

## **EMPATHY**

**You might ask "What does empathy have to do with a section on pets?" Empathy is the ability to experience the feeling of another person/animal. It goes beyond sympathy, which is caring and understanding for the suffering of another.**

**Empathy is the capacity to understand or feel what another being is experiencing from within the other being's frame of reference (i.e. the capacity to place oneself in another's position) I have picked this topic, because in the world of the shelter and rescuing animals there is often an absence of empathy. One day a person came to turn in her 14 year old dog. The dog had done nothing wrong. She said "A year ago when my husband died I felt very lonely and really bad. Now it is a year later and I feel much better and I want to go traveling and I can't do that with this dog. I need to drop him off." She did not seem to feel or understand the irony in what she was about to do. She knew she had felt so bad being left, but had no empathy or sympathy for the old dog. A shelter is no place for a dog that old. We took him because our heart went out to the dog. Relatively quickly we found him a much better home.**

**We understand that sometimes people are backed up against the wall and absolutely are limited in what their options are. This person did not have an emergency of any sort and didn't lift one finger to find the poor dog a decent home or to postpone her travels until the poor old guy passed. Her husband may have been the animal lover and most assuredly "rolled over in his grave".**

**85% of the animals that come to the shelter are strays and no one ever calls about them. Some of these animals are only a few weeks old, or even days old. Eventually we adopt them out to someone who will care for them. They usually are not too thin so it is pretty safe to bet that someone took their dog or cat for a ride recently and dumped them out when no one was looking. Can you imagine if you were taken to an area that you were unfamiliar with and dumped out (of course this would be after your cell phone, credit cards, money and any i.d. were taken from you). You'd be frightened, especially if you had to spend a few nights sleeping under a tree, with no food or water. Dogs and cats feel the same way. Pets don't complain much but they need good care both physically and emotionally, as we do. If you don't believe animals have emotions just watch them for a bit. They go through everything that we humans do. When we're sad, lonely, scared we want emotional comfort; so do they.**

**We have recently gotten two old dogs that spent nearly their entire life tied up. Tying up your dog for more than three hours is against the law. Imagine your life at the end of a rope that may be no more than six feet long. No new experiences, little attention, sometimes you get fed and watered, but never anything really delicious, no stimulation. Anyone of us would go stark raving mad. The two dogs we got were pitties and they are indomitable and seem to maintain a good attitude no matter what. They are far better creatures than most of us are, when it comes to bearing an unfortunate lot in life.**

**Please think about what you are doing to your pet. Remember a time when you felt sad, lonely, scared, afraid and do anything within your power to not perpetrate that upon another living creature (two or four legged, winged or finned). Cultivate the ability to empathize. You will behave much better. We see far too many animals that have never been the recipient of this greatest expression of compassion and love. Everyone deserves to be understood and cared for.**

*Cheryl Wicks is the Co-Founder and President of Sammie's Friends*