

Your Personal Coach

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“The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated.” – Mahatma Gandhi

The death toll continues to mount in New Orleans and along the Gulf Coast, areas ravaged by Hurricane Katrina. A numbed and grieving public demands to know why everyone was not evacuated to safety, since we knew in advance that a major hurricane was bearing down on the region. Thousands were unable to leave because they did not have the means – transportation or money -- to take them out of harm’s way. This is nothing short of a crime, and I join others in hoping that there will be some accountability for the bad decisions made that left so many people vulnerable. As time goes by, experts will analyze what went wrong. On a more positive note, there is hope for the future. The process of assigning accountability can insure that authorities will account for, and protect everyone, and not just those who can “afford” to travel to a safe place in advance of a predictable natural disaster.

Others, who did have the resources to travel, refused to vacate. Some remained to protect their homes or businesses – from looters or the storm itself -- as best they could. Still others stayed put for sentimental reasons. One ninety-year-old woman told reporters that she had lived in her home for all her life and she wasn’t going anywhere. Those whose homes were high and dry with no significant damage, stalwartly refused to move. As I write this, authorities believe that between 5,000 and 10,000 people are still in New Orleans and are debating what level of force to use to get everyone out.

But many others -- untold numbers of people -- refused to be evacuated because the system required them to leave behind a beloved family member. Shelters and most hotels refuse to harbor animals. As fetid waters filled their homes and gas leaks burst into flames, they knew they would be condemning their precious pets to almost certain death. Some simply refused to make this choice. “Why?” you may ask, would anyone risk their own life for a dog, cat, ferret, or other animal? For those who do not have pets and cannot comprehend just how important they are to their “owners,” no amount of explanation will lead to understanding. For those who love their companion animals and regard them as members of the family, no explanation is necessary.

Thousands of stranded animals now roam the littered streets of the city. They sit atop flooded automobiles, stare from behind burglar bars in abandoned houses, helplessly bark from rooftops, and swim through putrid water looking for their people and their homes. Many displaced homeowners search frantically for their pets, but they need help.

A number of organizations are committed to these suffering animals. The ASPCA (www.asPCA.org) has teams from as far away as Boston searching the streets, rescuing animals, and bringing them to safety at emergency shelters. The American Humane Society (www.americanhumane.org), The Humane Society of the United States (www.hsus.org), Best Friends (www.bestfriends.org), PETA (www.peta.org), and Noah’s Wish (www.noahswish.org), among others, have volunteer teams in the area and are collecting money. Animal lovers from around the country and the world have contributed millions of dollars, offered foster care, and sent supplies and food to help

with the effort. So far hundreds of animals have been rescued, but the remaining work to be done is overwhelming. Please give what you can to these important relief efforts.

In the post-analysis, communities, hopefully, will develop plans to protect all of its citizens. In America, we should all be assured that, regardless of our station in life, our government and local authorities are looking out for us. Each of us will be guaranteed transportation to a safe place and the immediate distribution of life-sustaining necessities like food, clean water, security, and emergency medical care. We should expect help to get back on our feet. So, too, we must find ways of including our four-footed, winged, and slithering companions in our preparedness plans. If we can put a man on the moon, we can find effective ways of harboring our pets at shelters. Many hotels and motels relax their “no animal” policies during emergencies and disasters. The ones who don’t should be encouraged to change their rules.

If, God forbid, I am ever in a position to be saved from a dangerous situation but that rescue does not include my pet, I will, without a moment’s regret, decline. That’s a promise, Kelly.

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