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Irresponsibility hurts animals, families alike

Letting dog run loose creates messes beyond yard

Dog people are passionate about the joys of ownership -- and the hardships that result when thoughtless owners let their animals run free.

The stories are legion. None has been as compelling as the incident related by Sherry and James Carnahan.

First, let me paint a picture of the Kenmore residents, parents of grown children, plus two dogs, two cats and a ferret. He works for Metro Parks, Serving Summit County; she provides virtual office support for financial advisers.

One of their missions in life appears to be explaining their ferret. He is named Fukie Sun, a lithe blonde rascal that was rescued from son Keith's fraternity house.

``He was the mascot and the kids would get him drunk," said Sherry. The fraternity brothers watched the *Iron Chef* on TV and when the announcer said something that sounded like ``fukie sun," the ferret drank from a miniature trough of booze. The Carnahans said the ferret had been ``Pavloved."

When Sherry got her hands on the little guy, she never gave him back. He's lucky to be alive, she said.

At this point in the plot, I would ask you to suspend your disbelief. It turns out the ferret has a rubber fetish.

``He loves rubber," she said, ``so we buy him rubber balls and mouse pads. We hide them in drawers and around the house," and he collects them and heaps them up in colossal piles. He drags, pulls and tugs items twice his size up the stairs, darts in and out of rooms, exhausts himself, collapses, sleeps for four hours and then begins anew. It is absolutely hilarious to watch this industrious ferret at work.

Harmony shattered

Fukie Sun generally has the run of the house and rides King Lear, one of their cats, and crawls up legs and down shirts in this house of quadruped harmony. Jake the mutt and Molly the Maltese mix adore him.

Molly is the result of a rendezvous between a pedigreed Maltese and a wandering lothario. She's been with the Carnahans 10 years, her entire life, is the Mona Lisa of the neighborhood and a dutiful companion of James on his pipe-smoking missions to the front porch.

Their home hums. Sherry works in her second-story office with a deck overlooking the back yard. Molly and Jake stay nearby, sunbathing in good weather. All was well until the unrestrained dog of a neighbor ran into the yard and started barking at Molly, who was tethered on the second story deck.

``I heard the neighbors yelling at the dog and Molly got loose, stuck her head through the railing and squeezed through it and fell to the ground," she said. Two of her vertebrae were crushed and she was paralyzed from the ribs down, and is now unable to control her bodily functions or indeed, even feel them.

``Molly started crying," she said. ``Her back end was limp.... She wanted to close her eyes."

The family got her to Metropolitan Veterinary Hospital, where tests were conducted and she was evaluated. Two of her vertebrae were pressing on her spinal cord. Surgery was necessary. The family was stunned and in deep for about \$3,000.

``The tech at the animal hospital said it was too bad she wasn't a cat," said Sherry. ``I really never dreamed something like that can happen."

The Carnahan animals were sad. ``They sensed something was wrong," said James. Jake wouldn't eat for two days, until Molly came home.

A long recovery

With Molly disabled, time seems to stand still. The vets say her situation could get better, that it would take as long as 10 weeks to see any change. The Carnahans are praying that Molly will begin to feel her feet again and have been instructed to keep Molly inactive all day, every day, with the exception of the four times a day they raise her up to express her bladder. It's messy and she hates it, but you play the hand you're dealt.

The family is doing battle daily with bedsores and diaper rash and is constantly mopping urine because of the unrestricted flow, but Sherry and James want to be around her all the time just the same.

Molly was disheartened, but perked up Monday when the neighbors came to visit her. She missed them. She had visited them every day before she was injured.

``Putting her down is not an option," said James. ``Besides our loving her so much, she wouldn't want to go."

``Even with a broken back, she is enjoying her life," said Sherry. ``We're going to fall down in tears when she walks again."

Meanwhile, they're checking out doggie wheelchairs just in case. There are plenty of options for partially paralyzed dogs, but let's not jump the gun. I'll keep in touch and do an update in the next few weeks.

``I want people to know it's not just the trash and the dogs messing in the gardens that's upsetting," Sherry said. ``In this instance, letting a dog run free caused a terrible accident and paralyzed another dog."

It's every owner's solemn duty to keep his dogs at home.

Readers who would like to send cards to Molly can write to the Carnahans at 1170 Sutherland Ave., Akron, OH 44314, or call 330-753-8039.

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