spends a great deal of time out the food. His face was thinning a bit, the veterinarian’s when one morning he did come by and would come by and first and his coat lost a little of its sheen. I shared a common language of trust, respect, and love, made visible by touching and aural

my lap, then down again, then return for another cycle of the same thing. He did that for weeks in a row. I couldn’t let him go, couldn’t let him out like that. But something was not right.

I laid him on a wool poncho, where he was terribly weak and could scarcely walk. He had lost half his body weight. I could see he was working at the edge underneath him when he sat.

Robert James Waller, professor of management at the University of Northern Iowa, is a writer, photographer, and musician whose work deals with the natural environment and other topics. His book of essays, Just Beyond the Firelight, was published by the Iowa State University Press in 1988 and is now in its second printing.

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Many of the people seeking to give away litters of puppies and kittens... think the book is closed once the last puppy or kitten leaves with its new owner.

The median. The family discovers their dead for him for sixteen years.

orders her to get rid of her pet or be evicted.

When her landlord discovers the cat, he

The female dogs Bear impregnated have 34 puppies among them. Some of these puppies inherit their father's aggressiveness and pose problems to people in the neighborhood.

But “pet overpopulation” may seem abstract to the average pet owner who just has one litter on his hands. One—or even a handful—of animals from one person does not seem like an insurmountable problem.

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The female dogs Bear impregnated have 34 puppies among them. Some of these puppies inherit their father’s aggressiveness and pose problems to people in the neighborhood. One man, tired of the dogs coming into his yard, manages to shoot one of them. Two more die when they eat rat poison. Four are killed by cars. Animal-control officers capture 7 more of these nuisance animals and must euthanize them because they are ill or unadoptable.

One of the dog owners recognizes the size and strength of the puppies and sells his 4 to a dogfighter. One pet owner takes his dog’s 4 puppies to the animal shelter and then has his dog spayed. Of the 34 puppies Bear fathers, 22 father or give birth to 156 more puppies.

Pet overpopulation is not a new issue to most people. Since the 1960s, groups such as The HSUS have worked to inform people of the problem of too many pets and not enough homes and to encourage education, sterilization, and legislation to protect animals and address pet overpopulation.

But “pet overpopulation” may seem abstract to the average person who just has one litter on his hands. One—or even a handful—of animals from one person does not seem like an insurmountable problem. With a human population already saturated with pets and ten or twenty people bringing litters into each animal shelter daily, the picture becomes clearer.

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Pet overpopulation comes from many sources. It comes from people who breed animals intentionally for profit or hobby. While it is true that there will always be a market for purebred animals, that market should be filled by responsible breeders who are committed to improving their animals’ breed in terms of genetics, behavior, and temperament, as well as desirable color, size, and shape.

Pet overpopulation comes from puppy mills, those cruel, inhumane breeding farms of pet-store animals. Pet overpopulation comes from the animals abandoned and left to fend for themselves, reproducing litter after litter.

Pet overpopulation comes from animal shelters that do not ensure that the pets they offer for adoption are spayed or neutered. These shelters are selling doors for pets and their offspring.

Pet overpopulation, or at least attitudes that perpetuate the problem, even come from advertisements for pet products. Happy children romp with puppies and kittens in an effort to push cats and dog food. These companies are very concerned about keeping pets healthy through good nutrition, but they also do their part to fuel pet overpopulation and assure more sales.

Finally, pet overpopulation comes from pet owners who allow their unaltered pets outside, where they do not get along well and are not properly cared for. This correlation is rarely understood by the individuals turning in, giving away, selling, or abandoning pets.

Our challenge is to reach people before they reach the point of giving up their pet, before they allow their pets to breed, and, in many cases, before they make the decision to get a pet in the first place. Talk to your neighbor, your city council, your local media. With a single litter, a single animal, we can make a difference.

Kate Rindy is an associate in The HSUS Companion Animals Division and Rhonda Lucas Donald is editor of Shelter Sense.

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