

SHERIFF & DEPUTY

2019 Special Issue: Animal Cruelty

THE "LINK" AND LAW ENFORCEMENT

**CRIMES AGAINST ANIMALS
ARE CRIMES AGAINST PEOPLE**

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around. She knows the officers by name. The officer that pulled Ed off of her is the same one that came on her birthday. The officer that dragged him to the car is the same one that left his cellphone number when Ed made a scene at the restaurant. The EMT always smells like bubble gum. She tells her

that she needs to be transported for X-rays on her arm. Rachel declines, promising that she will get it looked at on her own. Crime scene comes out and takes pictures. She tells officers what happened, staring at the blue light on their body camera, knowing that one day Ed will see the video. They hand her

a victim's rights pamphlet and remind her that there are resources and shelters she can go to. She thanks them for their time and takes the card with the report number on it. She knows the drill.

The officers leave and she secures the front door and begins to pick up the broken

HEALING TOGETHER: SHELTERING SURVIVORS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE WITH THEIR PETS

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"He said if I tried to leave, he would kill Sophie, my dog. I knew he was telling the truth—he had hurt her before. If I left it would be a death sentence for her, since I couldn't take her with me." This chilling account from a survivor of domestic violence highlights one of many difficult decisions victims often face when considering leaving a violent relationship. The lack of domestic violence shelters in the United States that accept pets may often force victims to choose between their own safety and the life of their pet—a decision that for many, will haunt them for the rest of their lives. "I can't help wondering what happened to her. That Beagle was my best friend and I had to....I had to leave her behind to get my kids out. I never saw her again."

Ninety-five percent of Americans consider their pet as "part of the family," so it's not surprising that so many victims of domestic violence remain in a violent environment to

protect their animal companion. Concern for the safety of these pets is warranted; when a domestic abuser threatens violence against a pet, they almost always carry it out. Even more concerning is the fact that if children are members of the household, the abuser will often commit the act of the violence against the animal in front of the children.

Most shelters in the U.S. that do currently accept pets often utilize foster systems that allow pets to be temporarily cared for off-site while the rest of the family remains at the shelter. While foster systems help to remove the barrier victim's face of having to leave a pet behind, separation from the pet during this crucial time in shelter (for many, the first steps toward healing) can be a damaging distraction and source of emotional distress for adult survivors, their children, and the animal itself. Pets from domestically violent homes may experience significant anxiety

and concern for the well-being of their caregivers when separated from them.

Though few shared-space options for human AND animal survivors of domestic violence currently exist in the United States, organizations such as **Red Rover** and the **Sheltering Animals and Families Together Program (SAF-T)** are working to bridge this gap by assisting shelters in creating pet-friendly environments that allow families to remain together. With a recent survey finding 90 percent of domestic violence victims feel having a "safe place to bring their pet" would make their decision to leave easier—it is critical that domestic violence shelters across the United States immediately begin to work toward opening their doors to pets.

Survivors of domestic violence often credit the consistency, security, and compassion they received from their pet as being critical in their survival. By the time they reach shelter, these families have been exposed to significant trauma and often experienced prolonged periods of pain. They've stood together, cried together, and survived together. Shouldn't they have the opportunity to heal together as well?

For a complete list of pet-friendly domestic violence shelters in your State, check out the Animal Welfare Institute's Safe Haven Mapping project at: <http://awionline.org/content/safe-havens-mapping-project-pets-domestic-violence-victims>.