

## **PERSBERIG VIR GANSBAAI COURANT**

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**PEARLY BEACH BEWAREA – VAN DIE LESSENAAR VAN DIE VOORSITTER,  
ELRINA VERSFELD**

### **ADOPT A PET**

The decision to adopt a pet should never be taken lightly. Thorough homework regarding the pet of choice should precede an adoption. Cats and dogs shed hair, some more than others. Ask yourself the following questions: am I prepared to feed, groom (cats also need grooming), exercise, and provide a loving home? What about the cost of veterinary care? Most rescued animals experienced neglect or even severe abuse. Even when placed in a loving new home the stress experienced by the animal is traumatic. Animals obviously lack verbal communication. The trauma experienced will often materialize in unwanted or misunderstood behavior. Animals in general learn through repetition and association. It is often difficult to replace negative behavior with acceptable behavior. If an animal is exposed to violent reprimands repeatedly, the repetition thereof will cause negative association.

You the new owner will have a huge task on hand to undo the negative association. This may take months in severe cases. Sadly pets are often adopted without thorough investigation. Most abandoned animals have no case history to go by. When deciding to adopt from a shelter or animal welfare society, try and get as much background information as possible. Shelters that take their commitment seriously will keep some form of record of the animal, for example where it came from or was found and the condition it was found in. Was the animal adopted previously and perhaps brought back to the shelter and why was it brought back etc.

It is quite an experience to walk through a shelter and make a choice. Try and remain as objective as possible. This in itself is often very difficult. However, it is unfair to an animal that perhaps caught your attention for whatever reason, to be brought back after a month or two because the animal did not live up to your expectations. Personally I cannot understand why people want to get a pet like a cat or dog which is not allowed in the house. Most animals with possible exclusion of certain reptiles are extremely sociable and like living in a pack. The family unit represents a pack. Forbidding the animal to enter the house sends the message that he or she is not worthy of the pack. Experience in dog training taught me that the most protective dogs were those in a close relationship with their owners.

Feedback from cat lovers and owners confirmed that although cats are less sociable than dogs they still need the feeling of belonging and definitely need their share of attention.

If the decision of getting a dog or cat seems too daunting, make absolutely sure you have the patience for a caged bird. Cage birds are not for the faint hearted as they require just as much attention. Parrots and many other birds in the wild are extremely sociable. Keeping a bird in a cage, possibly alone for most of the day, may result in

extreme behavior like feather plucking and screeching. This in itself can be compared to human solitary confinement. Some birds relate to only one family member and may bite anyone else.

Parents should also teach their children the responsibility of keeping a pet. Children cannot be expected to take full responsibility for the care of a pet. If parents do not sufficiently supervise and lead by example, children will become frustrated and may even become abusive towards the pet. The pet then once again becomes a burden and unwanted. All kittens and puppies are “cute”, but eventually become grown pets. Children (especially small children) cannot distinguish between the fluffy toy and a real live pet. Often both get treated the same way. Parents have a responsibility to instill in their children the respect for all living things.

Animals eat food and drink water which results in excreting waste. This is just as much part of the animal, thus should be taken into consideration when obtaining a pet. You cannot get angry with your dog if droppings are left on your lawn. Unfortunately this aspect is often overlooked and the comments are made: “The dog messes everywhere!” Having adopted most of our pets it taught us many valuable lessons, especially to give and receive unconditional love. The most important lesson however was patience. Like with abused children or anyone for that matter, patience and love can bridge many bad experiences. Where humans are able to verbalize their pain, anxiety and fear, animals can only express themselves through their behavior.

Unfortunately the downturn of the economy affects animals when the ‘birthday or Christmas present’ becomes a financial burden. Remember when considering buying or adopting any animal that it is a breathing, feeling, living being. Consider adopting a pet responsibly and help curb the backyard breeding practices so rampant in our country.

Written by Beatrice Bollmann for the Pearly Beach Conservancy.

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