



THE TWAIN MEET

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Pets in a precarious position

Problem:

Brenda, an American housewife, had the unfortunate experience of finding three puppies in the gutter on her way home from shopping. It was clear that they were left there to die. From this and other instances, she wonders why Japanese are, or at least seem to be, so uncaring and unconcerned about such cruelty to animals.

Joy:

Americans living in Japan need not be gung-ho animal lovers to feel somewhat upset or responsible for animals which are obviously being mistreated (intentionally or not). Such acts of "cruelty" toward animals from the American perspective may range anywhere from providing inadequate in- and outdoor space to outright abandonment.

Particularly the throwing away of unwanted animals raises such questions as "How can anyone with the least bit of feeling do such a thing?" or "Why am I always the one finding discarded animals when my Japanese friends claim this has never happened to them?"

One reason that American eyes and hearts are open to the plight of animals (though not true for everyone) may lie in the fact that in America there has been a history of having to coexist with animals whether on a farm, ranch or in a house.

Children were encouraged to have a pet, not only to experience companionship but also so that they might learn the meaning of responsibility — including having to continue to care for an animal when it was no longer young, cute, and fun, but became sick, ill-behaved, or just old.

They were also taught the painful lesson that showing compassion toward an animal may mean having to kill it if its chances of survival were slim as in the case of a horse with a broken leg or a newborn that could not receive proper care.

However, despite such a positive identification with

animals, there has been a need to protect animals from abusive individuals. Thus came to be such organizations as the Humane Society and the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

Issues that concern them are the use of animals for research, the killing of animals for commercial purposes, to the more immediate problems related to the prevention of unwanted pregnancies via neutering.

One popular program has been that of urging people to adopt an unwanted or uncared for animal — including those that are past their prime, disfigured or unpedigreed. This program has become increasingly supported as various studies have concluded that having a pet or "animal companion" (the politically correct term), can help alleviate stress, enhance feelings of well-being and self-esteem, and give meaning and purpose to life — particularly important to the emotional and physical health of the old as well as the young.

If Brenda can't face the official solution, that is, "the pound," she might try the local vet who will most likely share her concern and help find the puppies a home.

Fumi:

When Japanese throw away puppies or kittens, they do so knowing that they will probably die, at the same time hoping that they will be found and taken home by some kind-hearted passerby — usually a child who will then pester his or her parents into keeping it as a pet.

Before the pet boom some 30 years ago in Japan, puppies and kittens were commonly thrown away, due mostly to economic reasons and ignorance of birth control methods. Today this phenomenon by comparison is far less common as pets (particularly non-pedigree ones) are often spayed.

Those who continue to throw away unwanted pets may be unaware of a ¥5,000

government aid given by the ward or health centers to perform such operations. They may also be influenced by the Buddhist prohibition against killing any four-legged living creature. By throwing away animals, one's conscience may be relieved in as much as they have not been directly responsible for their death.

If anything, some Japanese are going overboard in their showing of "love" for animals, which is no doubt accelerated by commercialism. There are clothes, grooming salons, hotels, restaurants, wedding and funeral services, even CDs and videos which can be purchased to help relieve the stress of one's pet.

The recipients of such attention for the most part are pedigreed — costing anywhere from \$1,000 to \$6,000. Some trendy Japanese want to own a pedigreed animal as a status symbol or because it is fashionable. Certain breeds are popular depending on the year.

While all this fuss over pets may be viewed as a positive indication of the Japanese love of animals, there are some who argue that such indulgence is only to meet the emotional needs of the owners and has very little to do with the welfare of the animal.

Certainly the practice of keeping a large dog in a small apartment or tied up outside on a short rope is not done with the animal's interest in mind. But, with such a shortage of space in Japan, most people think it can't be helped and the animal suffers accordingly.

Brenda should call the Dobutsu Kanri Jimusho (Animal Control Office) found in every prefecture. Upon receiving her call, someone will come to pick up the puppies, give them a physical examination and try to find the owner or a home for them. However, Brenda should be aware that after six days, in which notices are distributed throughout all the ward offices, if no one claims them, they will be put to sleep.