

Interview – Education News

1). Over the past few decades, my husband and I have rescued, rehabilitated and adopted over forty abandoned, neglected, abused and injured dogs. Each has a tale to tell and has forever changed our lives and our way of viewing the world. I wrote “Our Rescue Dog Family Album” as a tribute or “homage” to each of the remarkable animals that have become such an integral, vital and joyful part of our lives. These animals have deeply touched and enriched our lives. Although many of them came to us after great suffering and trauma, each has been able to triumph over the challenges and adversity he faced. It is my hope to inform the readers of my book about the plight of millions of animals which have been mistreated or tortured and inspire them to care for, appreciate and respect all creatures. It is also my hope to encourage them, if they are able, to save the life of and adopt an animal in need.

2). We share the planet with so many glorious creatures – among them our animal companions. The life of each living creature is significant and purposeful – all life is interconnected and interdependent. As far as domesticated animals such as dogs and cats, they serve us in many profound ways. They are our companions, friends, and for many of us, beloved family members. They may serve as military bomb-sniffing dogs or as members of the police force sniffing out drugs, weapons and narcotics. They may serve as Seeing Eye dogs or assist those who are hearing impaired or disabled in other ways. They are able to help us in our search and rescue efforts following both natural and man-made disasters. As simple pets or animal companions, they improve our physical and emotional well-being. Well-documented studies indicate that they help improve our overall health, improve our heart rate, and decrease depression, anxiety and fear. Through them, we learn much about ourselves and the cycle of life.

3). After I lost my beautiful Alaskan Malamute/Lab mix Caesar in 1998, I grieved so deeply for him that I researched grief extensively. I was informed by well-intended friends and family members that “Caesar was only a dog”, and that “you can get another dog,” etc. Caesar meant so very much to me – he was a stray who had been terribly abused. We found him wandering around in a Los Angeles park and rehabilitated him physically and emotionally. When we first rescued him, he was terrified of people. He would lie in a corner of our den and shiver in fear whenever we had visitors.

At any rate, I had lost many wonderful human friends and family members, but my grief for my innocent, vulnerable canine “child” was unbearable. I sought relief from the pain of my loss by reading many, many books on the subject, researching grief and becoming a grief counselor specializing in helping those who were mourning the loss of a beloved animal companion. I provide those who have lost a pet to first identify the fact that they are grieving a profound loss. Secondly, I let them know that grief is the normal, natural and

healthy response to loss of any kind. Thirdly, I encourage them to express and communicate their feelings to those who are empathetic and supportive. I also let them know that there is no shame or embarrassment associated with grieving pet loss and that they are certainly not alone in their grief over the loss of a beloved pet. I also encourage them to take time to celebrate, memorialize and eulogize the life of the pet they have lost.

4). Dogs love us unconditionally. They are genuinely who and what they appear to be. They don't lie, deceive or pretend to be someone or something they are not. They don't analyze or judge us or disparage us for what we may view as our faults or failures. They accept us just as we are. They don't care what we are wearing or how we look. They love and forgive us no matter what. They are our faithful friends and loyal companions in whom we confide and who will never betray our secrets. From whom could we ask more?

5). Virtually everyone should be encouraged to volunteer or at least visit an animal shelter. It is a very difficult and painful experience on one level. After all, you are seeing the consequences of our (as humans) careless, irresponsible behavior toward creatures that are sentient and who are suffering the trauma of being in an unfamiliar and frightening environment where they know other animals like them have been placed there through no fault of their own and have a very small chance of being adopted and a very great chance of being euthanised (put to sleep). To look into a shelter animal's eyes is to see life in its fullness. We behold the beauty and friendship and hope of these animals in kennels. We also know in our hearts that many of these innocent and vulnerable animals will suffer and/or die. Hopefully, a visit to an animal shelter can make us more aware of and compassionate toward the needs of our animals.

6). What children learn about animals has a great deal to do with what they are taught by their parents, care-givers and teachers. If their parents teach them to respect and appreciate animals, it is very likely that the child will become compassionate and concerned about his fellow creatures and our planet. As far as losing a pet, it is my feeling that children be told the truth. It is an important opportunity to teach a child about life and death and the fact that all living beings eventually die – that loss is an inevitable part of life on earth. Embrace your child, support and empathize with him. Encourage him to express his true feelings. It is healthy to cry. A child needs to learn that there is no weakness, shame or embarrassment associated with crying or mourning a loss. One can use the analogy of the change of seasons to describe the cycle of life.

7). Some dogs, just like some human beings, are “high maintenance” meaning that they seem to require or simply demand a lot of attention, care and interaction. This can be the result of its breed characteristics, its breeding, its upbringing and the humans who have adopted him. There are many ways to view a "high maintenance" dog or cat such as environment vs. heredity.

8). Conduct extensive research about the breed of dog that you are thinking of adopting. You will learn a lot about the breed's personality, physical characteristics, etc. Find out as much as you possibly can about its innate characteristics and behavioral issues. Activity level, temperament, ancestry, personality, tendencies to hunt, retrieve, prey on smaller animals, etc. can all be revealed through research on the breed you're thinking of acquiring.

9). Our readers can find out a lot of information about our animal companions and a wide variety of issues such as pet adoption, pet loss, aging pets, and so on by visiting my website:

www.animalcompanioinsandtheirpeople.com. They can also learn a lot about my work as a grief counselor and in rescue. They can order copies of each of the seven books I've written including my most recent, "Our Rescue Dog Family Album" from my website, Amazon.com, Barnes & Noble, and so on. They can even view segments on my Youtube channel and clips from the many TV programs I've been on including CNNHeadline News, Fox New, Fox & Friends, Hallmark Channel, Lifetime, etc. My dogs and I have b\been guests on many television programs throughout the United Sates.