

Unleashing Creativity to Unchain Dogs

By Debra J. White


A DOG NAMED JOEY is tethered by a chain day after day, night after night in his owner's backyard. Harriet, a very clever cat, moves next door and takes an immediate interest in Joey's plight. How does the story end? Will Harriet be able to free Joey? How will he feel if she succeeds?

More than 2,000 third graders across Maricopa County, Ariz., were asked by their teachers earlier this year to come up with an ending to the tale and craft their conclusions in both words and pictures. The storytelling and art contest called Breaking the Chain is an educational project of the Phoenix Animal Care Coalition. Begun in 2004, the contest continues to spark awareness and empathy in children about the sad fate of chained dogs in Arizona, where summer temperatures routinely top 100 degrees.

In a number of the stories, children wrote that other animals came to the rescue of Joey, one in the form of a police dog, another as an "army of mice" who chewed through the chain until it broke. Renae Lynk of Westpoint Elementary School in Surprise, Ariz., broke the mold and wrote that Joey died—a sad ending that is often all too real. The girl's poignant story tugged at every judge's heart, and by unanimous vote, she won first prize in last year's contest in the essay category. Her story ends, "His head dropped to the floor once again. One day was finally his last. As the sun set and the moon rose, he fell asleep. The next morning he did not wake."

There are millions of dogs just like Joey in backyards and empty lots across the United States, who typically receive inadequate amounts of exercise, water, veterinary care, socialization




Animals are people too, they need everything we need. Especially love. 

and love. Sometimes these dogs suffer from strangulation on their tethers or their necks become festered and maggot-ridden from embedded chains.

Dogs who are continuously chained and therefore denied socialization can become aggressive and bite—a result of chaining that tragically affects children. According to Dogs Deserve Better, a national advocacy group to end chaining, 214 children in the United States were either killed or severely injured by chained dogs between October 2003 and June 2008.

Conditions, however, are improving. At least 25 communities across the U.S., including Tucson, Ariz., Jefferson County, Ky., Miami, Fla., and the state of California have passed legislation that either restricts chaining or bans it altogether. And the numbers continue to grow.

Not only does Breaking the Chain teach empathy for animals, but for some, the contest has instilled a sense of compassion for each other as well. In a society with so much violence, it's hard to argue with that.

For more information, visit www.pacc911.org or contact Debra J. White, contest founder, at whitedebraj@yahoo.com. 



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