

Coffee Break

How did you get involved in the animal welfare field?

That was the question we asked you for this issue's Coffee Break. Some of you have been into animals since childhood. Others came upon this work unexpectedly—but now would never want to do anything else. And so many of you had good stories, we didn't have room for them all! You can read more at animalsheltering.org/coffeebreak.



JANI BRYSON/ISTOCKPHOTO.COM

When I was a child, my mom got a monthly newsletter from Wayside Waifs in Kansas City. I saw a picture of a trailer stacked with bodies of euthanized dogs. It made a lasting impression on me. As a child in school, when picking a subject for a speech in class, I would pick "spaying and neutering pets." One time in college, I took a stray kitten I had adopted as a "visual aid" for my speech. ... One of my classmates came up to me afterward and told me that she had never thought it was a big deal before, but I had convinced her that it was important to spay and neuter. When I was a 911 dispatcher, if someone called with a stray animal and we had no animal control available, I would tell them to bring me the animal, or I would go get it myself after my shift ended. I would take the animal home overnight, and take it to the shelter the next day. So when I interviewed for the animal control job, I told them, "I've been doing this job for quite a while; you just haven't been paying me!"

— Karyn Watson, Animal Control Officer
Dodge City Animal Shelter
Dodge City, Kansas

In 2000, all types of stray animals ended up at my house (one cat was even "waiting" in the rocking chair on the porch)! Each time, I'd call the shelter. Finally I asked the transport person, "Do you ever need help there?" I became a volunteer, and later, an employee. The animals came to get me!

— Diane Tuhy, Animal Caretaker
Watertown Humane Society
Watertown, Wisconsin

Every summer as a child, I rode in the back of a station wagon with my best friend and her dad as we took a litter of puppies to the humane society in Pittsburgh. It broke my heart to leave these puppies year after year. Later in life, I worked in medicine. Then I finally followed my passion and opened a grooming salon, where we took in strays, found them homes, and offered grooming to our local humane society. Here I am, 15 years later, having received my national certification from the National Animal Control Association as an animal control officer.

— Lois Cummins, Animal Control Officer
Spencer & Friends Animal Rescue
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

About 20 years ago, I went to the Ottawa Humane Society to search for my lost 10-year-old cat. For weeks, I visited regularly, hoping to find my Pippy. Shelter staff were empathetic, and gave me tips to search for my beloved pet. During each visit, I learned something new—not just on how I could have been a more responsible pet owner, but on how our community was failing its animals, and how hard this organization was working to change things. I never did find Pippy, but I spent the next 15 years becoming increasingly involved with animal welfare—from dog walking, to fostering cats, committee work and more. Finally, when juggling home life, a high-tech job, and volunteer work became too onerous, I took a paid position at our shelter. I've never looked back, and I've never been happier.

— Sharon Miko, Director of Operations
Ottawa Humane Society
Ottawa, Ontario

I became involved with animals when I was little. I came across a stray cat in the middle of winter when I was living in Poland, and I talked my parents into keeping her. After moving to the U.S., I eventually started volunteering at a local humane society. I became more involved with a network of various rescue organizations. Then in February of 2006 ... a friend of mine pushed me to start AARS! We incorporated, filed for 501 (c)(3) status, and now run a wonderful no kill organization out of foster homes in the Chicago area. ... We pride ourselves on going the extra mile for our animals, no matter what.

— Joanna Konca, Founder
American Animal Rescue Society
Lockport, Illinois

I was working as an attorney when I was asked to join the board of the Humane Society of Harrisburg Area as their board solicitor. I was only on the board for a few months when the shelter's executive director left the organization. At that time the shelter was struggling financially and at risk of closing its doors. I realized that I did not want to live in a community without a shelter for its homeless animals. After a lot of soul searching, I decided to leave the practice of law and interview for the position as executive director to help turn the shelter around. I am happy to say that I have been the executive director for a year now, and I am working hard to ensure Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, does not become a community without a shelter.

— Amy Kaunas, Executive Director
Humane Society of Harrisburg Area
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

When I was in my late 20s, I was driving home from work on a country road when I saw a beagle who had just been hit by a car. I stopped and tried to help the dog. As I looked in her eyes as she breathed her last breath, I knew the time had come to do more to help the creatures I loved so much. I promised that dying dog I would remember her forever. The next day, I began volunteering with the local humane society. After a few months, I was asked to serve on the board, and several years later was hired as the executive director. I learned that trying to keep ourselves safe from sad sights and stories really does not help the animals. Being willing to have a broken heart many times over is a must for anyone who wants to devote their waking hours (and sometimes sleepless nights) to helping the creatures with whom we share this earth. ... As we "lose ourselves" in service, we truly find out who we are. Only then can we make a difference.

— Paulette Dean, Executive Director and
Humane Investigator
Danville Area Humane Society
Danville, Virginia

Animal Sheltering congratulates Karyn Watson of Dodge City, Kan., whose submission was selected in a random drawing from those published in this issue. Dodge City Animal Shelter, where she works, will receive a free coffee break: A \$50 gift certificate to a local coffee shop. "Bone" appetit!

If you were Emperor of the Universe and had limitless resources, what's the first thing you'd do for animals?

Please submit your responses (150 words or less) at animalsheltering.org/coffeebreak or send them to Editor, *Animal Sheltering*/HSUS, 2100 L St. NW, Washington, DC 20037. **Your answer may be printed in a future issue of *Animal Sheltering*.** If your response is chosen for publication, you will be entered into a drawing to win a **free coffee break (valued at \$50)** for your organization. Responses may be edited for length or clarity; no donation or purchase is necessary to win. See animalsheltering.org for contest rules, or send an e-mail or letter to the above addresses to request a printed copy.