

A Trip to the Humane Society ©

By Connie J. Schlosberg

The piercing whistle from a passing train turns my head toward the train station. A sign catches my eye. "Help me. I'm homeless." Beneath the sign sits a mousey-haired middle-aged man, wearing a red flannel shirt, ripped cargo pants and no shoes. His handled-bar moustache covers his parched lips as he speaks nonsensical words to me. Next to him, a charcoal and chocolate colored hush puppy dog named Sammy, sits patiently, sniffing the laces on my boots. Sammy looks well-fed; his owner does not.

A homeless man and his dog are near the train tracks, which is located in front of the Humane Society of the Pikes Peak Region. A non-profit organization that's responsibility is to house homeless or missing pets. The building is fairly new but disguised as a large rustic cedar-style home with a forest green standing seam roof. Walking inside, the place seems worlds away from the dank, dirty animal shelter I originally envisioned. Anne, a cheerful, plump lady wearing fire-engine red lipstick that flawlessly matches her fuzzy sweater, greets me at the customer service desk. She volunteers on the weekends. She hands me some standardized literature and gives me the sixty-second speech about what the Humane Society provides. She tells me to feel free to roam around and I take her up on her offer.

One aspect that is notably missing is the smell of animals living inside. No smell of dung or urine. No smell reminiscent of dog food or wet hair. The Humane Society appears so antiseptic that I almost believe I am in a hospital and not an animal shelter. The walls are day-glow white; the floors sparkle cleaner than most grocery stores. So where are the furry creatures?

I walk down a corridor aptly named "Whiskers Way." Behind a glass wall, separate metal cages hold a multitude of cats, neatly lined up in rows. All kinds. Calico, Siamese, Persian. Each one has its own spacious abode complete with a litter box, water, and food. Tabitha, a Siamese kitten, uses her razor sharp tongue to clean her feet. She has no interest in me. Mandy, a black cat with yellow illuminating eyes stares right at me. She's three years old and has all of her shots. For \$65.00 I can adopt her today. No story of where she comes from or how she got there. Each cat's cage is labeled with the type of cat, how old the cat is and how much is the suggested donation to adopt her.

I feel like I am in some swanky pet store in the mall rather than the Humane Society. Mothers with baby strollers walk by me, shopping for a new pet for their babies. The Herrington's, a well-groomed family, the kind you see in a Norman Rockwell painting, are playing with a Russell terrier in the waiting room. They decided it was time for a family pet and thought the Humane Society would be the proper place to buy one. The waiting room is where families can become acquainted with potential pets. The Russell terrier is barking uncontrollably and jumping in circles around the three children, two boys and a girl. "Pick me! Pick me!" he seems to say. Each child is dressed to the nines. It must have been the first stop after Sunday service. Of course, the children pick him.

I stroll down the next hallway to “Bark Avenue.” How much is that doggie in the window? There are countless rows of the same metal cages the cats are living in. The dogs are treated with the same royalty as the cats although I’m sure the cats would disapprove. Furry blankets and squeaky toys abound along with amply-filled water bowls and large overflowing food bowls. The larger dogs have huge cages for them to pace about. (I’m still not sure how I feel about God’s creatures in cages, but these ones resemble doghouses not prisons.)

Several elementary-aged children smear their noses up against the glass window where a St. Bernard and Irish setter are getting ready to chow down on some bones the volunteers have given them. Both dogs look up and in their excitement of seeing the children, start tap dancing with their toe nails, splattering their water bowls everywhere. The St. Bernard howls. The Irish setter joined in. Soon all the dogs are participating choir-style in the barking chant. The next hallway over, the cats must have heard the barking. Now, the cats can be heard whisper-like meowing in competition with the dogs. The dogs persist louder and louder. Of course, the cats lost.