

Compassion, cruelty and animal companions



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By Nate Smelle

Each week, either Bancroft This Week or the Bancroft Times features animals rescued by Home Again that are in need of finding a forever home. Since speaking with Home Again volunteer Cathy Archambault at Pet Fest last week, I have been thinking about where these animals come from and what they have gone through to make it to the pages of our local newspapers.

During our conversation Archambault told me a few of the stories behind some of the animals that have come into their care. Many of the animals have either been neglected or abandoned by their previous owners and turned in because they were no longer wanted. While the level of neglect and abuse varies from animal to animal, in several instances she said the cats and dogs we see in the paper each week have endured ?horrific? abuse. For example, on more than one occasion Home Again has rescued animals that have been thrown out the window of a moving vehicle.

The most common sentiment expressed by pet owners about their animal companions that I have heard while covering events like Home Again's Pet Fest over the years is that they consider their furry friends to be part of the family. Thinking of the connection I have shared with each of my four-legged friends throughout my life it is hard to fathom how anyone could treat another living being so cruelly.

Attempting to make sense of such an act of cruelty, German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer hit the nail on the head when he wrote ?Compassion for animals is intimately connected with goodness of character; and it may be confidently asserted that he who is cruel to animals cannot be a good man.?

Although animal cruelty still exists in many forms today, there has recently been signs of progress in Canada. In June, the federal government took steps to improve Canada's protection of animals by passing: Bill S-203 which bans keeping whales and dolphins in captivity; Bill C-68 which outlaws the trade in shark fin products; and Bill C-84 which makes the sexual abuse of animals illegal and tightens the laws against animal fighting.

Despite these steps forward there are several gaps remaining in Canadian law that promote animal suffering. Because animals are considered property under Canada's Criminal Code, cruelty towards animals in farms, puppy mills and laboratories, along with those used for entertainment purposes in zoos, aquarium's and circuses is often overlooked. In the past three decades 26 orcas have died while being forced to perform at Marineland; and 105 horses ? six in 2019 ? have lost their lives at the Calgary Stampede. Yet, both the Stampede and Marineland go about their business year after year, barely receiving a slap on the wrist.

The recent changes to animal cruelty laws in Canada seem to signify a shift towards a more peaceful future for animals of all species. However, the effectiveness of this legislation will depend on our government's will and ability to enforce it, and our wherewithal to hold them accountable.