Pets: Their Effects On The Elderly

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PETS: THEIR EFFECTS ON THE ELDERLY

Honors Thesis

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INTRODUCTION

"A Dog to His Boy"
Come on! Let's play!
It's a wonderful day!
There's a trail over there
We can try.
The sky is so blue--
And the grass is so new--
Since we've waited all year
For spring to be here,
Come on! Let's go! Let's fly!

Ednatha Spearman

Pets have always had a capacity for putting human beings in touch with life. Watching a puppy or a kitten at play stirs a joy somewhere deep within us bringing with it a smile or a chuckle. Pets remind us of spring, of youth, of all there is to see on this earth that is new and alive. Pets keep us in touch with ourselves as individuals beings. Walking in the woods or fields with a dog at our side or sitting by a cozy fire on a cold evening with a cat purring in our lap gives us a feeling of peace and quiet companionship.

Pets have always been part of our lives in America. We take them for granted and never stop to think why they are important to us.

Most of us have families, productive work to do and friendships. Since our lives are full, do we need pets? Yes, pets help us keep in contact with the basic and simple things in life that are so easy to forget in our highly mechanized scientific world. Pets can provide us with relief, give us pleasure and remind us of our origins.

In his book, Animals, Aging, and the Aged, Leo Bustad stated: "To remain healthy, people must remain in
contact with and relate to their environment throughout life. The people-animal-plant bond is critical to a healthy community."

If pets are important for the mainstream of our society, how do pets effect the lives of old people who no longer have families and friends, and who no longer are able to do productive work? Whether it be a dog, a cat, fish, a bird or a horse, pets can give an elderly person joy in being alive. Too often elderly persons are separated from the animals who could provide a source of continual, unconditional love, comfort and companionship.

The purpose of this research is to point out the many benefits of pets for the elderly, and to show how each of us can help provide pets for the elderly when and wherever suitable.
CHAPTER I

HISTORY OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MAN AND ANIMALS

What is man without beasts? If all the beasts were gone, men would die from great loneliness of spirit, for whatever happens to the beast also happens to man. All things are connected. Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons of the earth.

Chief Sealth of the Duwamish Tribe in 1885 to the President of the U.S.

From earliest history, man has lived in close harmony with animals and nature. Since man is an animal himself, he shares some basic emotions and drives with other animals. In order to survive, early man realized that cooperation with the animals in his environment was essential. Animals were basic to early man's economy, health and warmth. Living in close proximity, animals not only played an important part in man's survival, but they also influenced man's view of God and self.

The Indians of the American West had a great respect for animals. They depended upon the buffalo for most of their meat and used every part of the animal in some way. The Indians felt that animals had great powers and were thought to be links with the "Great Spirit." Often, names chosen for children were names of animals and their desirable traits. Some admired qualities were the swiftness, agility and grace of a deer and the wisdom and cunning of a fox or a wolf.

The domestication of the dog most likely occurred very early in prehistory. However, the first written
that we have dates back to 6300 B.C.\textsuperscript{1} Just recently, evidence prior to that date has been uncovered. In 12,000 B.C., a fossil of a man with his hand resting on a young dog was found in Israel. Another similar fossil was found in Iraq.\textsuperscript{2} Fossil evidence in the Yukon's Old Crow River in North America shows domestication of dogs as early as 30,000 years ago, 20,000 years before the domestication of any other animal.\textsuperscript{3}

Why was the dog the first animal to be domesticated? First, in early hunting societies, men may have realized that the acute sense of smell in a dog could be an aid to hunting and tracking. Later, men most likely discovered the exceptional intelligence of the animal. Through working closely with dogs, men probably noticed the unique spirit of the animal—his joy of living and his response to his master. There was a unity between man and dog that created companionship for both.\textsuperscript{4}

Domestication of animals by men is never onesided. Both dog and man benefited from their relationship. While man gained a hunter, protector and devoted companion, dogs gained security, shelter and food.

Throughout history, men have used animals to promote physical and psychological well-being. In almost every nation, there is a history of the use of animals in its pharmacopoeia. Parts of various animals were said to promote healing or to cure diseases. For example, "in the curing of erisipelas—cut off the ear of a cat and let the blood drip on the effected part." Also, fat from a wild cat was said to cure epilepsy and lameness.\textsuperscript{5}

On the other hand, dogs were not believed to have cured diseases, but rather they promoted healing. The dog's tongue was thought to contain healing properties. Carrying a dog around was considered a treatment for insanity, while holding a dog on one's lap cured stomach ache.\textsuperscript{6}
In our modern industrial society, dogs and cats along with other animals have been used in research to study such things as aging, heart disease, cancer and psychology. By studying animals, man has gained valuable insights into these problems. We have learned through the study of animals that "the appreciation of the uniqueness of each living organism (person or animal) is essential to understanding and caring for that organism."  

There is evidence that the United States has always been a pet-conscious nation. For example, in 1641 the first anticruelty laws were passed by the Puritans of the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

Since then, the number of pets in the United States has grown steadily. Today, our country can account for seventy million cats and dogs, eight to nine million horses and many small animals such as gerbils, birds and fish. Fifty five percent of homes in the United States have either a dog or a cat. Among nations that have kept records, this figure is topped only by Ireland which claims that eighty three percent of homes have a dog or a cat.

From the early domestication of the dog thousands of years ago to our modern society where most homes contain a pet, men have clearly demonstrated a need to be in close proximity with animals. Whether assisting men in their work or providing simple companionship, pets have indeed complimented man through the ages.
CHAPTER II
MODERN SOCIETY
WHERE DO THE ELDERLY FIT?

Most of the selected losses of performance can be easily accommodated in our society if we genuinely wish to take advantage of the unique capabilities and wisdom of the elderly.

Leo K. Bustad

Prior to modern times, old people had a definite function in our society. Usually, they lived either in the same house with their children and grandchildren or in close proximity to them. Some elderly were farmers working the land with their families. Others were city dwellers living in ethnic neighborhoods close to family and friends. Whether these elderly of the past lived on the farm or in the city, their council was often sought by younger members of the family. Their wisdom gained by living a full life was respected, giving them an honored place within the family and in the community.

What happened to change the status of an elderly person from a much sought after and highly respected person living in the midst of family and friends to the sometimes isolated individual of today who in some cases is no longer respected or valued by his family?

First, technology in the United States has advanced at a steady and phenomenal rate bringing about rapid change. Technology had a great impact on farming. The family farm no longer needed every member working to make a living. Farm machinery was mechanized and thus sped up jobs that had been done manually before.

Along with changes on the farm came factories
springing up in the cities. Jobs were numerous, and an adequate wage could be earned by anyone who was willing and able to work. Hence, many people gave up farming and moved to the cities where their futures were more secure.

For a time, the older members of families continued to be a part of the family unit. However, with advanced technology came faster and safer transportation. Moving from city to city no longer presented impossible difficulties but was a feasible alternative for many people. If job opportunities appeared more promising in another city, why not move?

As a result, high mobility now characterizes our society. No longer do most children grow up and work on the farm with their parents. In addition, children who grow up in a particular city often do not remain there as adults.

It cannot be denied that technology has made it possible for many people to have a better life. However, with every gain, something is lost. In the United States, the mobility and affluence gained through technology caused difficulties for the extended family system made up of older parents, their grown children and those children's offspring all living in close proximity. With increased mobility, the nuclear family consisting of a husband and wife and their children came more into evidence. To illustrate, if a man was offered a better job in another city, the expense of uprooting his wife and children usually was possible. In most cases, moving aging parents was not practical. Since these nuclear families no longer had access to the wisdom and experience of their parents, the families learned instead to depend on the resources in the new community. After a time, nuclear families sometimes found that their parents were not up to date on the rapid changes being made in society and
were not as effective in helping their children deal with problems.

Because of advancements in technology and the resulting mobility of modern society, older people often became isolated from their families. Society no longer valued them as much for their wisdom and experience. Instead, youth became highly valued. Mass media advertising glorified the youthful look, and people strived to meet the expectations. To be fit and slim, to have that healthy glow of youth overshadowed other human traits. Old was not "in."

However, even though society valued youth, it still maintained the Protestant work ethic. After an aging individual had lost his youthful looks and sometimes the respect and closeness of his family, he had one thing left—his work. But all too soon, work was taken away from an older person as well. In most instances, when a person reached the age of sixty-five, retirement became his fate. Considered too old to work, he was given a pension and a gold watch and was told to "enjoy the remaining years of his life by taking it easy."

Retirement comes as a sudden transition for many elderly. Suddenly, their status gained through years of work is lost. With loss of status often comes loss of self esteem. The picture reflected of him by society is one of unattractiveness and worthlessness.

Another factor of aging is illness. The older person's body no longer works as well as it once did and illness and death are ever-present treats.

(In summary, a significant number of older people are faced with isolation, aging, low self esteem, loss of youth and respect, illness and death. Many elderly spend their remaining years in city apartments or nursing homes with little money and too much time on their hands. Often,
they have nothing to live for, no one to love and care for, and no one nearby who loves them. Of course, the above picture is not true for some elderly, but for many, the picture is all too real.

Whether an older person spends his remaining years in his own home or apartment or in a nursing home, a need for companionship and love often is unmet. With the situation that the elderly in modern society find themselves, pets can be useful. Pets cannot change society or make up for all the losses suffered by the elderly. However, pets can be a link to life, reality and love. Before one can understand how pets can help the elderly live more worthwhile and enjoyable lives, it is necessary to look at human development in relation to pets.
CHAPTER III
HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND PETS

A.
Pets and Child Development

He sits and begs: he gives a paw:
He is as you can see,
The finest dog you ever saw,
And he belongs to me.

He follows everywhere I go
And even when I swim.
I laugh because he thinks, you know,
That I belong to him.

But still, no matter what we do,
We never make a fuss,
And so I guess it must be true
That we belong to us.

Arthur Guiterman

To better understand the relationship of pets with
the elderly, it is necessary to know how pets affect our
lives right from the beginning.

In early infancy, a child needs to have his mother
near. Physical contact and having needs met are all im-
portant in establishing trust in an infant. Children who
have been raised with a pet often have a dog or cat near-
by when mother is not there. Psychologists have observed
that infants who have the constant companionship of pets
suck their thumbs less often than infants who do not have
pets. 10

During the second six months of life, a child learns
to distinguish individuals. A pet can be a bridge between
the child's self and others—a transition object. 11
As a child grows, a pet can provide nonjudgmental companionship. Since a dog is physically active and always ready to play, it can help the child with motor skills and can be an object of fantasy play.  

In modern society, children no longer are expected to work as hard as they once did in the rural setting. Being responsible for the care of a pet within the child's capabilities provides a child with productive work and enables him to reach out of himself to another living thing. 

In addition to fostering responsibility in a child, a pet can be a constant friend and companion. If the child is rejected by his friends or moves to a new location, the pet can provide a continuity of friendship while new friends are being found. 

Further, a pet can serve as a love object for a child. Since the pet loves the child unconditionally and shows his affection with no mixed motives, a child feels comfortable in initiating affection and love by hugging and stroking the animal. Usually, children have difficulty initiating affection with adults. 

Pets can serve also as an aid to learning for a child. He first learns that his pet's needs are different from his own needs. For instance, anger doesn't work when he wants his pet to do something. Dogs learn slowly and require patience on the child's part. The child learns about sex by watching activities of pets, and finally, he learns about death. Often the death of a pet is the first experience a child has with death. 

During adolescence, the child tends to draw away from his family and his pet. Many setbacks are common during this life stage such as loneliness or loss of acceptance by peers. The child can come back to his pet as an object of love and security when the going gets
On the other hand, pets do not always benefit children. Some children develop pathological relationships with their pets by substituting the pet for healthy relationships with family or peers. These unhealthy relationships should be watched for by parents.

In summary, pets can help with the various developmental tasks of childhood. Through play, pets can help release emotional tensions and provide companionship. A child learns to forego some pleasures and learns responsibility by caring for his pet. Ultimately, pets can provide a bridge for a child in establishing warm human relationships.
B.
The Pet and the Adult

A friend is the one who comes in when the whole world has gone out.

from the Treasure Chest

The importance of a pet in the life of an adult can be overlooked. Since adulthood is such a busy, responsible time, pets don't seem to have an important place in daily life. However, looking more deeply into adult human dynamics, one discovers that pets can be invaluable aids in helping adults cope with their complex lives.

First, one of the most important adult tasks is bearing and raising children. If a husband and wife have successfully raised a pet either during their respective childhoods or as a couple, the experience will give them more confidence when they raise their child. Also, tests have shown that pets have a relaxing effect on prenatal stress.19

For those adults who choose to remain single or for married couples who do not have children, pets can serve as a child substitute. Pets need care and love much the same as a child, and a pet can love the adult in return.

Also, adults who are isolated or friendless in our society can find comfort in owning a pet. A pet provides the isolated person a contact with reality and a source of love.

Adults who face dangerous situations often use a pet for a mascot. Mascots are used by firemen, soldiers and sports teams, for example. Pets help people in these
situations remember the simple and basic parts of life and provide humor and love in times of stress.\textsuperscript{20}

Life for most adults in modern society is fast-paced and competitive with stress as a by-product. Studies have shown that pets have a relaxing effect on people and that contact with a pet serves to lower blood pressure.\textsuperscript{21} The following example illustrates the point.

A man who has had a hard day at the office comes home feeling highly stressed. When he opens the door, his dog comes running to greet him. The animal is overjoyed to see him and wags his tail and quivers all over in delight. Here is a little being that shows by his actions that he loves this man more than anyone else. The man smiles and passes inside to collapse into a chair. His dog nuzzles close to his feet, and the man pets him touching the dog's warm, soft fur. Presently, the man realizes that much of the stress he was feeling when he first came in has vanished. He is relaxing and ready to enjoy his evening with the quiet companionship his pet provides.

The relief of stress and the companionship can be provided not only by dogs or cats. Birds, fish and other small animals can produce similar effects.
C.
Pets and Old Age

I shall grow old, but never lose life's zest,
Because the road's last turn will be the best.

Henry Van Dyke

If an elderly person had a pet during his childhood and/or during his adult years, pets will evoke happy memories for him.22

In childhood, pets provide a bridge to human relationships. These relationships are an essential part of living during childhood and adulthood. However, in old age the person may not have those warm human relationships any longer. His family may be far away and friends may have moved or died leaving the older person alone. Now, the pet can play the reverse role that it played during childhood. When close relationships are no longer present, a pet can be the sole companion and love object for that individual.23

In many ways an elderly person suffers a reversal of roles. Where he was once the authority figure in his home and in his job situation, old age brings a loss of that authority. Further, the person often becomes dependent on others for care due to an illness. A pet can help an elderly person through these identity crises by accepting the person as he is and by simply being there to ease the pain and the loneliness. As in childhood, an older person can focus on something outside of himself by caring for a pet.24
CHAPTER IV

HISTORY OF PET FACILITATED PSYCHOTHERAPY

I could tell where the lamplighter was by the trail he left behind him.

The use of animals in helping people with mental problems called "pet facilitated psychotherapy" began in 1792 at the York Retreat in England. The York Retreat, founded by Quaker, William Tuke and the Society of Friends, dealt with mentally ill patients in the spirit of Christianity and common sense. They used no restraints or harsh drugs; rather, they used moral methods—kindness and understanding. 25

In the court area of the Retreat, rabbits and poultry were kept to help patients learn self control through caring for dependent animals. 26

Next, in 1867 a home for epileptics was founded in Biekfeld, Germany. The institution later became a center for the healing of disadvantaged people. Here, the staff had traditionally used birds, cats and dogs as part of their program. Also, on the grounds there were farm animals and a wild game park. No studies concerning the effectiveness of animals on people have been conducted at Biekfeld. The workers simply "know it works." 27

The first recorded use of animals in therapy in the United States occurred in 1940 at Pawling Army Air Force Convalescent Hospital in Pawling, New York. The hospital cared for war personal who had suffered injuries and/or "battle fatigue." Those housed there needed a regime of "restful activity" rather than actual medical treatment. The center used farm animals and woodland animals to accomplish this "restful activity."
woodland animals included snakes, turtles and frogs. The men found great sport in their "frog-jumping contests."  

Sometimes, pet facilitated psychotherapy came about by accident. This was the case one afternoon when Boris Levinson, a psychoanalyst, was playing with his dog, Jingles, in Levinson's office. A mother with her severely disturbed daughter arrived early that day. As a result, "Jingles" became the intermediary allowing Dr. Levinson to relate to the patient.  

As mentioned before, pets were used in psychotherapy because "they worked". Staff members of various institutions had no difficulty seeing the immediate and profound effects pets had on people. Pets were used in therapy, but no one knew why they were effective.  

Today, due to research, a little more is known about why pet therapy works. Research in this field is still in its infancy, but it has opened the door for further study.
CHAPTER V
RESEARCH

If you have knowledge, 
let others light their 
candles by it.

Thomas Fuller

By the year 2,000, it is predicted that fifty mil-
lion Americans will be over age sixty five. Since pets 
can provide a cost effective means of emotional well-
being for the isolated and lonely elderly, it seems im-
portant and justifiable to pursue the research needed 
in this field.

Thus far, most research concerning pets and the 
elderly has been anecdotal. Many stories about persons 
in nursing homes being cheered by pets have been record-
ed. Also, elderly persons living alone with a pet seem 
to be healthier and happier than those who do not live 
with a pet.30

However, more precise questions need to be asked 
and answered through well designed research.

These questions include the following.

1. Do surveys in which health is measured 
at one point in time demonstrate that 
older people are healthier with pets 
than without? (given similar social characteristics)

2. Do longitudinal studies where health 
is measured over a period of time 
show that pets improve the health of 
the elderly—when health is defined in 
terms of
   a. objective measures—death rate, 
      hospitalizations, disabilities
   b. subjective measures—morale, sym-
      ptoms, emotions and quality of 
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2. Do longitudinal studies where health is measured over a period of time show that pets improve the health of the elderly—when health is defined in terms of
   a. objective measures—death rate, hospitalizations, disabilities
   b. subjective measures—morale, symptoms, emotions and quality of life.
3. Based on longitudinal or survey studies, what segments of elderly people stand to gain the most from a pet?
   --any subgroup where a pet would be a detriment.

4. Do pets have the capability of altering emotional state, lifestyle or physical state which results in improved resistance to disease?
   --can pets alter the vital balance so health improves?

Thus far, there have been no conclusive answers to these questions. It is felt therefore, that the study of human/animal relationships is needed in our society and is becoming a legitimate field of study.

Research is still in the beginning stages regarding human/animal relationships, but several interesting facts have been observed to date.

First, the conclusions of studies done by Libow in 1963 and Youmans and Yarrow in 1971 stated that "varied and interesting daily activities are reasonable social predictions of longevity."  

Siegel in 1962, Levinson in 1969 and Mugford in 1979 observed that pets provide companionship and facilitate socializing with other people.

Also, it has been observed that petting a dog or horse causes profound change in cardiovascular response (Anderson & Garrett, 1960; Lynch & McCarthy, 1967, and Katcher, 1979).

Lacey in 1963 stated that watching birds, fish or other companion animals can relax the observer. Nonverbal communication with animals can be relaxing also.

First to evaluate pet facilitated psychotherapy in a systematic way were Sam and Elizabeth Corson. In 1975, at the psychiatric hospital of Ohio State University, the Corsons selected fifty patients who were withdrawn, self centered and uncommunicative. These patients had not
responded to any other form of therapy. However, when a dog was present or even mentioned, "the question-answer interval shortened, words per answer and number of questions answered increased, and the silent time decreased. Forty seven of the fifty patients showed some improvement with this therapy."\textsuperscript{36}

The Corsons concluded that pets can serve as "loving links" to those patients who have lost social skills. Also noted was that caring for a pet resulted in withdrawn patients taking better care of themselves.\textsuperscript{37}

Next, the Corsons moved dogs into the Castle Nursing Home in Millersburg, Ohio. Here they observed that dogs helped patients relate to each other and to the staff. The pet's role became one of "social matchmaker." As in the psychiatric hospital, patients became more responsible for themselves when they cared for a pet. Also, the Corsons found puppies to be especially helpful in bringing withdrawn people out of their shells.

Finally, the Corsons included in their research questionnaires for nurses and video tapes of resident-pet-staff interaction.\textsuperscript{38}

Another nursing home study was done by Susanne S. Robb in 1980. In the study, three external stimuli were given to patients in a nursing home—a wine bottle, a plant and a caged puppy. Social behaviors such as verbalizations, smiles, looks and leanings toward the stimulus were highest with the caged puppy.\textsuperscript{39}

Even though nursing home studies are important, they do not necessarily reveal anything new. The response of an elderly person when a puppy or a kitten is placed on his or her lap is immediate and almost always positive.

Much more difficult to gain reliable data on is the long term effects of pets on the health and well-
being of the elderly who live alone in their own homes or apartments.

To date, two significant longitudinal, research studies have been done which show significant findings in the above mentioned areas.

First is the "budgie and begonia" study done by Mugford and M'Comisky in 1975, and second is a coronary survival study done by Elizabeth Friedmann in 1980.

The budgie and begonia study took place in Yorkshire, England and involved forty-eight elderly persons with a mean age of seventy-three who lived alone. Half of these persons were given a begonia plant, and half were given a budgerigar (a small chatty parakeet.) Both groups were administered a questionnaire prior to receiving their gifts. The questions asked about attitudes toward other people, how they regarded themselves relative to their mental and physical well-being and their attitude toward their environment. It also asked for demographic data such as age and details of their families. 40

The study lasted for three years with a social worker assessing behavior and social adjustment every six months. At the end of the study, the questionnaire was given again and the participants again were assessed by a social worker. The results showed an overall positive effect of pets on the one group, whereas the begonias had no effect on the other group.

All the bird owners formed strong attachments to their birds. Many gave their birds names and trained them to leave the cage. The birds became an important topic of conversation and in many cases displaced monotonous concern for personal medical problems. The budgie owners had more friends, visitors and links with the community than did begonia owners. 41

The second long term study, a coronary survival
study, was done by Elizabeth Friedmann in 1980. For a two year period, Friedmann studied ninety-two patients who had been discharged from either University of Pennsylvania or University of Maryland Hospitals after a stay in the coronary care unit. These patients had been hospitalized for either severe angina pectoris or for a coronary infarct.  

The purpose of the study was to see if the pet owners had a better survival rate than the non-pet owners. Pets, in this study, meant owning either a dog or a cat.  

Of the ninety-two patients, thirty-nine did not have pets. Twenty-eight of these non-pet patients were alive after two years while eleven had died. Of the twenty-eight who were still alive, ten had pets other than a cat or dog (a bird, fish, etc.). Of the fifty-three people who owned pets, only three died after two years. The study showed that significantly more pet owners survived two years than did the non-pet group.  

Results of coronary patients two years after discharge.  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Patients</th>
<th>No Pet</th>
<th>Pet</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alive</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Alive</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chi Square=8.9 < 0.02 (Friedmann;1979)  

Friedmann noted also that having a pet was more significant to survival than daily contact with neighbors and friends, involvement in community activities, and being married or unmarried.  

Friedmann's research prompted interested persons to wonder why pets so strongly influence survival. As yet,
no one has come up with a definite answer. However, many theories have been formulated to try to explain the reasons.

One theory is that the pet alleviates loneliness and a person's need for companionship. This theory doesn't take into account that many persons who didn't have a pet had frequent contact with friends and/or were married.47

Another theory supposes that it is not the pet that causes increased survival, but rather the personality of the pet owner. More research is needed regarding the personality types of pet owners.48

Another theory takes into account the social differences between pet and non-pet people. Friedmann observed that pet owners tended to have been raised in a rural environment, lived in one place longer, were home owners and lived with a family during their adult years.49

Much of this early research points the way to further research that will at some time shed light on reasons why pets affect the health and well-being of the elderly.
CHAPTER VI
HOW PETS BENEFIT THE ELDERLY

Blessed are those who can give without remembering and take without forgetting.

Elizabeth Bibesco

As noted in the research section of this thesis, studies show that pets do benefit the elderly. This chapter explores the psychological and sociological benefits of pets; it also discusses circumstances that need to be considered in determining whether or not a pet would benefit a particular older person. Finally, some other ways pets are being used in our society are noted.

First, the psychological benefits are numerous. One characteristic of dogs especially, is their attentiveness to their owners. Whether the owner acknowledges the dog or not, the animal is still attentive. He watches and listens to the owner and is aware of his every move. This characteristic is the most highly valued trait of dogs according to surveys of dog owners.50

Further, welcoming can be considered a part of attentiveness. When an elderly dog owner comes home or into the room where the dog happens to be, the animal shows nonverbal enthusiasm for the owner's return. Since almost everyone wants to be warmly welcomed upon returning home, this welcoming characteristic is highly prized.51

Also, pets provide someone to talk to for an older person. When a person talks to his pet, his voice slows and the tone becomes soft and low similar to praying. Usually, the owner will stroke the animal's fur while he speaks to it. The combination of the act of speaking in a comforting manner and touching the pet results in
the person's blood pressure being lowered. 52

Above all, a pet is a companion for an isolated elderly person. A dog loves its owner unconditionally—no small thing for an older person who often feels ugly and unworthy of being loved.

In addition, a pet can provide a feeling of security and safety; in other words, the person is no longer alone.

Having something to care for that is completely dependent restores an elderly person's feeling of self worth. The pet needs care and exercise and, as a result, the older person becomes active. In caring for his pet, the person may become interested in taking better care of himself as well.

Next, pets are amusing to watch. They can provide a stimulus for play and laughter, an important facet of life too often neglected with the elderly.

Most important, a pet keeps an older person from dwelling on himself, his health and other personal problems. Instead, he focuses outwardly on another being who interacts with him in an accepting, nonverbal way.

The next category of benefits is sociological. First, a pet provides an acceptable outlet for touching. Old people are starved often for physical closeness. However, in our society, hugging and touching are acceptable only in intimate and family relationships. An older person can hug and stroke his pet anytime he wants without feeling that he is doing something inappropriate. 53

Also, pets facilitate interaction between the pet owner and other people. For example, while an elderly owner walks his dog, usually people feel comfortable speaking to him about his animal. Once the initial contact is made, conversation is easily maintained by discussing the pet, a topic of interest to almost everybody. In
addition, when an elderly person has a visitor in his home, his pet may be the catalyst for conversation, smiles and laughter. Pets also can help relieve tension between persons by providing a light-hearted diversion.54

Discussed above are various aspects of pets and how they benefit the elderly. However, not all elderly persons benefit from having pets. Various criteria need to be considered before encouraging an older person to acquire a pet. These will be discussed briefly here and more fully in Chapter 7.

First, the economic situation of the individual must be taken into account. Many elderly live on fixed incomes that barely provide the necessities for sustaining life. Pets are expensive. They need health care and food. This can be an added strain on a person, and any benefits would be negated by the additional economic burden the pet would cause.55

Another consideration before an older person acquires a pet, especially a dog or a cat, are his childhood experiences. Did this individual have a pet as a child, and if so, was the relationship a happy one? The chances of the person establishing a close and loving relationship with a pet are greatly increased if he had happy experiences with pets as a child.56

The key factor in producing positive results for the older person is the relationship between a pet and its owner. Bonding, that special process that two beings must go through to establish a close and loving relationship, must occur. If the owner is indifferent to his pet, he would probably be better off without it.57

Lastly, the appropriateness of the pet must be considered. Obviously, a St. Bernard would be unsuitable for a person in a third floor studio apartment. A bird or some fish would be more appropriate. The person's
total situation must be looked at in helping him determine what type of pet would be best suited to him.

A possible negative effect of an older person owning a pet would be the death of that pet. The person may love the animal as much as he would a beloved spouse or child. The loss of the loved object could bring about devastation for the individual. We need to be aware of the grief that will result in such a loss and have counseling available to that person so that he will have help in working through the grief process. If the person agrees, a substitute pet should be introduced as soon as possible.58

In addition to the psychological and sociological aspects of pet ownership, pets are being used as aids to people impaired with various physical handicaps.

One such use of pets is to help stroke victims recover speech and to reduce depression. The presence of a pet can change the hopeless attitude of a stroke patient thereby producing positive results.59

Seeing eye dogs are invaluable to the blind, and now dogs are trained to aid the deaf. Dogs can be trained to alert the owner to the ringing of the doorbell, telephone or alarm clock. Anything the deaf person needs to be aware of will bring the dog to his master.60

Finally, the handicapped are helped both physically and emotionally by having pets as aids and companions.
CHAPTER VII
PETS AT HOME WITH THE ELDERLY

I wish you a puppy. For he will never abandon you; Nor forsake you. Nor hurt you. Nor ridicule you.

He'll only love you and devote his life to you. And eighty-five years should be rewarded with at least that.

Bill Tarrant

After reading about the positive effects pets have on the health and well-being of the elderly, interested persons often want to initiate some sort of animal placement program for the elderly living at home. In order to begin such a program, it is necessary to know how to proceed cognizant of purpose, goals, organization and problems the program will entail.

Several programs have sprung from university centers and can serve as models for smaller communities. One program that I feel serves best as a model is called PACT.

PACT stands for "people and animals coming together," and originated at the Gerontology Center of Pennsylvania State University.

The program which is community-based, volunteer-run and non-profit, was formed to provide a model program for smaller communities and to conduct long term research to further measure the effects of pets on the elderly.

According to PACT, before beginning a pet program, several problems in the community need to be faced. First, some members of the community will think that time and money spent on animals is foolish and, as a result, will oppose the program. To combat this thinking, community education is needed to pave the way.61
Next, comes the most significant problem for pet placement programs—rules against having pets in public housing and some private apartments and retirement homes. Working with the legislature, lobbying and testifying at legislative hearings is the approach used to get public housing laws changed. Such tactics were used in California, resulting in a new law passed in 1981 allowing elderly living in public housing to have two pets each. The "Pet" Food Institute has taken on the role of supporting lobbying and of providing technical assistance regarding legislative testimony.

Needed further is education to bring about policy changes by private owners of apartments and retirement homes.

Along with community problems, pet ownership for individuals will involve predictable barriers and burdens. PACT lists these barriers in order of priority:

1. interference with travel
2. responsibility of care
3. costs
4. increased need for house cleaning and housekeeping problems
5. property damage
6. need to tie or restrain
7. grief at death or loss of pet

Next, in order to insure the success of a pet program, several assumptions must be made. First, animal companionship is not for everyone. Both people and animals need to be screened carefully.

Secondly, workers need to realize that pet placement is not enough. The main emphasis should be on the development of person-animal relationships.

Thirdly, the rights of clients, animals and community members must all be considered.

Next, the match between client and animal should be given top priority.

Also, a pet program must be able to prevent and
respond to predictable problems posed by pet ownership. The need for followup care and service is essential.

Sixth, evaluation is necessary during the program for quality control and refinement.

Seventh, education of the public is a necessary component.

Eighth, the program should be voluntary and based on members' abilities to generate financial support. Government funding is not to be considered according to the proponents of this program.

Finally, the program has to be simple and flexible to meet the needs of the particular community. 64

After the above preliminary considerations have been studied, the program needs to be organized. PACT's governing board is made up of eleven directors consisting of community representatives and individuals from human and animal services. The general membership includes juniors (individuals under age 18), individuals and families with dues at five to six dollars yearly. 65

The six standing committees are human services, animal selection, care and training, volunteer coordination, finances, education/communication, and evaluation. 66

PACT carries $300,000 worth of liability insurance with a yearly premium of $225 to protect the organization from legal involvements. 67

Next, the actual working of PACT involves four components necessary in placing pets successfully in homes: people, animal, matching and followup.

The first is the people component. Before a person can receive a pet, he must go through seven steps:

1. intake (initial interview)
2. selection of sponsor (can be PACT volunteer, family member or friend)
3. information collection
4. ownership orientation and education
5. counseling on animal ownership
6. decision regarding animal preference
7. holding prior to service delivery 68

After these seven steps have been completed, the individual is first screened to see if his memory is failing or if he has problems with reality orientation. These two factors present the greatest reasons why an elderly person should not own a pet.

Next, the person's physical condition must be determined. If he is physically impaired, support and help must be available for caring for a pet.

Then the client's environment is evaluated for adequate facilities. Possible conflicts with other family members or neighbors is studied also.

Lastly, the person's responsibility of ownership is evaluated. For example, does he agree to have the animal spayed? 69

The second component involves the animals to be placed. Animal search activities include referrals from shelters, kennels and donors. Once an animal is found, its behavior and temperament must be tested and its health screened. The animal must have necessary health care and a basic training course for obedience and housebreaking. 70

Also necessary is holding an animal for a period of time for continued assessment of appropriateness. Many animals are considered, but only a few are chosen for home placement.

In the pilot project, the cost of each animal to go through the above steps is seventy dollars. 71

Third, the matching component first involves a meeting between client and animal followed by the client's assessment. The client then decides whether or not to accept the animal. If he decides to accept, he is given detailed information regarding animal care and ownership. He then signs an ownership agreement and has the
option to become a PACT member.  

The animal is placed in the client's home for a trial period with the assurance that PACT will take back the animal anytime the client desires. Also, the client has the security in knowing that if he should die, the animal will be cared for by PACT.

The last component, followup, is the key to the success of the program according to PACT. The most important part of followup is regular visits by the sponsor to determine if the relationship is going well and to problem-solve.

Followup visits by PACT members help to promote the essential bond between animal and client by being a model for the client to follow. The member holds, pets, talks to, and plays with the animal showing the owner that the animal is special.

In summary, PACT sets definite guidelines for establishing a pet program in a community. The program provides interested persons with an awareness of potential and predictable problems along with definite ways of solving and preventing such problems.

A pet program is not an endeavor to be taken lightly. Organization, education and dedication are all needed for a program to work. However, the rewards of seeing older individuals regain a zest for living are well-worth the effort.
CHAPTER VIII
PETS IN NURSING HOMES

Happiness comes of the capacity to feel deeply, to enjoy simply, to think freely, to risk life, to be needed.

Storm Jameson

A nursing home to an elderly person is often viewed as the last stopping point before death. One "waits to die" in a nursing home. All the ingredients needed for happiness are considered no longer possible for most residents.

One reason why nursing homes are viewed by so many people in the above manner is that a nursing home produces a threatened sense of identity. Patients tend to withdraw from life. Also, many find themselves dependent, helpless and no longer in control. Most patients are lonely and feel that nobody cares about them. After having lost these important components to life, no wonder the elderly withdraw from a reality too painful to bear.

In order for nursing home patients to remain in touch with life and achieve some degree of happiness, they need certain basic needs met. These needs include affection, companionship and opportunities to be useful by doing for others. Even though most care-givers in nursing homes try to meet some of their patients needs, time and ratio of patients to staff make this task impossible.

The answer to the dilemma of meeting the needs of the elderly in nursing homes is simple and can be done at little expense. An obedient dog or cat can restore a sense of identity for the patient resulting in his being less dependent, more in control and needed by another.
living thing. The animal can also bring back a person's self respect, thus reversing the withdrawal process and also can provide needed activity. In addition, a dog or a cat can serve as a love object, constant companion and link with reality for the nursing home resident.

It may be that some elderly people are similar to children in many ways. However, in some cases one difference is often lack of openness in giving and receiving affection due to an older person's feeling he or she is ugly and unacceptable to others. An animal causes no embarrassment or exhibits no disgust for an older person. Thus, affection can be bestowed and received as often as the person desires.

Along with dogs and cats, other types of animals offer benefits to nursing home patients. Fish and small animals such as gerbils often keep patients interested in life. Watching living things also relaxes anxious, agitated patients.

Birds offer elderly people a symbol of freedom and flight. Watching birds fly around the room and listening to their cheerful twittering can be a delight to older people. In addition to their being enjoyable pets, birds are the easiest small animal to care for and maintain.

Making an in residence pet program work in a nursing home depends to a great extent upon the staff. The staff needs first to be reoriented regarding philosophy of care and treatment of the elderly. Most staff members consider their job to be custodial—simply seeing to the daily necessities of the patients with little thought to quality of life. Once the staff accepts the idea that the purpose of a nursing home is to help the elderly residents live a fulfilling a life as they are able, the staff can see the need for changes in routine and will alter their philosophy of treatment.
Education of the staff includes their learning to evaluate the degree any particular patient can assume responsibility for a pet. Also, staff will learn what problems to expect and discover ideas for solving these problems. Teaching methods to use in showing patients how to care for a pet must be learned by the staff as well. The key for an effective program is frequent and open communication among staff members. This can be accomplished in staff meetings where problems and feelings can be brought forth.83

Nursing homes that are interested in starting some sort of pet program have many alternatives to consider. First, questions need to be answered regarding pets for individual residents. Should a patient be allowed to bring his or her pet when he/she enters the home? Should an individual patient be permitted to select a pet once he is in the home, and should relatives be allowed to bring pets in to visit?84

Often, nursing homes begin with a volunteer visiting pet program. Pets are brought in by volunteers weekly for several hours to visit the patients in their rooms and in the dayroom. (See Chapter 9 on pets at Western Care Nursing Home.)

Another alternative for nursing homes is to provide the dayroom with a number of small animals such as fish, birds or gerbils. These animals can be cared for by interested patients and will benefit most of the residents.85

Of course, a pet program in a nursing home produces problems. However, the rewards of seeing patients show an interest in their surroundings, relate better to others and have something to love far outweigh any problems.
CHAPTER IX
AN EXPLORATORY STUDY ON THE EFFECTS OF PETS ON THE ELDERLY AT WESTERN CARE NURSING HOME

Purpose and Overview

As mentioned earlier in this thesis, numerous studies have been done involving pets in nursing homes. The conclusions of these studies point out consistently the immediate and profound effects puppies and kittens have on the elderly.

Since we know that pets do effect the elderly, what is needed in the field of pet therapy are in depth longitudinal studies to explain why the elderly respond so positively to pets and to find what causes this response. Studies of this nature are underway in larger centers where sophisticated research procedures and trained professionals will lead the way to significant scientific conclusions.

However, for this thesis and to pursue my own interest in the subject, I undertook an exploratory study in the Western Care Nursing Home beginning in the summer of 1981 and continuing into the summer of 1982. I wanted to observe firsthand what effects pets actually did have on the elderly. Also, I hoped that by my example, a continuing pet program would result at Western Care.

Methodology

For a year prior to beginning my study, I worked as a volunteer at Western Care Nursing Home. I was pianist for the weekly Catholic Mass, and I helped with the monthly birthday party. Also, I visited two women weekly.
as part of a friendly visitor program. During that year, I got to know most of the residents and staff.

After reading the chapter on pets in Nancy Littel Fox's book, *How to Put Joy into Geriatric Care*, I decided to initiate a pet program at Western Care. After this decision was made, my first step was to contact Pam, the activities director, and discuss my idea with her. She was enthusiastic and so was the administrator, Paige Puckett, who gave me permission to proceed.

Next, I went to the Lewis and Clark Humane Society Animal Shelter where, luckily, I had worked as a volunteer for a year and consequently knew the staff. They agreed to cooperate by supplying puppies and kittens for me on certain designated days.

Finally, before beginning my pet program, I had to decide how to measure my observations of the effects pets had on the elderly. Following is my list of dimensions and indicators to be observed.

1. Emotions
   a. happiness smiles, laughter
   b. sadness tears
   c. anger
   d. other
   e. no emotion indeference

2. Communication
   a. verbal interaction between person and nonver-
      bal 1) animals
           2) myself
           3) other residents
           4) staff

3. Reactions of staff
   a. positive cooperation, interest,
   b. negative communication

4. Unique individual reactions
With the groundwork done, I was ready to proceed with my program. Wednesday afternoon was the time most convenient for all concerned to be "pet day." On Wednesday morning, I began by telephoning the Humane Society to find out if there were puppies and kittens available and suitable for the excursion. Also, the staff would have time to check the animals' health and clean them up before I arrived.

Next, I called Pam at Western Care to let her know I was coming. She would see to it that those patients who wished and were physically able were gathered in the dayroom at 2:00 to see the animals.

With the preliminaries accomplished, I arrived at Western Care at the appointed time with two animal carriers in tow, one containing puppies, the other kittens. After I opened the carriers on the dayroom floor, the puppies and kittens would peek out and timidly emerge. After the animals became somewhat familiar with their surroundings, I would place one, then another, in a person's lap. Those youngsters left to their own devices would chase each other around the room or play with balls and toys. Their antics brought exclamations and hoots of laughter from the residents.

After a half hour to forty-five minutes had passed, we would take the animals to visit patients in their rooms. Whoever was helping me—either the activities director, another staff member, one of my children or a friend—would take one animal to one set of rooms while I took another animal down a different corridor. This took approximately an hour.

During our one and a half to two hour stay, we made certain that the animals had sufficient water and were in no way abused. Messing by the animals did not prove to be a problem. Those few accidents that did
occur were easily cleaned up from the tile floors.

After all the patients had seen the animals, they were returned to their carriers and transported back to the Shelter. The Humane Society staff noted that the animals slept when they returned, but not one ever suffered from its adventure.

For the three summer months of 1981, I brought the animals to Western Care every Wednesday. During the fall, winter and spring of 1981-82, I brought animals every two to three weeks on the average. On three occasions, I brought adult dogs when no puppies were available.

Findings

As I had anticipated, the reactions of the elderly residents to puppies and kittens were positive, immediate and profound. However, experiencing these reactions firsthand made a deep impression on me, one that I never could have gotten from reading even the most detailed, well-written accounts.

Before discussing the many phenomena I observed in the elderly, I will relate my findings regarding the animals themselves. Puppies were easier to handle than kittens, especially large puppies such as Labrador retrievers. These puppies were cuddly and seemed to enjoy being hugged and petted more than the others. They were content to sit on laps for as long as they were wanted.

Kittens, on the other hand, were difficult to manage. They did not like to be still or to be held, and they usually scratched anyone who tried to hold them. When the kittens weren't restrained, they took great joy in racing behind couches, the piano or wherever they could not be caught easily.

As a result of my on-the-job education, I took more puppies than kittens on the Wednesday excursions. Kittens were taken out of their carriers for brief times
only, where they would play with toys provided by the staff. They were a joy to watch but not to hold. I took puppies rather than kittens to the rooms most of the time.

With Irene, however, I made an exception. I had been visiting Irene for a year, and she loved cats more than anything else in the world. She had lived alone with only a cat for many years and had little to do with people and the outside world. When she came to Western Care because of failing health, she had to give her cat to the Humane Society.

The nursing home staff found a difficult patient in Irene. She was highly critical and very outspoken. However, when I brought a kitten to her, her manner softened. By talking to the kitten and petting it, she produced a calming effect that no one else could match. Because of this, every Wednesday I brought a kitten to Irene's room first thing and left it there until it was time to go. Nothing else brought Irene as much pleasure as that tiny, fluffy kitten.

On three occasions, I took adult dogs to visit. The residents enjoyed them, but not nearly as much as the puppies.

During my year's study, I recorded my observations every week. The results of these observations are as follows.

First, of the one hundred and six residents in Western Care, I found only four who showed negative reactions toward puppies and kittens. Two of these patients had allergies to animals and didn't want them near. One woman was afraid of animals and had been all her life. A Polish woman who couldn't speak English spat in my face when I showed her a puppy. Because of the language barrier, I never did find out why she was so repulsed
by the animals.

Approximately ten residents were indifferent to the animals. These persons would be polite to me and sometimes make only a token gesture of petting an animal. However, they showed no emotion of any kind.

For the majority of patients, the reactions were positive. Most residents smiled while watching the antics of a puppy and kitten at play or while holding a warm animal in his or her lap. The dayroom was filled with laughter and happy chatter as patients held and watched the animals. This was a profound change from the usual pattern exhibited by persons in the dayroom. In silence they had either watched T.V. or had mumbled to themselves, lost in their own worlds.

Communication opened up first to the animals themselves. Loving and comforting words calmed the puppies as the old people stroked their soft fur. Patients had questions for me concerning breed, age and homes of the animals. Interaction with each other became apparent through smiles and eye contact.

"Look what that puppy is doing now, Mabel!" was a common exclamation as two residents shared their delight. The major satisfaction of the dayroom experience for me was seeing the patients come out of their shells and back from the past into the here and now. They were interested, stimulated and seemed to find the present a worthwhile place to be if only for awhile.

Prior to the pet program, I had visited many of the residents in their rooms. Conversation was awkward at times and mostly superficial. The picture changed when I entered a room carrying a puppy. Vacant eyes would come to life as a patient noticed the animal. I would sit on their beds and let them hold and pet the puppy for as long as they wanted. Sometimes, I found it
difficult to leave a patient when he opened up and talked to me of past memories. Most of the residents had pets when they were young and wanted to tell me all about them. When I did leave, I felt gratified to see a little color on usually sallow cheeks and pleasant smiles lighting up aged faces.

One of the most obvious reactions of patients was their desire to touch the animals. This need seemed to be an extreme hunger for a loving physical contact with another living being. Old people often are starved for warm, physical contact, and puppies and kittens fill this need very satisfactorily.

I observed the above reactions from the majority of residents at Western Care. More poignant for me, however, were some of the individuals I met who responded in unique ways to the animals.

The most touching experience I had was with Marie, a severely arthritic woman in her eighties who was very much "all there." She spent hours sitting in her room working on needlepoint pictures. Her crippled fingers labored over her work as she thought of the grandchild or friend who would receive her gift. Mementos of her past life filled her room—pictures of loved ones covered the walls as she sat trying to make the best out of the life she had left to her. When I place a fat, black Labrador puppy in her lap, he said "oof." Marie laughed and cuddled him to her crooning loving words in German. After a time, she looked at me, her eyes filled with tears. She said, "I'll never go home again."

The puppy had triggered her memories of home—a home that no longer existed except in Marie's heart. Marie hugged that puppy and I hugged Marie while she cried healing tears of grief.
Rosie was a tiny wizened woman in her nineties. Her mind was lost in senile dementia leaving her confused, frightened and completely out of touch with reality. Over and over, day after day, Rosie said "I want to go home." Nothing seemed to reach Rosie—she responded neither to touch nor to the human voice with more than a brief glance.

When I placed a fat shepherd puppy in her lap, I held my breath hoping for a miracle. To my amazement, a miracle is what happened that afternoon. Rosie looked at the puppy, and her blue eyes suddenly came to life. She smiled and looked at me. "See him," she said. "Isn't he something?" She laughed, and as she held that puppy she was home again for awhile. She was a little girl living on a farm where she was happy and loved by her family.

Shaking her finger at the puppy, her eyes twinkling, she said "Ladd, you had better be good or Mamma won't give you your supper."

Rosie talked to the puppy for ten minutes completely absorbed and happy. From time to time, she would look at me, and I could tell she was no longer far away, but here with me now—if only for a minute.

After that day, every time I brought puppies and kittens to Western Care, my best moment was placing a puppy in Rosie's lap and watching the miracle.

Rosie is dead now. I hope that somewhere she is happy—the way she was as a girl running free in an open field with a puppy at her heels—home at last.

My favorite person at Western Care was "Grandpa." He was an enormous man with twinkly blue eyes and a sense of fun that wouldn't quit. The staff liked him too. First thing each morning, they loaded his huge
frame into a wheelchair and pushed him out to the nurses station where he spent most of the day.

Grandpa brought pleasure to everyone around him by just being himself. His sweet disposition rubbed off on those around him and brightened the day for many.

As a result, it was a special joy for me to place a puppy in Grandpa's lap because it gave back to him a portion of the pleasure he gave away every day. No matter what kind of puppy I gave him, it always reminded Grandpa of a dog he used to own.

"Why you look just like ol' Duke," he would say, or "By gummed if yo're not the image of my Bessie."

Grandpa had grown up on a farm in the South and in later years had ranched in Montana. Dogs were as much a part of his life as breathing.

The puppies seemed to know all about Grandpa. While he told his many stories, they would gaze at him lovingly and lick his hand or fall asleep peacefully in his lap.

Grandpa's stories delighted me, and I spent as much time as I could listening to his tales of coon hunts with his hounds, adventures of bears with his labs, and herding sheep with beloved Border Collie.

I felt that a man like Grandpa should never be without a dog. So it was always with great reluctance that I would take the puppy away from him when it was time to go.

The reaction of the staff to my pet program surprised me. Most of them never paid the least attention to me before except for a rather abrupt answer to one of my questions. In organizing a social event that caused a disruption in their routine, I had observed that many staff members were often only grudgingly helpful.
With the advent of the animals, the staff changed. They shot questions at me about the animals, wanted to hold them, and tripped over one another providing water and cleaning up messes. Three staff members adopted animals from the Shelter during the year I was there. Also, their attitude toward me as a person seemed to change. Before, I was invisible to them or at most a pest, there to disrupt their routine. Now, I was the "pet lady"—a real and worthwhile person. They opened up to me and many became friends.

Summary and Conclusion

The findings I observed with the pet program at Western Care supported all I had read about the profound effects of pets on the elderly. Pets produced instant happiness for the majority of residents, opened up communication between residents, myself and staff, and brought into the present some persons otherwise lost in the past. Emotions surfaced with residents experiencing both tears and laughter.

When I left, the activities director continued the program. Now, "pet day" is a regular feature on the calendar of events and occurs every two weeks.

My dream is that every nursing home in Helena will have a permanent pet program. In addition to bringing in animals, I would like to see some permanent animal residents in the nursing homes that would be cared for by willing residents.

Too often, old age is a time of withdrawal from life and those pleasured that go with it. Puppies and kittens can do a great deal to help an older person enjoy "today."
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