

Homeless does not mean Dogless

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There is a rich history, emotional as well as pragmatic, between dogs and humanity. Dr Paul Tacon, a Principal Research Scientist and Head of the Australian Museum's People and Place Research Center, contends that the alliance between domesticated dogs and humans dates back 13,500 years. His conclusion is based on the skeletal remains of an Israeli woman and a 3-5 month old domesticated puppy found in her arms. National Geographic asserts DNA findings put the existence of domesticated wolves/dogs "well before the earliest traces of their bones" (Tacon 2). Carlos Vila, from the University of California, date the emergence of dogs from wolves though the "mitochondria in their DNA" to go as far back as 100,000 through 135,000 years ago (Tacon 2).

The focus of this research is to juxtapose the relationship of our tribal (non-residential) homeless ancestors and dogs, with our contemporary homeless (non-residential) neighbors, the chronically displaced, with dogs. The intention is to explore the survival needs of each, inviting proactive solutions as well as rehabilitative strategies into the complex human condition of destitution.

Anticipation of a new paradigm initiated by the ancient itinerants is reiterated in the relationships of our modern day nomadic multitude and their dogs. Phillips retells the story written by Rudyard Kipling in 1912. There may have been an agreement between the dog and the man, but it was sealed by the woman. "The Woman said, Wild Thing out of the Wild Woods, help my Man to hunt through the

day and guard this cave at night, and I will give you as many roast bones as you need” (qtd. In Phillips 2). This still appears to be a valid contract. The differences being, the caves may be cardboard boxes, the hunt, scavenging garbage cans, and the roast bone, may be half of a peanut-butter and jelly sandwich. However, it is the phenomenon of unconditional love, the bonding of two different species, and the therapeutic effect this attachment has on homeless youth (who may otherwise suffer severe attachment disorders), thus the community, that I hope to impress on those reading this article today.

My discipline is in Theologies of Compassion. These theologies: Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism and the Sufis, to name but a few, seek to attain attitudes of tolerance, as well as mindful awareness of our interdependence and interconnectivity. Jesus Christ illuminates this truth, “to love another as you love yourself” is the fulcrum of a spiritual community (Holy Bible, Mk, 12:31). Like a seesaw, the standard of that self-love can be high or low, according to your life experiences. When self-love is turned into self-loathing through neglect and abuse, the scenario of loving another as your-self can be perplexing. Self-destructive behaviors and abusive relationships become the burdensome patterns that keep many good people down. Lewinsohn insists that “A result of their past experiences and their lack of economic and social resources, homeless youth are at high risk for behavioral disturbances and suicide” (qtd. In Rew, 125).

The absence of love is debilitating to the development of human beings. When a child is neglected and or abused and runs away from the dangers of home, there begins an isolation from an accepted social order. Exposure to drugs, sexual

diseases, trauma relating to rape, hate crimes, initiation or retaliation from gangs, poor nutrition, standing for long periods of time, which causes tinnea pedis, better known as boot rot (an immobilizing foot ailment common in the homeless), having very limited resources for hygiene maintenance and going to the bathroom, are a few consequences of street life. Ironically, for those escaping the uncontrollable rages of guardian's or the sexual degradation of incest, this kind of life, on the streets, is a chance at having some control.

Many times it is the family dog that follows the runaway, becoming the friend, protector, and confidant in an otherwise detached world. The companion dog can be, as stated in the introduction, the one attachment that can spare the adolescent the burden of attachment disorder later in life.

Dogs are natural lovers. They are animals skilled in social structure. Evolved from the Grey Wolf, they have an innate sense about the alpha male in a pack, what could be called the leader of the pack. Once the role of leader is established, most dogs are known for their loyalty and obedience. This is translated in the streets as protection.

Fifty thousand years ago it is believed, man was dramatically influenced by watching wolves and dogs mark territory by urinating a boundary line. "We do know that scent-marking would have been unreliable because of a decreased sense of smell in humans, assumed because of a shrinking of both the nose and the part of the brain associated with smell" (Tacon 3). However, the sense of smell could be exchanged for a visual boundary line such as marking rocks. It is believed that this

behavior, imitated by wolves and dogs, was the beginning of “landscape marking and symbolic object productions that continues today” (Tacon 3).

The streets of Portland, Oregon have become home for many people and their companion dogs. The young, spirited and rebellious, become the old, broken and cynical or hardened sages, keen observers of human nature. Their dogs are self-possessed, tails thumping out an exuberant nature, noses sniffing. What do they smell? Everything! The nose of a dog hosts “220 million olfactory receptors” in copious comparison to man’s measly five through ten, million (Phillips 5). It logically follows that verifying and securing information through the olfactory receptors is the way a dog process information. This ability can mean the difference between going hungry or finding food, as well as being able to sleep at night knowing that your dog literally can smell danger! Eating and sleeping provide the human brain with the ability to make decisions. Making healthy decisions, such as not getting intoxicated today, or staying out of someone’s way that you know is combative, is what Lyn Rew calls “self- care”, and effects not just the one making the decision, but the community and essentially the world.

Lyn Rew is a Professor of Nursing at the University of Texas, and is actively involved in researching the “Theory of Self Care” first practiced with a sense of authority by Florence Nightingale between 1859-1946. Lyn explains how there are three categories of self-care, based on the principles of Orem. “Orem conceptualized self-care as the personnel care that human beings require each day and that may be modified by health state [ones state of health], environmental conditions, the effects of medical care, and other factors” (Rew 234). This theory is

a reference point for determining if one is effective in meeting the basic needs that must be met to maintain health and safety. The three categories, as you will see, each have a unique role for the companion dog. “Staying Alive with Limited Resources, Becoming Aware of Oneself, and Handling Ones Own Health” are the three categories.

“Staying Alive with Limited Resources” has two sub categories: “engaging in self-preservation and planning for self-protection” (Rew 237). Lyn interviewed fifteen homeless youth to find that being companioned with a dog is beneficial to all three categories of “self-care”. Liz is between the ages of sixteen and twenty and is very aware of her need for self-protection, which secures self-preservation. “I’ve got my big huge dog and I know how to fight and I carry weapons [knife].” Bev, another homeless youth between the age of sixteen and twenty said, “...yeah I had a really big dog for a very long time, that was kind of my knife, I guess you could say. Nobody ever messed with me with him, you know” (Rew 239). In the category of “Staying Alive with Limited Resources” dogs are a girls best friend.

“Becoming Aware of Oneself,” also has two sub categories: self-respect and self-reliance. Self reliance begets self respect and in this interview of fifteen homeless youth, “strategies that increased their self-reliance included (a) taking care of a dog... (d) staying aware of ones surroundings” (Rew 238). The partnership between the two natures is quite moving. To protect is in dog’s genes and to nurture is one of the greatest of humanities qualities, when given the opportunity to develop. Dogs, as well as other pets, become surrogates for the absent parent or loved one and “in caring for a dog” homeless youth “may mitigate the circumstances that

otherwise make them vulnerable to unhealthy development and emotional distress” (Rew 131).

“Handling Ones Own Health” sub categories are: “Interacting with other people and Confronting obstacles”, is a very important area where having a companion pet can be the perfect solution. Loneliness is an obstacle that can be crushing to the homeless “Interacting with peers as well as professionals” becomes part of “handling one’s own health” (Rew 239). Having a dog stimulates conversation with the public. People who would otherwise keep walking stop and chat when seeing the presence of a dog or cat.

Panhandling, one of the strategies listed in Lyn Rew’s self-preservation categories tends to profit when a dog is on the receiving end. This is not to imply that people have dogs for the purpose of making money panhandling. It is a connection that is made between the dog and a stranger’s heart, this connection has been going on for thousands of years.

A sixteen year old female interviewed by Rew, voices her experience: “They [dogs] give you more responsibility, because, I mean you have a lot of responsibility for a dog. Even in my muscles and shoulders because when you’re hitchhiking you have to carry like twenty pounds of dog food with you [the dog} makes you get out and get some exercise...and you have to make sure she doesn’t like go to the bathroom in the middle of the sidewalk or something.” The next young woman was 15 and adds this “It [a dog] makes me feel like I have to be responsible for something. I know its not just that he’s just, you know, to play with, but yes this is something I can be responsible for. I choose to spend \$700 to take care of him

and...over the last couple of months when I had him I don't drink as much. He means a lot to me" (Rew 128-129).

Sisters of the Road, or SOR, a Cafe and mingling place for the homeless and the community, helps meet this critical need of interaction. Their mission statement reads: "Sisters of the Road exists to build authentic relationships and alleviate the hunger of isolation in an atmosphere of non violence and gentle personalism that nurtures the whole individual toward changes that will reach the root of his or her homelessness and poverty and end it forever". SOR is in the process of a research project concerning the homeless in Portland, Oregon. They graciously shared with me their specific interviews with homeless people who had pets, there is no age identification. One man called "Gent" said "_____ I was standing there, my cat _____alley and chased the rat out of the alley and came back" (SOR 19). This falls in the "Staying Alive With Limited Resources: self-preservation, self-protection" category established by Orem (Rew 238). The interviewer asked another homeless man in reference to his dog, "And for you, the relationship's about companionship, having somebody to share stories with, protection" His response was "yeah well, no, not just protection. Just somebody to be there you know, or cuddle up to" (SOR 7). Clearly this falls in all three categories of self-care as established by Orem. The dog is providing protection, "Staying alive with limited resources", interaction, "Handling ones own health" and a sense of responsibility, becoming Aware of Oneself" (Rew 237). The narrator, as he is identified by the interviewer of this conversation states that this relationship between his dog and himself is a responsibility, "its not an authority but you got a purpose" (SOR pg 7). One of the

people interviewed validated the reason so many homeless stay sober when they have a beloved pet. “I was in jail and my partner got drunk and he passed out. And they took him and my dog...they took my dog to the pound and I’ve never seen him since” (SOR pg 10). Being sober and living on the streets “is a major obstacle to caring for oneself and staying healthy” (Rew 239). In this domain dogs are miracle workers.

In Virginia, a prison program called “Prison Pups” selects inmates to train service dogs for the community. The inmates cannot have ever had an animal cruelty charge in order to be recommended for this program. Several of the inmate puppy trainers “agreed that traditional programs do not come close to the rehabilitative effects of the Prison Pup Program” (Harader 4-5). These traditional programs are Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotic Anonymous, and Anger Management programs. This is not to suggest that these twelve step programs are not effective, but for the many that do not respond to the doctrine of traditional thought there is hope in the dogma of alchemy, the magic of love, to change tin to gold. “Wagging Tails” in Maine, “Puppies Behind Bars” in Stoga New York, “Pups Up For Parole” in Nevada, and “Prison Pups” in Virginia are all highly successful prison programs. Dogs from local pounds are spared death, and given to selected inmates to be trained. The inmates are well prepared prior for the puppies’ arrival. The pups are raised as hearing dogs for the deaf, seeing eye dogs for the blind, and or service dogs for those with “physical disabilities that restrict or impair movement such as individuals that are partially paralyzed or prone to seizures” (Harkarder 2).

In Woodburn, Oregon at Maclaren Youth Correctional facility, “Project Pooch” was born in 1993. Ironically, these troubled youth are locked up, not locked out. Dogs that have been abandoned to the Humane Society are “adopted by juvenile offenders” and trained in “basic obedience skills”. The dogs go on to be “adopted by families in the community”, while the juveniles go through a metamorphosis of character. “Staff have noticed that juveniles in the program have fewer referrals to the office, have more patience interacting with others, demonstrate greater self esteem, and exhibit a higher level of responsibility” (Harkarder 2). All these observations congeal with Orem’s theory of self-care. Self-care is a reference point for determining if someone is effective in meeting his or her basic needs of health and safety. JOIN, is an outreach program in Portland, Oregon that has services that embrace the healing relationships of the homeless and their pets. They provide veterinary services, as well as people services. There is a health clinic for the needs of the poor, as well as:

sleeping bags, day space, personnel hygiene products, and a friendly ear in an atmosphere of respect and individual dignity. JOIN offers access to legal advice to homeless and low-income people in collaboration with the Oregon Law Center and maintains a clothing room and a shower program in collaboration with St. Francis Church (JOIN, 2005).

There is a downside to being homeless and with dog: shelters, soup kitchens, and public restrooms, do not allow dogs for health reasons. The University of California, School of Veterinary Medicine, Human/Animal Interactions Research

Fellowship has put together an interesting bit of statistics. They tested homeless pet owners, “thirty- five men and thirty- two women”. Here are the results:

In responding to the Lexington Attachment To Pets Scale, both men and women participants had significantly higher mean scores on attachment to their pets than did the scale’s standardized population. Participants did not differ from the normative sample of adults on the Beck Hopeless Scale.

Both men and women stated a preference to being re-housed. Ninety- three percent of men and ninety- six percent of women said that housing would not be acceptable if pets were not allowed...Attempts to re-house homeless individuals who have pets are likely to be unsuccessful unless accommodations for pets are included (Singer 851)

The relationship between dogs and their homeless owners is primal. Dogs do not care or comprehend the eccentricities of economics. Wealth is a relative perception, and time is the gold lavished on the companion pets of the homeless.

Everyday the homeless choose to endure the indignities of the street rather than take a chance at losing their friends and companions forever. To ask someone to leave their dog overnight in the streets so they can go into a shelter or even a soup kitchen for an hour is ludicrous. The police round up the dogs of the homeless and take them to the pound where without a contact number the dogs are considered abandoned. These frightened dogs are then subjected to tests that evaluate their temperaments, thus their adaptability status. If they fail these tests they are euthanised. Gail O’Connell-Babcock, Ph.D. is the founder of Watchdog, “Citizens for Humane Animal Legislation”. The urgent intent of this organization is to

intervene, and “stop the killing”. “Watchdog” will be a contact number for those who need it as well as provide legal services, in cooperation with JOIN. They also provide transportation and veterinary needs including licensees for your pet.

Watchdog is indeed a dog’s best friend!

Ellen Pangle is without a residence and went into a store to buy essentials. She tied Panda, her female, spayed dog of five years, to a bench in front of the store. Panda was impounded after only half an hour. Ellen went to MCAS on a Monday to retrieve her dog, they were not open to the public. This is the report from MCAS:

Owner came through the door on Monday because painters left door cocked open with a screwdriver. Owner became upset saying someone stole her dog and she knows it’s here and she wants it back. Cyndi ok’d dog to leave for \$100, because that is all she had on her. Owner claimed to have talked to a man on the phone who quoted her \$100 fee. Actual fee for redeeming was \$240. License and rabies current (MCAS).

“Had Ellen not gotten into MCAS that Monday when MCAS was closed to the public, Panda would have been dead on the day she was allowed in”. (Babcock file #6). Note that Panda was spayed, and her license and shots were current. The care of homeless companion dogs is generally the priority of the homeless owners. They literally live for these companions, with the services of JOIN, Watchdog, Outside In, and Sisters of TheRoad, the hard life of the streets can be a little softer.

Jenna Hagge, manages the “Home at Last” Animal Shelter in the Dales, Oregon. Jenna tells of a love story between a homeless man and his dog. The dog was a “cattle dog” and for generations this breed of dog was trained to herd cattle.

The man was shy but content with his dog. Jenna reminds us that camping is a dog's favorite pastime, and here these two are on an extended camping trip. The reflexive nature of a cattle dog becomes problematic when the only cattle to herd is traffic. The man tried everything to break his dog of this inbred proclivity for herding, but the dog was hit and killed by a car, and the man was devastated. The animal control officer involved visited "Home at Last" the Humane Shelter in that area and informed the staff of what had happened. Jenna convened with her staff and they decided Holly, a homeless dog in their custody, would be perfect for this grieving man. She was thick furred for winter and was a breed that did not wander. They bonded instantly, and "Home at Last" takes care of all her health and grooming needs. This kindness also extends into the introverted nature of the man who is beginning to trust the staff through socializing on the days Holly goes in for a bath.

I raise the question why are these dogs not seen as service dogs?

Service dogs are animals that are individually trained to perform tasks for people with disabilities such as guiding people who are blind, alerting people who are deaf, pulling wheelchairs, alerting and protecting a person who is having a seizure or performing other special tasks. Service animals are working animals not pets" (ADA).

This is the definition of a Service dog from the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Homelessness is a disability, and the services of a companion dog are so valuable that people young and old would rather freeze and go hungry rather than take a chance of losing their pet. Companion dogs "alert and protect" they "guide"

people through depression and “performing other special tasks” such as giving purpose and hope, teaching patience, tolerance and a sense of accountability to those who would otherwise have no one to be accountable too (ADA). I propose that the Americans with Disabilities Act reevaluate the value of companion dogs for the homeless. A Service dog is allowed entrance into all public businesses. The integration of companion dogs into the protection of the ADA Act will not only validate the reality of a growing homeless population, but will no longer permit circumstance to further injure the already wounded homeless individual.

I wonder, was the Israeli woman who was found 13,500 years ago holding her puppy in her arms in her grave, afraid that someone would deny her and her puppy entrance into the afterlife?

Namaste,

Troy may