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1964

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Orphans of the Storm

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Recommended Citation

Castle, I. (1964). The war against surplus breeding. In R.J. Chenowith (Ed.), *The humane movement, 1964: Selected discussion papers of the National Leadership Conference of The Humane Society of the United States, September 26-29, 1963*, (pp. 21-23).

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The War Against Surplus Breeding

By Irene Castle, Lake Forest, Ill.,
Founder of Orphans of the Storm

I wish I could make sure that not one more puppy or kitten would be born in the next five years, until America had the opportunity to absorb the many dogs and cats that are at present in this world without homes.

There is no sadder sight, to me, than someone standing at the gate of our shelter with a basket or cardboard box of unwanted puppies or kittens! They proudly say they have found homes for five or six—but what homes? You may be sure they do not plan to check on the homes every few months. Many of them will be given away before they have been in the new surroundings one week—sometimes not a day!

Almost the whole humane movement is snowed under and overwhelmed by the still mounting flood of surplus cats and dogs. The surplus turns our shelters into sordid slaughterhouses. It distorts and perverts the thinking of many even of our very best people. Hundreds of our societies are kept permanently on the edge of bankruptcy by the single problem of taking in and disposing of cats and dogs which are homeless or unwanted simply because of the immense surplus of such animals.

It is so easy for all of us to throw up our hands and denounce veterinarians for the high fees that they charge for spaying. It is so very easy for all of us to place the blame on “irresponsible animal owners”. It is easy for us to lay the blame on public pounds or on legislatures.

The fact is, however, that we of the humane movement haven't cleaned up our own house in this respect. Scores of local humane societies still are unrestrainedly selling unsplayed female cats and dogs to any takers who appear. Not one humane society in a dozen is conducting any kind of educational campaign about the evils of surplus breeding. The American Humane Association says that it “has no fixed policy” about spaying. The American SPCA, handling 265,000 animals a year, freely releases unsplayed animals for adoption.

People will not realize, and particularly *kind* people, that the cruelest thing you can do is to let *all* puppies and *all* kittens live to grow up. At birth, many—in fact, most—should be put to sleep humanely before they have become attached to people and have grown to enjoy life—only to be abandoned (“dumped”) or passed on into careless or, worse than careless, downright cruel hands.

I have begged, pled with, and scolded people who love animals too much to put kittens to sleep humanely at birth—knowing full well that instead they will press them on their neighbors or give them to farmers or little children passing by, or ring doorbells of strangers to “get rid of them” at six, seven or eight weeks old. It is difficult for most people to understand that the sensible thing is to put all but one male to sleep at birth, and thus help check further over-population of the cat world.

What happens later? Let’s look at the seriousness of their crime and see how much suffering they will have caused for years and years to come. We are speaking of cats now because recently we have run into more cat cruelties than dog.

Don’t think that just because *you think* you have found nice homes for all of them, that the responsibility of the future inevitable suffering does not rest squarely on *your* shoulders.

First of all, you should have had your female cats spayed—or should not have accepted a female. Secondly, you have no *humane* right to give female kittens away. Cats can, and do, have three or four litters a year. If *one-half* of each litter are females (and often the quota is much larger), they in turn will each have three or four litters a year. One carelessly given away female can in two years produce several thousand cats. Do *you* know of several thousand *good* cat homes? When I protest because even my friends often won’t bring their unwanted kitten family to Orphans of the Storm, they bring up those old arguments of “they have a right to live”—or—“they were so darling the children wouldn’t hear of our parting with any of them”—or—“we gave them to a farmer”—or—“a young couple at Ft. Sheridan”—or—“to a little boy who had lost his kitten a week ago”—etc., etc.

Let’s take up, first, the farmer. All farmers have too many cats—people drive by and dump them on a farm. The females he has are continually adding to his number and cold and weary strays in blizzardy winters sneak into his hay barn for refuge if not sustenance. Some farmers may buy food for cats, but all I’ve ever heard of their giving them is skimmed milk, justified by that vicious old adage that “they won’t kill the rats if I feed them.” Rats are not good food for man or beast, and a good ratter is a good ratter even if pig-fat.

Let’s take the home at Ft. Sheridan. We have learned to our sorrow, that Army people do not stay put, and while they may take their dogs with them, you can bet your bottom dollar they won’t take their cat. The little boy who has “lost his kitten,” will also lose the new one you give him. Children handle them too much and their kittens run away, or they take them to play in a neighbor’s yard and forget about them. So the kittens drift off—to be killed by a dog or be run over or swallowed up by the nearby woods—or be picked up to be sold to a laboratory.

Please remember that many people *despise* cats. It's not easy for a cat to get itself "a good home"—and most of the homes that the unwanted kitten family are given to will not be "good homes" six months later. Just call up and ask about the kittens you gave away last year before you start saturating the neighborhood *this* year with your "too cute to be put to sleep" kittens.

We had a call recently to send our humane officer post haste to rescue a cat three little boys were using for a football. They actually were kicking it high into the air from one to another when the humane officer got there and quickly took possession of the cat, bringing it safely to Orphans of the Storm.

We had a janitor arrested for throwing a live cat into a furnace and he was fined only a dollar! Had it been a dog—he might have been fined \$100.

Stop and think, you tender-hearted, animal lovers—before you give female kittens away! You must bear the burden of the suffering it generates. Remember that every grocery store, bakery and butcher shop has a mother cat with kittens they are trying to give away. The result is that Orphans of the Storm places only one-fourth as many cats as dogs in homes each year!

One Sunday, just a few weeks ago, ninety cats (including kittens) were brought in which had to be added to the twenty-five or thirty we already had for adoption. People *must come to realize* that it is not fair to the cat world to keep every kitten born to their female cat and expect someone else to do their dirty work later.