

Animal Rescue ~ People Rescue
Who is Rescuing Whom?
("Winky Rescue")

by
Warren G. Patitz 09/02

Dave Wintz of Animal Care and Control put the little Shih Tsu into my wife's care for bathing and grooming to become more attractive for adoption. This little guy smelled so bad that you needed a handkerchief over your nose on the drive home with the windows down, otherwise your nausea center would be triggered. His hair was long, matted and dirty. You couldn't see his face. When I first saw him and experienced the aroma I called him "Stinky". Still, he wagged his tail.

He had every right to not be the excitable puppy you would expect for his approximate age. During careful bathing and grooming, Karen discovered that he had an injured eye and the eyelid, injured as well, had grown to what was left of the bad eye. When he blinked, the whole eyeball would move with the lid. (Remember, this guy wags his tail. Can you imagine that?) "Stinky" became "Winky." He melted right into our heart and there was no way he was going anywhere but here.

One-eyed, stinky dogs don't make it very far on the road of life in this world. Frankly, over 12 million medically healthy dogs/year don't make it very far down the road of life in our culture.

We adopted "Mr. Winkster" (I like to call him that sometimes) and took him to veterinarians Drs. Shari and Rick Lyons at Zionsville Country Veterinary Clinic. For the great care they gave "Mr. Winkster" (and *all* of our animals for that matter) we are most grateful. Their skills and kindness are blessings. They worked in tandem and removed the injured eye, cleaned out the infection, removed three sebaceous cysts and made his testicles disappear. "Voila!" He was put on antibiotics and in 48 hours was a new guy, in need of nutrition, but "good to go," further down the road into our life.

There is a poem that, for the life of me I thought I had saved somewhere in a file, but of course I can't find it now. It must be with one of my socks. It is entitled, "The Man in the Looking Glass". It is about a fellow looking at his reflection in a mirror and what and how he sees and thinks of himself, ...about how everyone thinks he's a great guy. The "gist" of the poem is that what *really* matters is what the fellow staring *back* at him really sees.

We have all noticed what happens when we shift our focus when looking into a reflecting surface like a pane of glass or the eyes (or *eye* as the case may be) of another living creature. We see either beyond the surface to the other side and/or we see our own reflection. A somewhat tangible analogy is that authorities in animal behavior tell us that much of our companion animals' behavior is a reflection, or compliment, of our own inadvertent and unconscious reinforcement.

Why people acquire animals is open to discussion, but I suspect a reason is that we want to reconnect with a place inside ourselves that is primal, a place close to the source of our being. Animals live in “the moment” and the magic of that place is the magnet that attracts us. Our perception of the creatures that share the earth with us determines how we treat them. The translation of *how* we treat them reflects where we are in ourselves and where we see ourselves in the universe.

*I have a certain fascination for the backward spelling of **d-o-g**.*

Why people get into animal welfare is open to discussion, also. I suspect that we don't have a choice because it is part of the journey of discovering ourselves. I have observed that some people use the animal welfare arena as a theatre for satisfying a need for “power” and “control” by making life and death decisions based on a narrow criterion with little, if any, affection for the mission. Others are involved because we perhaps see the animal's plight as a reflection of failed accountability due to humane ignorance. By extending the safety net of “rescuing” the animal to avoid homelessness or death we perhaps also relieve the collective cultural guilt that we might have regarding the throwaway mentality rehearsed with God's creatures. In summary, it boils down to genuine caring.

The **National Council On Pet Population and Study** reports that 40% of dogs will be rehomed or surrendered within 6 months, 60% within one year, and 66% by the second year. 94% of dogs and 81% of cats surrendered to shelters are more than 4 months of age. The problem of unwanted companion animals is no longer just an issue of pet overpopulation; it is also an issue of a failed relationship or “broken bond” between a human and their companion animal. Animals in homes for 4-6 months have already had some degree of bonding. Successful relationships, whether with another person or another animal, are based on mutual *respect* and *trust* and these are cultivated in the context of each individual's spiritual growth and development.

Realizing our efforts to improve the journey for companion animals on the road of life is relative to the character of the reflection that looks back at us because this is a mutual journey. In a more generalized context the success of an animal welfare organization or rescue group is relative to the character of the individuals who represent that organization. Careless decisions regarding life and death and withholding simple medical treatment embarrasses the spirit in the journey and threatens the fabric of opportunity at the expense of the animals which it is suppose to serve. Listening, we hear the animals' voice within the one heart that we all share. When a façade of sincerity exists, it is as obvious as a person changing clothes in a glass house. The community witness is on alert and the mission of the agency is compromised. Only a genuine leader with clear vision will recognize and correct such a travesty by breathing *integrity* into the sails. A definition of *integrity* that I embrace is: “Doing what is right when no one is looking.”

Whenever Winky has his blind side to me, I am reminded that what he sees is not limited to his one eye and I do not escape his inner vision.

I am infinitely grateful for the privilege the animals offer us to visit the moment in time where they live and may we be thoughtful to acknowledge the reflection looking back at us to acknowledge, “who is rescuing who?”

“There is little that separates humans from other sentient beings – we all feel pain, we all feel joy, we all deeply crave to be alive and live freely, we all share this planet together.”
- Mahatma Gandhi

“Not to hurt our brethren is our first duty to them, but to stop there is not enough. We have a higher mission...to be of service to them, wherever they require it.”
- St. Francis of Assisi

“Pets are for a lifetime”

PS: Winky and I have a little routine where I tell him, “Hey! You look suspicious. I need to ‘search you.’ Put your paws on the wall.” He puts his paws on the wall, (and gets a little treat) and I proceed to gently ‘pat down’ his tiny body. I then say, “OK, you’re clean” and he gets down, looking at me with his one eye, waiting to be held ‘under suspicion’ again.

Biography

Warren G. Patitz was introduced to “dog training” in 1980 and has been offering training instruction in the Indianapolis area for over 20 years. He grew to realize that training occurs between *our* ears, listening with an open heart, being humble and that much of the dog’s behavior is a reflection of our own doing. Warren’s interest is to help people and dogs enjoy a relationship of mutual *trust* and *respect* and to reduce the number of abandoned and relinquished animals.