

A THOUSAND SNAKES IN THE GRASS

By Margaret Anne Cleek

"Better the dragon you see than a thousand snakes in the grass."

This Chinese Proverb should be recognized and heeded by pet owners and fanciers. Currently anyone who breeds animals is the target of animal rights activists who wish to abolish the purpose breeding of pets, and in some cases pet ownership in general. While we are made aware of federal and state legislation threatening our ownership of our animals, for example PAWs and the Animal Welfare Act at the federal level and CA's AB 1634, mandatory S/N bill, and broad-based opposition is launched, I believe that the greatest threat is from local legislation enacted as quietly as possible. The threat is greatest at the local level because a small special-interest group of animal right activists is following a quiet plan to rob us of control over our pets and their reproductive capacity and enacting this plan community by community.

Programs on how to enact legislation have been developed by special interest animal rights organizations. Action steps are outlined on websites with literature, sample wording, canned letters, and a plan showing how to proceed. They are told not to reveal that a new ordinance is the objective, but rather to form a taskforce to address animal welfare or to decrease shelter euthanasia. Also the advice is given to remain informal as this keeps you from being subject to "sunshine laws" which may exist to assure open and public process and to lay the groundwork and assure support from staff before going public.

Thus the public is not aware that behind closed doors special interest groups are drafting an ordinance to suit their agenda. A group is formed and under the guise of being a coalition which includes all "stakeholders" participants further their plan. Some participants are well-meaning, some know precisely what the real agenda is. In any case, the MSN or "pay or spay" ordinance is drafted with city or county staff co-opted as a participating member. Senior staff, legal, and council or board members are now inundated with information in private one-on-one sessions.

The perception of a crisis is cultivated and the only solution is to enact legislation forcing people to pay huge fees to own intact animals or criminalize the ownership of intact animals. Data is provided which is either false or misleading about the success of mandatory S/N legislation. They may show a decline in euthanasia, but fail to note that greater declines were achieved in communities without such an ordinance. They may show an increase in licensing with coercive legislation, but fail to mention that enforcement costs exceed revenue. In my municipality I found that success was even claimed in a community that had no such legislation.

(For a comprehensive article on MSN legislation's results please see: Do mandatory spay/neuter laws reduce shelter intake and euthanasia? by Laura Allen
http://www.ab1634.com/Files/ARE_MSN.pdf

Breeders are vilified as being responsible for the deaths in shelters under the simply appealing but logically false premise that the birth of a wanted pet causes the death of a shelter animal. Breeders are pimps, heartlessly exploiting animals for money, causing the death of wonderful shelter animals and costing the municipality tremendously in animal control costs. A huge number is manufactured and becomes the lost revenue to the county because all breeders are tax evaders making tens of thousands of dollars and costing the community in animal control costs for the surplus animals they produce. Apparently someone failed Econ 101 as there can either be a crisis of surplus desirable animals OR breeders selling pets for thousands of dollars. You cannot have both. There is rampant emotional manipulation. Pictures will be shown of darling puppies. Then

the numbers of animals killed in the shelter will be given. This leads the targets of the message to believe that these darling puppies are killed. In fact, the number presented includes wildlife injured and brought in, small animals, reptiles, owner surrender for euthanasia because of age or illness, feral cats and unweaned kittens, and dangerous dogs. They present as if the community is killing huge numbers of adoptable animals, but when the data is examined, the numbers of adoptable animals is revealed to be very low. Many shelters cannot meet the demand for puppies and smaller dogs and only have large mixed breed, often pit type available in any numbers for adoption.

Anyone who gathers this data is dismissed, because now the numbers, which were once touted as so compelling, are "not important". The council members or supervisors are sold "the big lie." The Big Lie is a propaganda technique. It was defined by Adolf Hitler in his 1925 autobiography *Mein Kampf*. It is a lie so "colossal" that no one would believe that someone "could have the impudence to distort the truth so infamously".

In the case of pet overpopulation the Big Lie is promoted over and over to city officials and the public, to the point of where they no longer can process logical arguments against the lie and accept it as fact without question. They come to fully believe that there is a crisis of pet overpopulation, that the public has not responded to education and the problem is getting worse and worse and we must enact coercive and draconian legislation because all else has failed. Breeders are unethical and unregulated and need to be controlled. Intact animals bite and run at large while altered ones do not. Every intact animal is a ticking time bomb and a single female cat can produce 470 thousand cats in seven years and a single female dog 65 thousand dogs-everyone knows this to be true!

In fact, there has been a dramatic reduction in the number of pets euthanized. The most reliable data available indicates between 3 and 4 million animals were euthanized in shelters last year. This includes feral cats, ill and infirm animals, dangerous animals, and owner turn in for euthanasia. These numbers are a far cry from the 25 million estimated 30 years ago and these numbers have decreased in spite of an increase in the number of total pets and a doubling of the expected lifespan of dogs in homes (mostly due to leash laws). It is estimated that voluntary S/N rates for cats are around 90% and 75% for dogs (numbers from HSUS, American Pet Products Manufacturer's Association and Animal People). Spay/neuter for pets is an easy sell and represents one of the most successful social change efforts of this generation.

Before dog and cat fanciers are aware that such legislation is even being considered, senior staff and legislators have been indoctrinated to believe that there is a crisis so great and so intractable that extreme coercive and punitive action must be taken, that breeders are the scum of the earth, that a single intact animal is a threat to the community and thus vets must report animals not neutered by 4 months to animal control, that the community supports this draconian legislation, and that it has been hugely successful every where enacted. Any evidence to the contrary is dismissed as false information from breeders who are trying to protect their "business". Anyone who opposes the ordinance is demeaned as a selfish and heartless "special interest" while the so-called coalition is presented as representing the interests of the larger community and the animals.

The legislation is then presented to the municipal legislative body by staff as the extensive work of a "taskforce", all "stakeholders" have been involved, and it is specially designed to meet the needs of the community. In fact, the legislation is the "canned" product of an animal rights group and these taskforces are rigged, and anyone who does not agree with the agenda is not invited to the private meetings, or if initially involved but not with the program, "chilled" out of the proceedings by the dominant group.

The real kicker in all of this is that the agenda and legislative lobby work of a special interest group (possibly with a 501c3 status which means they should not be political) is presented to the council members or supervisors as a recommendation of staff. This makes passing it a knee jerk as councils or boards rubber stamp just about anything staff recommends in virtually every community. In some cases a MSN ordinance is not even presented to the public and is attempted to be snuck through on a consent calendar (Sacramento City August 2007).

It is my belief that the greatest threat to the ownership of pets lies in the stealth enactment of these ordinances in our communities. And this is not just happening in California, the land of fruits and nuts. Hendersonville, NC, Palm Beach, FL, Little Rock, AR, San Antonio, TX, Albuquerque, NM are some of the communities considering or enacting extreme AC ordinances.