because people either don't care about the issue or they don't know how serious the issue is. Overpopulation due to owners letting their pets accidentally or intentionally reproduce sees millions of these "excess" animals killed annually. So, the best that we can do is spread the knowledge of how many animals are dying each year in hopes that the majority of the population will step up and do the right thing (spay and neuter their animals), and also to help persuade people looking to get pets to go to shelters instead of buying from breeders if ONLY to save the ones that are inevitably going to end up in shelters.

Please spay and neuter your pets, and please consider going to a shelter and rescuing an animal if you are looking to add an animal to your home. If you are interested in helping the cause, help spread the word using the hashtag #Adoptdontshop and volunteer at your local Humane Society or other animal shelter. There are so many ways that you are able to help, from adopting or fostering animals to walking the dogs to playing with the kittens. Heck, you can even donate money and/or supplies if you are so inclined! Every little thing you are able to do makes a difference in an animal's life. My family adopted a dog from the Humane Society a little over four years ago, and it was the best decision that we ever made. Duchess is the sweetest dog that anyone could ever hope for. She is wonderful with babies and small children and she loves to cuddle and lick your nose (like, all the time). She is beautiful and such a sweetheart and we don't need to know what breed of dog she is to know that she will love us until the end of time. Our family is all the better with her in it. There are so many sweet, loving animals in the shelters that are just waiting for someone to come and take them home. Even the great Patrick Stewart from Star Trek and X-Men is fostering a rescue pit bull named Ginger so that he can campaign for the #Adoptdontshop cause! If that isn't reason enough to get involved, I hope that the rest of the article has convinced you that this cause is definitely worth fighting for and how much of a difference that you can make when you choose your next best friend from a rescue shelter.