A mericans love dogs and cats. At least, we like to think so. We spend millions—$1.6 billion in 1987—on our companion animals.

Pet ownership is at an all-time high. Never before have so many taken so much comfort from dogs, cats, and other companion animals. Sixty-one percent of all American families, about 52.5 million households, include a companion animal—in most cases, more than one.

The powerful, natural bond between people and dogs and cats has received a great deal of attention during the past decade. For the first time, significant numbers of scientists began to explore the capacity of animals for cognition, emotion, and language. In so doing, they have also demonstrated the depth and complexity of interactions between people and their pets.

Indeed, as we enumerate the ways in which dogs and cats enrich human lives, it would seem that people benefit in larger measure.

The health benefits, both physical and mental, of keeping a companion animal are, by now, well known and were the subject of a special report by the National Institutes of Health last year. The mere act of stroking the head of a friendly dog or cat lowers our blood pressure and heart rate and reduces stress. The presence of an animal in our homes fulfills many human psychological needs—to feel wanted, needed, loved. Companion animals lubricate our social interactions, enable us to express and receive physical affection, and provide many alienated, isolated, or emotionally disturbed people with a reason for living. Some, such as specially trained working dogs, enable the physically handicapped to blossom and lead normal lives.

But, mostly, dogs and cats simply share with us—and inspire in us—the joy in living they naturally feel.

To those of us who are familiar with animals, there is nothing mysterious at work here. Dogs and cats have always offered us total acceptance, unconditional love; they forgive us and seem to understand us at some basic level. And, most certain of all, they are loyal, trusting, and consistent in their dealings with us.

As a result of their studies, researchers have developed renewed respect for the awareness and intelligence of companion animals. Dogs and cats know things on their own that are as interesting as anything we can teach them. They think. Dogs have an uncanny ability to read human intention. And, even more impressive than dogs’ well-known ability to follow a set of commands (push elevator buttons, get food out of the refrigerator, guide the blind and deaf, locate missing persons) is the sense of responsibility they develop in their interactions with people. When a handicapped person drops something on the floor, a working dog doesn’t merely retrieve it—he looks up to see whether the person wants the object back.

In fact, dogs and cats excel at tasks no human could attempt. What person, for example, can make sense of the world through his nostrils—as a dog can?

Researchers have also dis-
cats are abandoned by their owners and euthanized at animal shelters. Even if every dog and cat in the country were spayed or neutered today, the fundamental problem—the idea that dogs, cats, and other animals are mere objects that, like trash, we can discard at will—remains. Whether a family has allowed its cat to birth a litter of kittens or whether a family abandons its ten-year-old spayed dog because she's “too old and no fun anymore,” the “animals are objects” mentality lies at the root of animal suffering.

**TEST-TUBE PETS**

When is a dog or cat not a dog or cat? When he or she is a laboratory tool.

Science continues to document the capacity of dogs and cats for intelligence and sentience (and thus, for suffering). Yet, how quickly science forgets when a living subject is wanted for another painful laboratory experiment.

Approximately 200,000 dogs and 60,000 cats are used as experimental subjects each year in the United States. Of this total, a substantial number come from pounds and shelters and are, or were, someone's trusting companion.

Dogs and cats are used in some of the most painful and distressing research imaginable: Countless numbers of these animals are used each year by scientists studying everything from the effects of radiation poisoning to germ- and chemical-warfare agents, other weapons, and burns. Thousands more find themselves the subjects of nervous-system and pain studies, toxicology and pharmacology studies, addiction studies, and cruel behavioral experiments.

In 1987, a review of biomedical experiments conducted between December 1985 and April 1987 on mongrel dogs (most of whom were former pets obtained from animal shelters) revealed shocking results. More than 65 percent of the experiments inflicted significant pain or discomfort, while 12.9 percent of the experiments involved procedures that caused severe pain to conscious, unanesthetized dogs. The median duration of the two most painful categories of experiments was three weeks.

In addition to the pain and sickness inflicted on them, many dogs and cats used in long-term experiments suffer severe stress—especially those who were raised as trusting pets and are accustomed to loving human attention and gentle treatment. It is not uncommon to find in a laboratory dogs who shake paws and do tricks, or cats who are extremely social with people. In fact, it is the most friendly (and, thus, most adoptable) dogs and cats who are selected from animal shelters and elsewhere for use as experimental subjects.

Many of these animals are forced to undergo such atrocities as having their vocal cords cut so that researchers will not be annoyed by their barks and cries. As highly social, active animals, dogs in laboratories also suffer greatly from being caged in isolation and from lack of exercise.

**THE ANIMAL SLAVE TRADE**

Dogs and cats arrive at the nation’s laboratories via a torturous journey which many do not survive. Most dogs and cats used in laboratories are bred specifically for that purpose. Others, called random-source animals, are collected from a variety of sources by middlemen called “bunchers” and are almost always someone’s pet. Although, by law, such animal dealers must be licensed by the federal government, bunchers as a group are unscrupulous. The HSUS and other animal-protection organizations have investigated several bunchers who buy former pets for pennies at animal auctions.

The HSUS's Barbara Cassidy (left) rescues a starved, abandoned dog—another victim of the "animals are objects" mentality.
and swap meets, steal them from backyards or neighborhood streets, or obtain them fraudulently through newspaper ads seeking to place animals in good homes. Bunchers do their best business, however, in states where pound seizure—the practice of releasing pound and shelter animals to laboratories—is required or permitted by law. In such states, all a bucher need do is back his truck up to the holding pen of a local animal shelter and load the animals on.

When supply momentarily outstrips demand, bunchers transport shelter dogs and cats to often substandard holding facilities where, not infrequently, they succumb to freezing temperatures or lack of food, water, or medical attention. Those who survive look forward to brutal handling, a miserable hours- or days-long journey in an overcrowded truck, and, in many cases, agony in the laboratory until only death brings relief.

WHAT THE HSUS IS DOING

Do Americans love dogs and cats? Yes. We at The Humane Society of the United States believe that most people love and care for their own companion animals. However, something is terribly wrong when we are able to lavish love and care on those dogs and cats we call our own yet permit millions of animals just like them to suffer tormented lives and unspeakable deaths.

We must work harder to close the gap between the “haves” and the “have-nots”—between how we treat our own animal companions and how society treats the “invisible” dogs and cats “out there.”

Toward that end, The HSUS is currently waging its most ambitious fight ever against pet overpopulation. An unprecedented publicity, education, and legislative effort, the “Be a P.A.L.—Prevent A Litter” campaign, is reaching more than 3,000 municipal animal-control agencies and humane-society shelters and 3,000 news media throughout the country. Over the years, The HSUS has made spectacular gains in instituting successful spay/neuter programs throughout the country. The “Be a P.A.L.” campaign will show the most dramatic results ever.

On another front, The HSUS believes that our trusting companion animals do not belong in laboratories. The HSUS continues to fight for pound seizure bans in the five states that mandate it and many of the 31 states in which it is permitted.

As for the appalling animal slave trade—The HSUS is responsible for shutting down several of the worst bucher operations in the country. HSUS undercover cruelty investigators routinely check on conditions at bunchers’ holding facilities and animal auctions and seek immediate redress when necessary. The HSUS is also working on the legislative level to outlaw the animal slave trade.

WE NEED YOUR HELP

• Get involved in stopping the pet-overpopulation problem in your community. Be the one who gets the ball rolling! If you would like information on how to receive the HSUS “Be a P.A.L.—Prevent A Litter” campaign kit—a packet of information on how to generate action on this issue—let us know on the enclosed order form. Also, register your concern about pet overpopulation by ordering our new bumper sticker and placing it on your car.

• Join the HSUS Activist Alert Team. This is a committed group of people like yourself who have pledged to write letters to help dogs, cats, and other animals when they receive an HSUS emergency alert postcard in the mail. This special group is responsible for saving literally thousands of animal lives by writing letters to decision makers. The HSUS has frequently and successfully used this group when matters pertaining to pound seizure and the use of animals in laboratories arise. (Note: You must be a member of The HSUS to join the Activist Alert Team.)

• Get involved in a more personal way. Become aware of any stray or abused dogs and cats in your neighborhood. Offer them your help by providing emergency food, water, shelter, and medical aid. Transport the animals to a shelter or animal-control facility in your area that has a responsible animal-care program. Ask the shelter director if volunteers are needed and offer your services.

• Finally, help end the suffering of our most beloved animal companions—dogs and cats—by supporting The HSUS’s massive publicity, education, and legislative efforts. Please use the enclosed postage-paid envelope to send your contribution today.