

What would YOU do ? Part 6

Can you truly call yourself an Animal Lover ?

by Masayo Furuki

There are many people, here in Japan and all over the world, who take pride in calling themselves dog lovers and cat lovers. But is their love based on a real understanding of the animals' needs? Or do their own egos and preconceived ideas play a greater role? And while it is easy to say you love animals, if you discover a case of abuse and feel sorry for the victim, are you willing to rescue the animal and find it a home yourself?

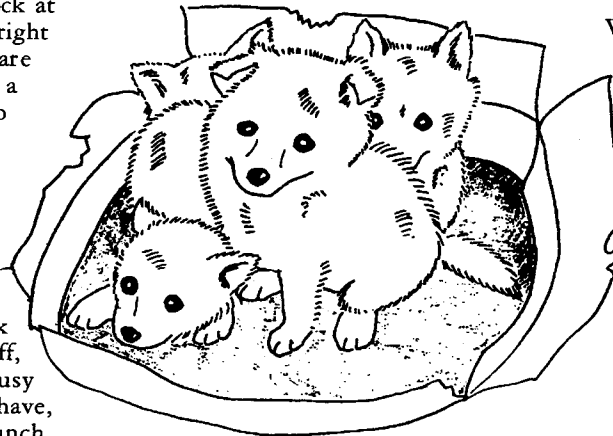
ARK receives phone calls on a daily basis from people who have found kittens abandoned behind their house and want ARK to take them in, or a dog being mistreated in their neighborhood and would ARK do something about it? Some callers ring us at ten or eleven o'clock at night, while others demand we come right away because people from the pound are coming to catch a stray dog living in a local park. We at ARK try to do everything in our power to help such animals, but it would be impossible to respond to every case that comes our way. We do have a special telephone line for emergencies, which is open from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m., but we cannot be ready to handle rescue operations on a round-the-clock basis. ARK has no night-time staff, while our day-time staff are so busy caring for the animals we already have, that they scarcely have time for lunch. Unlike the police and fire departments, we simply cannot be available for immediate action at all times.

If you really want to save the animal you have found, you should first think of ways to do so yourself before calling ARK. We are always ready to offer help and advice to people who are making their own efforts to find homes for unwanted animals. However, it is unfortunate that many people are not willing to take action themselves (or feel that they can't, which is ultimately the same because there is always something you can do) and only want ARK to step in so they can feel better about themselves.

There is a park near my house where I often walk my dogs, as do other people in the neighbourhood. One day I saw several of them gathered around a puppy and talking about "the poor thing, it probably got lost or was abandoned." As I was walking an aggressive, large dog at the time, I had to give them a wide berth and pass quickly, but the puppy preyed on my mind and I went to the park later to look for it. As I had expected there was no one there, and the lonely puppy was

whimpering in front of a bench in the gathering dark. Everyone had felt sorry for it, but unwilling to do anything for it, had gone home with their own dogs and left the puppy behind. (This puppy found a very good home through ARK and is now living happily in Tokyo.)

Another day at the same park, a woman who had been loitering there approached when she saw me. "Somebody's abandoned a little puppy over there and it's bothering me so much I can't leave," she told me. "I keep watching it, hoping someone will take it home." When I suggested that she take it home herself, she said she



already had a dog so she couldn't. I knew that her dog was an aged Shiba, and moreover that her house had a large garden and that her family was well-off, with enough members to help care for another dog. She insisted, however, that she could not take the puppy. And while she knew that I already had five dogs myself, including two large ones, when I finally agreed to take the puppy, she said, "What a relief! I'm so glad that's worked out so well."

Well no, it hasn't quite "worked out" yet — for the one who has taken the animal, it is just the beginning. First there is a visit to the vet's, for a health check, blood tests, vaccines and neutering. Then there is feeding and walking every day, and generally seeing to the animal's physical and mental well-being. Meanwhile, efforts must be made to find it a permanent home. And even if a home is found, it is not sure the animal will adapt to its new environment—there have been cases of rehomed animals never getting used to their new owners or of running

away and getting lost—so the first few months are filled with anxiety. Only after I finally receive a letter from the adoptive family, with a photo enclosed, saying the animal is now a happy member of the family, do I know things have well and truly "worked out."

When coming across an abandoned or mistreated animal, it is easy to say you feel sorry for it — and many people do. But when it comes to actually doing something to rescue the poor animal from its situation, the number of people willing to do so unfortunately seems to drop drastically.

Older readers may remember a movie called *Tea and Sympathy* starring Deborah Kerr. It was about a couple serving as the house parents of a university dormitory, and their interaction with the students. The wife is a kind woman who involves herself totally in caring for the students, but "all she really needs to do," her husband tells her, "is offer them tea and sympathy."

When it comes to an abandoned or abused animal, however, sympathy alone is worth nothing. What the animal needs is to be taken in promptly, and cared for appropriately. The first person who can do that for it is you, you who have found it and want to help it. ARK will give you advice, and if space permits, offer a temporary home for a limited time, but you must take the primary share of responsibility in finding a new home for the animal you have found.

Rescuing an animal and finding it a happy home requires time, effort and money. It may not be something everyone can do easily, but you should at least try to do everything you can within your own limits. With several people working together, it is not an impossible task — so building a network of like-minded people you can rely on when necessary is something you can already start doing today. Somewhere, maybe someday soon, you will meet an animal that needs your help — and if you are truly an animal lover, you will play an active role in giving it another chance in life.

