

Animal cruelty

Mistreatment happens locally, too

(March 2007) - Recently, it was reported in the national news that two teenaged brothers were convicted of animal torture and sentenced to 10 years in prison. Their crime? They microwaved a puppy. Then there is the disturbing internet video that shows some teenagers throwing gasoline on some horses and setting them on fire so they could watch them run around the field in flames.

What is wrong with these people?

In February, in our own Jefferson County, Ind., an animal control officer was called to investigate a possible animal cruelty case involving horses. The horses were not being adequately fed or sheltered by their owner, and one of them was so weak from malnutrition that it had been lying on the frozen ground in its own feces, unable to get up. This poor animal was humanely euthanized on the premises.

Even though this individual had neglected to feed these animals to the point of starvation, she was able to avoid prosecution because she agreed to relinquish the other animals on the premises to the custody of the state. According to Indiana law, "cruelty" is defined as "intentional beating or mutilation" of an animal, but not as starving it to death. Her crime, as defined by law, was neglect and is considered a misdemeanor.

Just a few weeks ago, one of the county's animal control officers was dispatched to Canaan, Ind., to pick up two puppies that had been abandoned or dropped. One of the area residents had finally managed to catch them and had tied them to her deck until the officer could get there. The puppies were brought to us for physical and behavioral evaluation to determine their adoptability. Both were about four months old and probably litter mates.

We managed to get the first one out of the truck with little incidence, but the second one was downright vicious, snarling, growling, biting and attacking anyone within three feet of her. You would think it wouldn't be too difficult to manage a little four month old puppy. But this one already understood that to stay alive you had to fight.

We finally managed to get them inside and kenneled them together hoping that they would calm down and let us handle them. It took several days, but we were finally able to get the calmer puppy to warm up to us. She realized pretty quickly that we did not intend to hurt her and began to happily follow us around, let us hand feed her, and, eventually, got so brave as to climb in our laps and fall asleep.

No such luck with her sister. In spite of working with this puppy every day, exposing her to the same conditions and treatment as the other one, she continued to be wary and extremely aggressive. Unfortunately, she did not have the luxury of time. While her sister was eventually able to be sent to the shelter and ultimately adopted, the aggressive puppy had to be put down.

These two events didn't happen somewhere else. They happened right here in our region.

We are fortunate to have two very dedicated and compassionate animal control officers in Jefferson County, and they are both frustrated and discouraged by what they see every day in this community. People let their animals run loose, they get hit by cars, they are destructive to property, they get into people's trash, and chase, and bite people. The animal control officers frequently find animals with no shelter against rain or cold, no food or water, and there are many animals in this county that have never had a rabies vaccine. They are a danger to the human population.

If you suspect, or know of, someone who is abusing or neglecting an animal, understand that these people are breaking the law. You can contact the Jefferson County Sheriff's Department or the Madison Police Department. Both agencies will dispatch an animal control officer who will investigate all reports of suspected animal abuse. Furthermore, the Jefferson County Prosecutor's office has individuals who are very willing to prosecute all cases of animal cruelty in this community. The hitch? They can only prosecute a case if someone is willing to report it.

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