

### Everyday acts of kindness are saving animals



Among us are ordinary people doing extraordinary things for animals.

They're not employees or volunteers in animal shelters, or animal professionals, like veterinarians or groomers. They're not associated with rescue groups or with reality TV shows on Animal Planet.

They're everyday people who can't *not* do something for animals in need. When they see critters in trouble, they jump into action, never thinking of the sacrifice. Most likely, they don't consider it a sacrifice at all.

You see them dodging dangerous traffic to catch a stray dog. They'll load up a grocery cart with canned cat food for the feral community felines in their neighborhoods. They'll transport injured wild animals, like birds and squirrels, to get medical attention.

Why do they risk personal safety, deplete their paychecks, and use up time they probably don't have to tend to an animal situation?

Ask them, and they'll say because it's the right thing to do. This goes deeper than loving animals. To them, there's a responsibility that goes with being human: we should look after more vulnerable animals, whether they are pets or not. Some 800 years ago, the patron saint of

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Written by Janet Goodman, BT Contributor  
August 2017

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animals, Francis of Assisi, explained, “We have a higher mission -- to be of service to them wherever they require it.”

Although our community has an excellent network of pet professionals, shelters, and rescues, sometimes it doesn't take a village to help. One person and one act of kindness can make a difference in the life of an animal.

Shelters facilitate thousands of pet adoptions each year. In 2016, the Humane Society of Greater Miami adopted out 3382 dogs and cats. Not included in the statistics are the untold numbers of undocumented South Florida animals that have been “re-homed” by good Samaritans.

A few months back I ran into my friend Albert and his wife, Marta, at a local park, where we got caught up with the news of our lives. I was stunned to learn they were now caring for four dogs and a lovebird.

In late October 2016, Marta's mother suddenly passed away and her elderly father needed special care. Still at the house where her parents had lived for 50 years were a 14-year-old Chihuahua, Pancho; a ten-year-old boxer mix, Lady; a six-year-old shepherd/lab, Lulu; and a ten-year-old lovebird.

“These poor doggies, without understanding what happened, lost the two people who always cared for them,” says Albert. With hearts grieving for their in-laws/parents, and hearts breaking for the pets, Albert and Marta took over the responsibilities of caretakers.

But the couple's own condo in Bay Harbor Islands has a restrictive pet policy of one dog per unit.

After eight months of maintaining the in-laws' house near FIU's south campus, as well as their own, Albert remains resolute. “Although it's been quite stressful living in two places that are one hour apart,” he says, “we could never give them up, as most people who know us have suggested.”

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“I know people mean well,” he continues, “and upon seeing how stressful things have been for us, they tell us that we can’t continue living this way and that we need to find a solution to this issue, such as giving them up for adoption.”

But, he explains, most of the people who say this have never had a dog and don’t realize the unconditional love and devotion they provide, or appreciate that pets become family. He’s also more sensitive to the emotional turmoil these particular dogs must have endured when their long-term companions and caregivers were there one day and suddenly gone the next.

I, too, expressed concern, but I quickly realized the special calling to care for these pets, and that Albert and Marta were answering the call. When people ask them how long they plan on doing this, says Albert, “We just say, as long as we are blessed to have the doggies with us.”

Encouraging words give them the perseverance to continue making the pets’ lives fulfilling, despite the costs, the travel back and forth, and the hours involved. Last month Albert e-mailed that Lulu had suffered a bad cut that got infected and needed antibiotics, nine stitches, and a drain in place for three weeks. He’s just grateful she’s back to normal now.

Not one to like being in the limelight, Albert agreed to share his story with the *BT* in the hope that it can bring awareness to how ordinary people can make a difference in the lives of animals. It will be worth it, he explains, if reading his story results in even one person taking an interest in caring for an animal in need and helping to make this world a much better place to live for all of us.

*Janet Goodman is a Miami Shores-based dog trainer, animal-talent wrangler, and principal of Good Dog Bad Dog Inc. Contact her at [info@Gooddogbaddogmiami.com](mailto:info@Gooddogbaddogmiami.com).*

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Feedback: [letters@biscaynetimes.com](mailto:letters@biscaynetimes.com)