



Pet Welfare offers safe harbor for furry friends

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5/13/2010 - **EGLIN AIR FORCE BASE, Fla.** -- The toy left behind brought no joy, the frigid 20-degree winter night brought no comfort, but tied to a picnic table, Eglin Pet Welfare volunteers found Hope, a Shar-pei, abandoned on the second day of the New Year.

Famed "Peanuts" cartoonist Charles Schulz once said, "Happiness is a warm puppy." Surrendering "happiness" because of a deployment, a move, etc. is a horrid choice I have never encountered. Abandoning an animal in the dead of night is an act unfathomable to my conscience. You never leave an Airman behind; never leave your family behind; so how could you leave the furrriest member of your family tied to table with no food or water, hoping someone finds him?

I cannot comprehend a human being so cruel as to drive away watching their pet get smaller and smaller in the review mirror. I'm convinced whoever does this feels they have no other options. But it is not so.

Pet abandonment presents several problems at pet shelters including Pet Welfare, said Kristy Taylor, Pet Welfare publication coordinator. Among these problems are a lack of history about the animal. The history includes both medical records and personality traits. Being tied up in an unfamiliar place can cause the dog to become defense and aggressive towards people who are trying to help the animal.

An appointment with the organization can stop all these problems. If there is no room at this shelter, volunteers call other rescue organizations or post the animal's picture on the adoption bulletin board.

"The people at Pet Welfare do everything under the sun [to help the animals,]" said Carla Engeldinger, dog coordinator. "We do what we have to do. There are alternatives; just give us a call. "

In addition to being Pet Welfare a non-profit, no-kill shelter placing nearly 300 abandoned, stray or homeless dogs and cats with new families every year; it is where I spend most every Wednesday afternoon. Since opening in 1982, volunteers have run the shelter with no monetary support from the government.

I must admit after a never-ending day of work, the only thing I truly find comforting is taking the dogs at the shelter for a walk. It is not all Hallmark moments complete with a Lassie look-a-like. There is kennel cleaning and doggie-dish washing. The love shown by these animals, both cats and dogs, replaces any "sweat" that goes into the volunteering here.

Recently, my heart has been stolen by Gracie, a lab mix with a gentle disposition. Her family left her in a small pen outside the shelter on a rainy night in early March. Given the small patches of grey around her smile, they must have known her fear of storms; however, they kept driving as the rain, thunder and lightning poured down. Gracie pulled apart metal fencing because of her fear of the weather, and spent three days roaming the Eglin range before being taken in. Despite her past, she still gives me a little "kiss" every time I walk in with a leash.

If Gracie can forgive the transgressions of people, then the least I can do is spread the word to stop this from happening again. If you find yourself in that difficult position of having to surrender your pet, give them one last act of love and set up an appointment to discuss surrendering them.

Hope quickly found a home, but others are still in need of a new family and a second chance.



Gracie, an Eglin Pet Welfare dog available for adoption, was left at the shelter during a thunderstorm after hours. She escaped the outdoor pen she was placed in by her former owners and roamed the Eglin range for three days. Pet abandonment causes problems for both the animal and the volunteers at the shelter. One can learn more about preventing pet abandonment or volunteering at the shelter by visiting www.petwelfare.net. (U.S. Air Force/Ashley M. Wright)

Also, the shelter finds itself in serious need of volunteers at this time. For more information about volunteering at Pet Welfare or animals available for adoption, visit www.petwelfare.net, and may you always be the kind of person your dog thinks you are.