

PART 4: Rehoming Animals Some Guidelines in the following case

What would you do?

FINDING HAPPY HOMES FOR UNWANTED PUPPIES AND KITTENS — BORN TO unneutered pets and strays — and for abandoned or otherwise homeless pets is one of ARK's most important activities. Not just organizations like ARK, but many individuals are active in rehoming as well, as evinced by the large number of "Pets for free" notices on computer bulletin boards and in grass-roots newspapers. But how do people judge whether interested parties will indeed provide good homes for their pets? This is the million-dollar question for the animals themselves, who have absolutely no choice in the matter. The quality of their lives henceforward depends on their new owners, and thus on the judgment of the people rehoming them.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CONDUCTING BACKGROUND CHECKS

When people come to ARK wanting to adopt an animal, they must first fill out a detailed questionnaire. The 32 items include questions on type of home (house or apartment, owned or rented), family members, experience in pet ownership, and even such private matters as plans to have children or move to a different home. They must also sketch the layout of their home, marking areas where their pet will be kept. Based on their responses, staff pick out a few animals judged to be best suited to each particular family. This means that sometimes people are not shown the type of animal they wanted. For example, if someone asks for a small puppy, but has an infant or spends most of the day out of the house, ARK will recommend they take a grown dog instead. Or if a family comes looking for a large dog, such as an Akita or Siberian husky, but it turns out that the primary caregiver will be a child, or that the dog's living quarters will be too small, they will be urged to take home a small or medium-build dog.

In addition, ARK insists on other conditions such as the following. The dog must not be chained, but run free, if not throughout the house or garden at least within an adequately large enclosure. Walls must be high enough and doors/gates must be able to stay closed, to prevent animals from running away and getting lost. Pets must be vaccinated and otherwise have their health maintained properly. They must get enough

attention daily and dogs must be walked every day. If necessary, ARK staff will visit a potential family's home to check whether all of these conditions will be met, or offer advice to make sure they are fully understood.

Some people get angry at all this probing, and leave in a huff saying, "I came here to get a dog, not go through a bloody interrogation." Even some of ARK's supporters voice the view that, with such rigorous screening procedures, many of the animals at ARK will never find a home. They argue that ARK's standards should be lowered so that more animals can find families. Our position, however, is that the animals in our care should be able to live out their natural lives with their new owners, or at least be happier with their new families than they are at ARK. For this reason, we cannot just hand animals over to anybody who wants them.

SOME PITFALLS IN REHOMING

While other animal welfare organizations have experienced staff who are aware of the various pitfalls in placing animals in new homes, individuals who attempt to rehome pets through local papers, for example, should always remember that not everybody who inquires about adopting an animal will give it a good home. Some people want a "toy" for their children, while others simply want a watchdog for their warehouse, or a hunting dog (Kishu dogs are popular in this category). ARK refuses all such cases. More sinister, however, are people who sell dogs and cats to breeders, samisen makers and medical laboratories. People trying to find homes for animals should be on guard against these frauds, who often are pleasant young people with a seeming love of animals. But try to contact them at the address or telephone number they gave you, and you find they were both false; both new owner and pet have disappeared. ARK receives many frantic appeals involving just such cases, but of course by then it is too late to do anything.

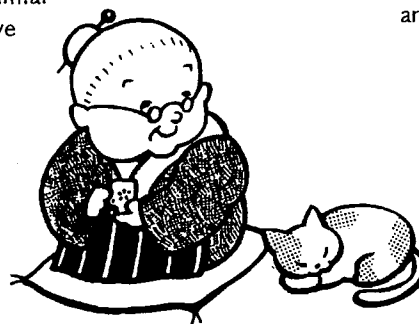
The recent murder case in Kobe also highlighted the existence of people who enjoy

torturing animals, and adopt them for this purpose; meanwhile, there are more than a few documented cases of young women and others who adopt little kittens only to abandon them when they become adult cats, so that they can adopt yet another kitten. Such people are repeat offenders, and must be vigorously screened out as potential pet owners.

HOW TO FIND GOOD HOMES FOR ANIMALS

The following guidelines will help ensure that the animals you have saved will not suffer again.

1. Confirm that the address and phone number given is correct (ARK asks to see a driver's license), and obtain permission to visit the home. People who are reluctant to tell you where they live should be considered dubious.
2. Instead of having the potential owner come to pick up the animal, take the trouble to deliver the animal yourself. Use this opportunity to observe the family and their neighborhood.
3. Watch out for people who have no preferences regarding the type, build, sex, color etc. of animal, but are interested only in obtaining the animal quickly. People who disregard your schedule and insist on coming to pick up the animal early in the morning or late at night are likewise not to be trusted. Even if they turn out not to be frauds, it is doubtful they would make good pet owners.



Thanks

4. Local papers sometimes run ads saying, "Trying to find homes for unwanted pets? We'll do it for you. ¥0,000 required for vaccinations." Such ads should be viewed with caution, as they may be placed by dog- and cat-sellers pretending to be animal welfare activists.

5. When rehoming puppies and kittens that have not yet grown to their full size, emphasize the importance of ensuring they don't get lost. If growing animals get lost wearing collars or ribbons around their necks, these get tighter as the animals grow larger and can strangle them.

And just in case they do get lost, emphasize the importance of keeping a tag with address and telephone number on pets' collars at all times, so that they can be returned to their owners.

(Next issue: Animal protection and euthanasia)