

points of view

Pet ownership can offer us much love

THEY REMIND us this week that "happiness is a healthy pet."

To that, I would agree. Twelve-year-old Charlie the Cat reminds me of that every day. He sort of meanders around the house, until a flicker of light or a moving string catches his eye. Then he's as frisky as a kitten. For an older cat who was the runt of the litter, he's a pretty healthy guy.

It hasn't been without cost. Pet health is something everyone should be aware of before taking on the responsibility of pet ownership. There's a lot more to sharing life with a pet than having a ball of fur and fluff to cuddle. They're living

things that can develop many of the same health problems as humans.

And those who take home a puppy, kitten or other animal to love, better be ready to foot the bill for preventive medicine, special foods if needed and time out to handle behavioral problems should they develop. Caring for a pet can be expensive, although I have found veterinarians to be most reasonable in the fees they charge.

A FEW years ago, an aide in my vet's office apologized as she handed me a \$150 bill.

"Oh dear, that's a lot," she said, after adding up the costs of a four-



Casey Hans

day stay, tests, continuous intravenous fluids and a myriad of medication, some of which I was taking home with me. She looked at me with concern. I gladly paid it. To me, having my companion of many years in a healthy state was well worth the investment.

Despite his constant begging at the dinner table and the drool marks on the sofa back, the little pest is still lovable. Payback to the investment comes when he curls up on your lap on a cold day, or keeps you company when you're sick.

Many people don't realize they may spend the next 10-20 years with a pet when they bring one home. And they don't think about the health problems these pets might encounter as they grow older, which might require special, daily medications or even surgery. The experts tell us that pets, just like humans, are living longer and longer today because of improvements in veterinary medicine.

SOME PEOPLE won't spend the money, and have their pets put to sleep when the expense is too great. Some people just can't spend the money, and that is understandable.

There are others who simply grow tired of caring for their pets, and just take them to a park, or leave them behind when they move. The responsible thing to do is to try to find them a home — and to take them to a shelter or have them put to sleep as a last resort.

A pet is more than a short-term visitor. He is a longtime companion and a member of the family; adjust-

ments will be made to lifestyles because of him.

Special arrangements will be made for family vacations, the pet food aisle at the grocery store will become a regular stopping place, and certain parts of the house will suddenly no longer belong to you. In most cases, humans are happy and more fulfilled for having a pet or two.

Just remember during this National Pet Week: to make everybody happy, keep them healthy.

Casey Hans is a staff writer for the Farmington Observer.

Stifling free expression Did TV play role in death?

TERRY RAKOLTA IS going national.

And from the Hills of Bloomfield to the halls of Plymouth-Canton schools to the skyscrapers of Madison Avenue, rumbblings and chain-rattlings are getting louder.

While Rakolta, the Bloomfield Hills housewife who got piqued when she inadvertently saw an episode of "Married... With Children," expands her campaign to have programs that she finds offensive replaced with "family fare," Diane Daskalakis, the Plymouth grocery store owner, keeps on hunting witches and devils in the Plymouth-Canton school system.

Rakolta and Daskalakis are not the only ones being abetted by the ghosts of Thomas Bowdler, Anthony Comstock and Will Hays. A wave of New Moralism is sweeping the country.

Like all reform movements, this one is sure to get louder and more hostile as the self-appointed arbiters of taste and decency tell the rest of us what is good for us and what is not.

FOLLOWING RAKOLTA'S letter-writing campaign against "Married... With Children," several advertisers pulled their commercials from the show. And more advertisers decided to bail out of their sponsorship of "Saturday Night Live," after a fundamentalist group of crusaders operating out of Tupelo, Miss., filed complaints.

The Chrysler Corp. just recently agreed to end its advertising boycott of NBC's "Nightingales" — a boycott brought about by a complaint from



Jack Gladden

the American Nurses Association — after the production company agreed to revise the scripts if the series is renewed.

The advertisers didn't care a whit about the content of the programs in question; they were terrified of a boycott of their products by viewers who could easily have become non-viewers simply by changing the channel.

Television, of course, is not the only target of the new reformers. X-rated videocassettes are coming under fire, too. In Owensboro, Ky., after two individuals and one organization complained to the city manager, Owensboro police "advised" all video store owners to get rid of the adult-only tapes. And not one of the store managers challenged the "advice."

In Decatur, Ga., a similar purge occurred after a law was passed giving prosecutors the power to halt the distribution by wholesalers of videotapes they (the prosecutors) believe to be obscene.

AND IN CHICAGO the board of trustees of the prestigious Art Institute ordered a "re-examination" of the institute's exhibition policy, after two exhibits at the institute's art school set off public protests.

One of the disputed works was a

portrait of the late Chicago Mayor Harold Washington wearing women's underwear; the other pictured an American flag draped on the floor. They may have been offensive, but that's beside the point.

Museum officials defended the displays, based on the right of the artists to freedom of expression. But the trustees ordered that a committee be established to, among other things, fashion a policy that "maintains the delicate balance between freedom of expression and community tastes."

In other words, freedom of expression is valid only as long as the reformers aren't offended by it.

A GROUP OF eighth graders in Muskegon learned that lesson recently when they spent their lunch hours over a five-month period writing a play that they later performed for their middle school classmates.

The play showed how a group of apathetic and disrespectful students gradually became concerned enough about the depletion of the ozone layer to become activists, planning a march on Washington. But some fifth and sixth grade teachers were offended by a few of the early scenes, especially one in which a student comments, "This class sucks."

The young playwrights ended up apologizing for and rewriting the offensive scenes. They may not have learned much about freedom of expression from the experience. But they learned a valuable lesson about what to expect in a society in which bowdlerism and Comstockery are on the rise again.

"IT WAS as if they were watching something on television."

That was the observation of Observer and Eccentric reporter Carolyn DeMarco of the pre-examination testimony by friends of Anthony Bonelli, 17, who is charged with murder in the drowning of his former girlfriend, Kristina Fracchia.

Fracchia, a student at Mercy High School in Farmington Hills, was found March 17 floating face down in shallow water on the north shore of Orchard Lake.

Bonelli's friends testified that he had told them he was about to murder his former girlfriend, because she was, as one said, "bothering" him. He said: "I'm tired of it. I can't handle it. I'm going to kill her," testified Robert Kaszoga.

Another friend, Jim Nader, said that Bonelli told him of his plans the day before Fracchia drowned in Orchard Lake. "He said he was going to kill her," Nader said.

THE HORROR of such a crime is further magnified by the fact that those he told apparently did nothing to stop it. In fact, one testified that he supplied him with marijuana and gloves and helped him with transportation. He is expected to be charged as an accessory.

As experts debate the recent



Judith Doner Berne

The truth is that violence is part of the household scene — via television. The hours spent watching the wasteland of television programming — from soap opera histrionics to the violence of prime time to the late night movies has become part of our reality.

"wilding" episode by teenagers in New York City, and its basis in the have/have not socio-economics of our time, there is no such debate here.

In our generally affluent northern suburbs, a kid who was said to be under psychiatric care reacted abnormally to a normal teenage situa-

tion — and his friends did nothing to stop it.

The truth is that violence is part of the household scene — via television. The hours spent watching the wasteland of television programming — from soap opera histrionics to the violence of prime time to the late night movies has become part of our reality.

IT'S DIFFERENT from watching a film in a theater or a play on the stage — in a foreign place where you go to be entertained.

No, TV is just there. And a switching of channels at any time of the day or night can mean violence right there in your family room or bedroom.

Maybe that's too simple. But maybe it's just that simple. Groups that lobby for improving children's television have long pointed to a correlation between the violence on TV and in our times.

Censorship isn't the answer. What is?

"They seemed like they were watching something on television," the reporter said. But this is real. A girl is dead. Her former boyfriend is on trial for murder. A friend may be held as an accomplice.

They'll probably make a film about it. But right now, this can't be turned off.

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