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As I See It

Animal welfare societies need help

By Neal Cruz
Philippine Daily Inquirer
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Last October 4 was World Animal Day, and there were blessings of pets in many parts of the Philippines, duly covered by media. But while that was going on, dogs were mercilessly being drowned in the city pound of Cagayan de Oro under the supervision of the city veterinarian, of all people. The veterinarian, Dr. Perla de Asis, and Mayor Constantino Jaraula as well as other city officials should have known better. There are other, more humane ways of putting animals to sleep, such as lethal injection. Every veterinarian knows this.

Every public official should also know that subjecting animals to cruelty, including killing them by cruel means such as drowning, is prohibited by Republic Act 8485, the Animal Welfare Act of 1988, and that the vet as well as Cagayan de Oro officials can be prosecuted for such cruelty.

The electronic mails are burning with protests from

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citizens against this cruelty to animals, and Cagayan de Oro, supposedly a civilized city, has earned a black eye for it. The mayor should do something to make amends and make his city catch up with the 21st century.

Let's face it, the Philippines is faced with the problem of stray dogs, due mainly to irresponsible owners. Communities, homeowners associations, barangays, municipal and city governments have the responsibility of rounding up the stray dogs because they raise the risk of spreading rabies. But once you have rounded them up, what do you do with them?

Most unscrupulous "barangay" [village or neighborhood district], municipal and city officials sell them to dog merchants who resell them to eateries specializing in dog meat. This is also prohibited by the Animal Welfare Act.

Most city pounds (only very few cities have city pounds), after waiting a few days for the owners to get back their pets and pay the fines, put the unclaimed dogs to death! The common method is by gassing them with carbon monoxide from vehicle exhausts. This takes about 20 minutes—too long for the Cagayan de Oro vet. Drowning takes only five minutes, so the vet resorted to it. But a dog dies a very cruel death by drowning. And the Cagayan de Oro drownings were done in a landfill, in full view of the public, including children. They witnessed the horrifying sight of the dogs desperately thrashing, trying to breathe, while their heads were held under water. That's what we are teaching our children?

Ironically, the private animal welfare societies are doing much better than government units. The Philippine Animal Welfare Society (PAWS) rescues abandoned dogs and cats, gives them veterinary care, trains them to be family pets, and puts them up for adoption by responsible families. Care and Responsibility for Animals, realizing that the population explosion of stray dogs and cats cannot be stemmed unless they are spayed and neutered, picks up strays, sterilizes them, and releases them. They continue to be strays but at least they don't multiply. Another private organization (I forgot the name) rescues dogs from dog merchants.

These animal welfare societies get no assistance from the government, national or local, although they



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are doing what the government should be doing. They live entirely from private donations. The local government units should ask them to teach them what to do with strays and throw them some funds to maintain their operations as part of the bargain.

* * *

The PAWS is one animal welfare organization in dire need of help. It takes care of abandoned pets and puts them up for adoption. It provides free, or almost free, veterinary care. It helps pet owners and gives them free advice on responsible pet ownership. It survives entirely on private donations by animal lovers. Its animal rescue center is staffed by volunteers who don't get any pay. It doesn't get any assistance from the government. It is paying P10,000 a month to rent a lot owned by Manila Electric Co. in Loyola Heights, Quezon City, where it has its animal rescue center.

Lately, donations have been drying up (probably because of the dire economic conditions) and PAWS operations have been cramped. The regular veterinarians had to be let go, and it now has only volunteer vets on call. It needs more volunteer staff members at the rescue center. It needs donations of funds, food, medicine, old dog collars and leashes—anything your own pets don't need anymore.

So this Christmas, the season of gift-giving and peace and goodwill to men—and animals—think not only of the humans to give gifts to. Give the gift of life to abandoned animals. After all, the first companions of Baby Jesus in the stable in Bethlehem were animals.

For years, we have been giving gifts to our friends through the PAWS. Instead of giving gifts that they probably don't want and need, we donate to the PAWS in the name of our friends. The PAWS sends Christmas cards telling them that we have donated in their names and thanking them for it. Most of our friends send us notes thanking us for the gifts, saying it is a good idea. You can do the same thing: Give gifts to your friends and relatives by donating to the PAWS and give help to abandoned animals that desperately need help. They will be greatly appreciated and the act will give you a happy feeling.

A few nights ago, ABS-CBN Broadcasting aired a documentary on our richest businessmen—Lucio Tan, Gokongwei, Ayala, etc.—and their favorite charitable projects. None of them has any project for abandoned pets, although at least two of them—the Concepcions and San Miguel Corp.—manufacture and sell animal feed. How devoutly we wish that a few of them will throw a few crumbs to the animals and the welfare societies that care for them.

Merry Christmas!

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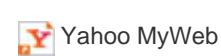
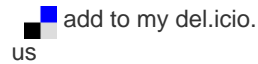
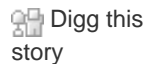
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