

ALL I WANT FOR CHRISTMAS
OR
“MOMMY, WHY IS THAT BOX MOVING UNDER THE TREE”

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There's absolutely nothing more sweet, and heart warming than seeing a young child cradling, and nuzzling a brand new puppy, or kitten in their arms. It engenders a picture right out of a Norman Rockwell calendar. During this season of celebrations, adding a new critter to the household can be a very rewarding and enriching experience. It doesn't have to be a dog or cat species; it can be a bird, reptile, ferret, or one of the many small pocket size pets. Small or large, young or old, all these animals need the same thing; a place to feel secure, to call home, and a loving caretaker to provide them with the necessities of life.

There are so many places to obtain those animals needing new loving homes. The situations where we come across the adoption process are many and varied, but may involve a trip to the wonderful shelters we have in our area, a pet store, or a private breeder's facility. It may even involve rescuing an animal from a neglected home, under an abandoned car, or out of a box outside the local supermarket. They may even come to you without searching for them at all. We see hundreds of stray pets slowly working to blend themselves into your households without you doing much more than offering them a regular meal, and a comfortable spot to lay their head at night. They hang around, capture your soul, and then move in. Sometimes, I think that these rescues aren't rescues at all, but are old kindred souls making their way back to you to be with you once again. Of course, I am a likely candidate more than most, being an animal doc. Some people will abandon pets when they move; others will drop them off in boxes on the front porch with a note saying "take care of my kitten, Emily". I don't see a sign on my porch that says "Orphanage", but they get to me some how. I remember one cold winter's night at 2 a.m., a plaintive whining meow. It came out of the fog from the property next door. Across a 9 foot chain link razor wire fence was a cold, tiny, hungry kitten. "I need you, help me please", he cried. His name became Morchek (the little orphan). It turns out he acts just like a cat named Tom I had years ago. He has exactly the same markings and color. He came back again, as I knew he would. There is and was a special bond there and Tom had left quite unexpectedly, and suddenly. A little unfinished business I think. Now there's a newbie named Dancer, a six-week old skinny, blonde, female mutt. Cold, hungry, and loaded with mange she arrives on my departed mother's birthday. What is the message here I wonder. My mom continues to say hello in mysterious ways.

Mary and I find homes for many strays each year just like the shelters, and rescue organizations do. There is such a need. There are so many stray and unwanted pets just screaming to find a place to be wanted again. They have so much love and happiness to give back to those open enough to receive it.

Taking on a new pet is a big job. It requires time, and money. You must be willing and able to provide for their needs, as well as be responsible enough to continue for their care throughout their entire life. You must not adopt under duress because others want you to, and never take on a pet on an impulse. It is always better to try and plan these things, know what you looking for, analyze what you are able to do in terms of time and funding. With all dogs young or old, you need to budget the time to give to basic obedience training, whether self taught or done at the many good classes available to the public. When you adopt a pet you should find out as much about the animal as you can before taking him home. Ask questions such as how big does he get? What food will he need? How often to feed? Is he good with children of all ages? What type of habitat and cage requirements will you need to provide. Do you have an adequate fence around your yard? What are the healthcare needs of the animal? Will he require a lot of grooming to maintain the coat? Do some research; it will save so many headaches later on. The internet and the library are full of so much useful information.

Of course your heart may be set on a certain breed, and no other will do. Do you know all the good and bad points for that selected breed? Some popular breeds of dog and cat have some very serious genetic diseases that you should find out about before you adopt the m. Don't ever forget that your local veterinarian is a wealth of information, and often an appointment for a consultation ahead of time is worth every penny and more. Every baby animal is cute, and you just about can't walk into a shelter or store and not want to take them all home. Remember puppies and kittens will be extra active, and be doing the terrible two's for a good long time. If you have a busy schedule, and cannot donate at least six to twelve months to the raising of these critters, or you do not have lots of family help, then adopt a mature adult cat or dog. What you put into that youngsters first six months will dictate how they behave for the rest of their life. That old adage "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure", still holds true for animal training as well. The shelters are full to the brim with so many homeless pets needing a place to go. Our choice is to go to the shelters first before committing to that pure bred animal. Most shelters will try very hard to help you match your wants and needs with those of the adopted pet. Once you have them home do everything you can to provide a safe and stress free introduction. There are lots of pets that will benefit in a major way from the use of Rescue Remedy in their water that first week or two. It makes transition and stress reduction much easier on everyone. Provide extra litter pans for awhile. Make lots of time for potty breaks and house training. Don't feed rich holiday foods; just stick to the basics for a few weeks to avoid upset GI issues. Make sure you obtain an identifying microchip fairly soon after adoption, and an engraved ID tag on the collar too.

Feed them good diets (see past columns), obtain an initial health checkup from your animal doctor (many are free for new pets). Finish by adding love, lots of attention, a little direction, and they will make the best gift ever by giving you back years of unconditional love and devotion.