

The Myth of Pet Overpopulation

by Stacey Ritz, M.Ed.



An estimated four million dogs and cats are killed in our country's shelters annually, yet every year twenty-three and a half million Americans bring a new pet into their home. It's simple math- pet overpopulation is a myth. "Shelters need to compete for the market-share of animals." Stated Nathan Winograd in a recent local Fox 13 news interview. Animals lives can be saved if and when shelters commit to following the No Kill Equation. It's important to remember that shelter pets did not put themselves there. Just because a pet is in a shelter does not mean there is something wrong with him/her. Being a shelter pet typically means that something was wrong with the person who put the pet(s) there! The shelter animals are the victims and they are in need of our help- they need us to speak up on their behalf and to help save lives.

You Decide

Imagine working at a high-kill shelter and you are the appointed staff member whose job it is to walk up and down the rows of cages, not to pet and love on the cats and dogs who have been abandoned through no choice of their own, but instead, to play God- to choose who lives and who dies today. You stop and look at the cat cages. You see a pure white two-year old feline named Lucy. Her green eyes beg you to save her, to pet her, to love her- to take her out of this cage and let her be part of a home again. She was left here when her owner passed away and family members said they had "no room" for her to stay with them. Lucy misses her human and is grieving- therefore seemingly lethargic and quiet. In the next cage you watch a pregnant female cat named Ruby- she could give birth at any minute. How

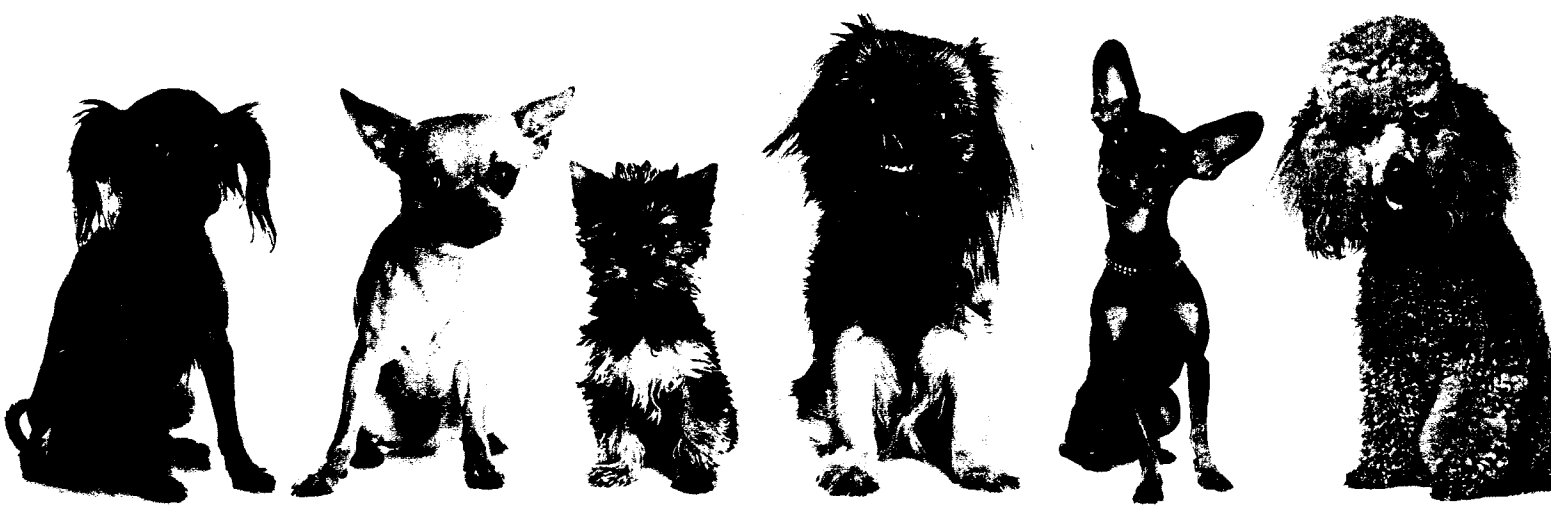
many kittens might she have- 2, 5, 8? Will the shelter have space for so many kittens? They won't be able to be adopted right away, which means shelter workers will have to clean up after them. Her humans dropped her in the overnight box at the shelter when they decided they didn't want to care for Ruby's soon to be kittens. They just didn't want to spend the money to have her spayed. In the following cage sit two blind cats- Jeffrey and Bonnie. They have lived their entire six years together, but when their human hit hard financial times, she turned them into the shelter saying that she could no longer afford to care for them. Unable to see their new surroundings, the two cats snuggle up close to one another, hoping for a miracle. Ten more cages are filled with additional cats, all with individual stories- all longing to live, to love and be loved. Each one of them longing to escape the cold metal bars of their shelter

cage. Down the hall and to the right you will find a room full of dogs- again, each with their own, individual stories- each one behind bars awaiting your decision of their fate- all, through no fault of their own. Jasmine, Daisy, Chloe, Ladybug, Sugar, Gizmo, Danny.... they all pace their crates as they wait. Each one with a heart begging you to let them live. They pace and wait, their paws hitting heavy on the cold cement floor. How do you choose? More importantly, why do you have to choose?

Know the Facts

Shelters and county pounds in our country kill an average of 50% of the healthy animals who enter their doors. Sadly, many communities kill many, many more than 50%. Knowing that pet overpopulation is a myth and that there truly is a model to end the unnecessary killing

of healthy shelter pets- why aren't all shelters adopting these measures and saving lives? Shelter pet euthanasia can not only be reduced, it can be eliminated and this fact has been and continues to be proven in communities throughout the country such as California, Virginia, Utah, Kansas, Nevada and more. In a Local 13 Florida News Interview, Winograd discusses the fact that some of the successful No Kill Communities that have been established are in urban areas and some are in rural areas. Some No Kill Communities have been established where communities are highly conservative, whereas others have been created where communities are predominantly liberal. As Winograd stated, it just goes to show you "When it comes to saving the lives of dogs and cats, people of all walks of life want to build a better world for them."



Jake Action

What are you doing to exercise your democratic rights? Do you speak out and provide statistics and information to your local community on the current shelter policies and kill rates? Or do you volunteer with a local no-kill rescue organization or with your local shelter? Do you foster pets in need? Do you help with local adoption events or fundraisers? Do you help transport shelter animals to No Kill Rescue organizations? Have you adopted your pet(s) from your local shelter or rescue group?

Taxpayer Dollars

Many naysayers rant and rave that No Kill Communities are unattainable and unrealistic. They say that there are not enough taxpayer dollars to fund a No Kill effort. Interestingly enough- using taxpayer dollars to save the lives of shelter pets is just as, if not more cost effective than the unnecessary, daily killing that all too often takes place. Holding animals and killing animals costs more than adopting them. Adoptions bring in funds to the shelter. In addition, when shelters partner with local 501c3 Non-Profit No Kill rescue organizations, animals not only get to live, but the cost of care for the animals is then transferred from using taxpayer dollars to instead, using private donations- making it a winning situation for everyone—for the animals, for the community/ taxpayers and for the adopters of course!

No Kill Equation

The mandatory programs and services that shelters/pounds must implement in order to become No Kill Communities, include (www.nokilladvocacycenter.org):

1. TNR Program (Trap/Neuter/Release)
2. High-Volume, Low-Cost Spay/Neuter
3. Rescue Groups

4. Foster Care
5. Comprehensive Adoption Programs
6. Pet Retention
7. Medical and Behavior Prevention & Rehabilitation
8. Public Relations/Community Involvement
9. Volunteers
10. Proactive Redemptions
11. A Compassionate Director

Every element of the No Kill Equation must be implemented successfully in order to foster a true No Kill environment. Take a look at the items on the above list- does your shelter implement any of these programs/services? How can you work with them to help implement the programs/services that are not yet being utilized by your local shelter? Do you know others who are interested in volunteering? Have you considered the possibility of fostering a shelter pet? Do you know individuals who are interested in helping with a TNR Program?

If you're an individual or a rescue organization or shelter worker/volunteer and you are interested in learning more in regards to building a No Kill Community in your local area, consider attending the 2012 National No Kill Conference. The 2012 Conference will be held in Washington D.C. the weekend of August 11-12. For additional details on the conference, please visit: www.nokillconference.org.

It Can Be Done

As Margret Mead once said, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." No Kill Communities are popping up all over the country...it can and is being done! Achieving a No Kill Community takes great leadership, community support, public education/awareness, dedication and persistence...it takes loyalty- the same loyalty

that the shelter pets vow to give to you, if you can let your voice be heard and save their lives. Will today be the day that you speak up for the shelter pets in your community? Will today be the day that you begin, through your actions and your words, saving the lives of pets like Lucy, Ruby, Jasmine and Danny? They don't have another week to wait, some don't even have the luxury of another day. Now is the time to step up and support what is right. Now is the time to be the voice of the voiceless. Now is the time when we can all work together- shelter workers, volunteers, rescue organizations, the community- we can all unite despite our differences in background, income, education...despite all odds and all differences, we can save lives in need when we decide to work together. When cooperation is in play- amazing things can be accomplished. When the best interest of the animals is first and foremost- lives will be saved. When our efforts match the love that is in our hearts for the animals in need- communities throughout the country will be transformed into true No Kill Communities- creating a kinder society for us all. A kinder environment for everyone, less taxpayer dollars being used and precious lives being saved- you just can't argue with this kind of success. 🐾

Resources and Additional Information

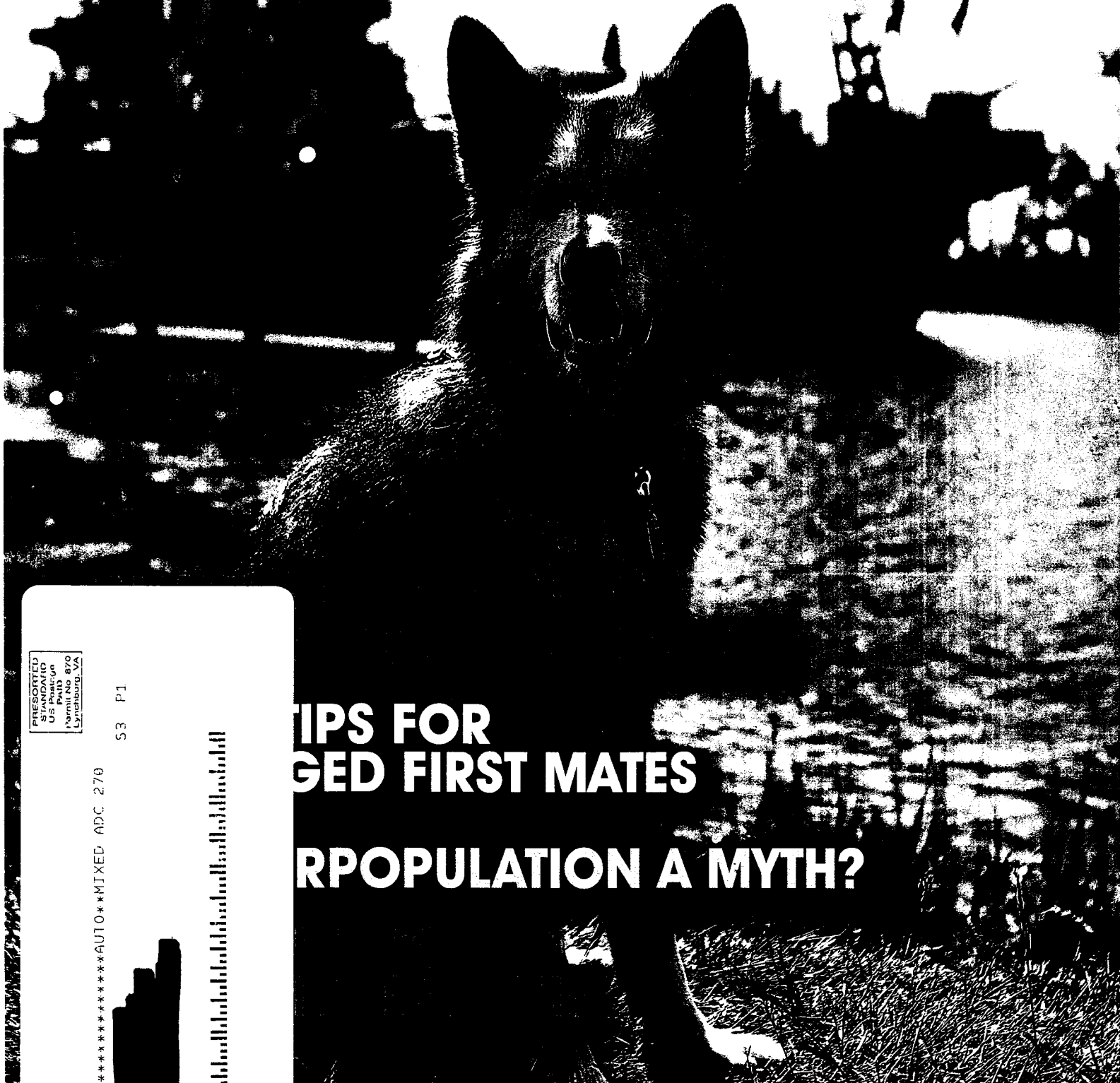
- www.save90.org
- www.nokillnews.com
- www.nathanwinograd.com
- www.advocates4animals.com
- www.thenokillnation.org
- www.nokilladvocacycenter.org

Stacey Ritz, M.Ed. is an author and freelance writer with a focus on the human-animal bond. Ritz is a professional member of the Cat Writers Association and Dog Writers Association of America. Stacey is the Executive Director & Co-Founder of Advocates 4 Animals, Inc. as well as the Editor of 'The Golden Rule'.

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