

We named her "Bella"

In the quiet of the night you sometimes hear a barking dog in the distance and, for the moment, think about why the dog is barking. Our dogs, in a large fenced pen, get their enjoyment from barking at deer, passing dogs with people, rabbits and cats roaming the area. The deer, finally used to the noise, stand for a minute, stare at the dogs, and casually walk away. The rabbits stand motionless until the dogs tire of hearing their own voices. The cats hunker down to their smallest sizes and also wait.

Happily, there is only an occasional stray dog, sometimes 2, who make a mistake and wander on to our five acres. Our two beagles bark ferociously, sounding like big dogs and the intruders leave.

So, it was a little surprising to see a dog lying down on the edge of our road. My friend and I thought she was hurt or sick and as we approached her she stood up and came toward us. She was a medium sized dog with short yellow fur, definitely a mixed breed. And then we noticed that she was full of milk, obviously having had a litter. But there were no puppies. She had no collar but allowed us to put a lead on her. She'd whimper at times, wouldn't take food or water. We put her in our car and rode around the area looking for owners who were missing her. No luck. Each of us has two dogs at our homes and couldn't care for her. We decided to take her to the Humane Society. But the Humane Society had no room, the Briggs Shelter in Charles town was full with a waiting list, and other places were also filled.

She had to be placed somewhere so we decided to take her to Animal Control where she would be cared for her while we put up notices about her. We had 5 days to find a rescue group or a family to take her. And then, a sort of miracle happened. We sent an e-mail with her picture and our need to find her a home to Hedgesville Hounds, a rescue group. They took responsibility for her on the fifth day. For us, she was saved.

How did she get there on the road and was she abandoned? That's the question I ask you to think about. There are all sorts of dogs in yards at the end of chains, sometimes with nice dog houses and food and water bowls. And then there are others on short chains, mangy and mean looking and obviously there to guard the property.

The word out there is that there are also packs of dogs roaming the woods, left by somebody, maybe lost. How did they get there?

So I'm asking you to think about these smaller creatures and what their purpose is in our world. They've been with us a long time. We have loved them and taken them to our hearts, cared for them for all their lives. Do we want to go on destroying them because they no longer are of any use to us? Is this humanity? Is this our responsibility or do we leave that to the people who eventually have to euthanize them. We make killers of people whose job is really to protect people from dangerous and sick wild animals.

Unless you are a dog breeder, there is no reason to allow your dogs to reproduce themselves. Spaying and neutering is how we keep the dog population down and avoid the sadness of killing dogs in our county each year. If there is a dog heaven, it's probably very crowded. And each person who knowingly abandons an animal to survive out there may one day meet that creature in the hereafter and eternally face the shame.