

RESCUE & SHELTER ADOPTIONS

by Tam Cordingley, former Shelter Manager



Dec 2011 - In less than 5 years, the adoption situation has progressed from bad to outrageous. In the last 24 hours I've seen three adopt-a-thon promotions from shelter/rescue people.

First was an adoptathon scheduled for Christmas eve for "last minute shoppers." And by the way "we also sell pet accessories."

Second was a rescue that said "adopt now as we are closing for Christmas" and "any animals not adopted will be killed on Wednesday."

The third was a group having a half off sale, "a puppy for Christmas only 25 dollars."

All three made my blood boil. If a breeder did any one of these things, HSUS and the press would be all over them yet I hear nothing about these adopt-a-thons. Who speaks for the dogs? Or for the customers being duped by such despicable "sales practices"?

Aug 2006 - There has been for the last several years, a terrific push to adopt, adopt, adopt. There are adopt-a-thons at pet stores, malls, shelters, and about any other place that will allow one. There are also rescue railroads, transporting dogs all over the country. I'd like to open a discussion about the real effect of all these adoptions.

Certainly, adopting a shelter dog destined to be destroyed is a good thing. However adopting just to be adopting is not a good thing. We decry the puppy-in-a-window syndrome, yet in the next breath we put cute dogs all over the TV screens, on every available street corner and pet shop, and beg people to adopt. We dislike selling puppies at flea markets and in pet shops but what makes it all right to sell dogs at adopt-a-thons?

In none of these cases are prospective homes evaluated. One of the differences between responsible breeders and the "others" is that good breeders screen potential homes. Few of the adoption organizations do that. Nor do they offer continuing support for the new owners. Sale done, goodbye.

None of these people who end up with this hapless dog have any emotional or financial investment in the dog. It is however, re-counted again as a part of the pet overpopulation stats.

This poor dog is even more confused. He has been adopted but immediately dumped again. Maybe the next owner who adopts this shelter dog gets a new job out of town. Can't take the dog. So back to the shelter it goes. To be counted yet again. Now we have one dog counted as three.

What I see are dogs adopted by Dad and the kids at the adopt-a-thons, going home to Mom who shrieks and says "get rid of that dog". They are too embarrassed to return it to the nice ladies who were so happy to have the dog adopted, so it is given away, goes to the shelter in the next town, or it is simply put out on the road.

Tattoo or Microchip Accountability: Of course adoptions are a good thing but if a dog is to be adopted out it should be permanently identified. Either tattooed and that tattoo registered or micro-chipped and that microchip registered. All of this ferrying of dogs multiple states away removes control from the rescue organizations locally. When Susie, rescue coordinator in Alabama, finds a good home in New Hampshire many people along the way are involved. These rescue railroads and transports sound like a heroic effort. I disagree. I feel these are kindness gone awry.

A homeless dog is desperately looking for a new master and security. When a kind person takes the dog and takes it for a ride, gives it water and shelter and possibly food, the dog gives a great sigh of relief and begins getting to know its rescuer. Then a few hours later it loses that person and gets shuttled off to another stranger to begin the process all over again. By the time this happens 3 or 4 times during the transport, the poor dog doesn't know which end is up and he becomes more damaged and more anxious with every transfer.

A dog that has had numerous changes of food and water and is stressed by a long car ride is certainly not ready to settle into a new home with no digestive upsets. He is likely to have loose stools, doesn't know any of the rules, and is given to a person who didn't want the dog badly enough either to pay for its transport or to go get it. That is a recipe for failure.

Numbers Game Accounting: How many of these dogs end up again in the local shelter or pound? No one knows. No records are kept and for good reason! Numbers translate to more money needed, more donations, more local funding. So if the adopted dog messes all over the floors, snarls at the kids, jumps on the Grandma, or kills the hamster, off it goes, back to the animal shelter. The new owners were willing, maybe even anxious, to take the dog if someone delivered it but weren't eager enough to have the dog to go get it themselves.

I'm not speaking from a position of little knowledge. I am the former manager of a large Humane Society shelter in California. We did screen homes and do onsite home checks, and had a trainer on staff to help with problems, and still we had dogs that were recycled every few months. We were local so we knew the dogs, and knew why they had failed in their last home. If we had been sending dogs all over the country as is common today with inter-shelter transporting (CUR), no one would ever know their history. They would just continue bouncing from home to home, continuing the same behavior that cost them the first home, and being counted again and again, until finally they become so damaged that someone was kind enough NOT to adopt them out again. Someone had the intestinal fortitude to put the poor animal to sleep.

Responsible Kindness: Misguided kindness, without considering the long term consequences, can do much more harm than good. If we are going to adopt out a dog, permanent ID is as important as spaying and much more important than neutering. If we are going to adopt out let's make it mandatory that the new home have a secure fence. No fence No dog. Period. If we can't put a dog in a great home it is a misguided kindness to put it in just any home that will take it.

There are much worse things than a quick and painless death and one of them is a long slow death of the spirit. For a dog, the scarring that comes from repeated separation from their people is a terrible thing. If it can't be a permanent home maybe no home is better. Adoption should be a carefully considered option, not a spur of the moment thing prompted by "feel good" sales hype.

http://www.thedogplace.org/SHELTERS/adoption_cordingley.asp #0608.1112