



Pet Talk

-2 Black dogs-

By Steve B.

Welcome to *Pet Talk*, a periodic update of pet news and happenings at the Flathead County Animal Shelter. Today we're discussing the problem of stray and abandoned pets.

To clarify, we're referring to escaped pets or animals who have been dumped to fend for themselves—not to owners who formally surrender pets at shelters.

For perspective, the Flathead County Animal Shelter took in 54 stray dogs during May, but luckily 47 were promptly reunited with their owners.

And what about stray cats? Shelter manager Austin Hicks says that, although the county does not have a stray cat ordinance, Animal Control does bring in strays as time and resources allow.

Stray dogs and cats are then posted on the shelter website and become adoptable after 72 hours—but only after a local veterinarian conducts a wellness exam that includes spay/neuter status.

Back in 1998, my wife and I encountered a stray dog on the outskirts of Kalispell. Imagine this scenario: A black dog pacing back and forth on the edge of a high-speed road—with nighttime coming on!

After unsuccessfully canvassing the neighborhood, we concluded that the uncollared dog had likely been abandoned.

Unfortunately, the county shelter was closed for the day, and no Animal Control Officer was available. So, we took the frightened pup home for the night and delivered him to shelter the next morning.

By the way, shelter manager Austin Hicks had the following tip for similar would-be rescuers: If a stray dog happens to have a collar with a license, calling the shelter

can often yield an owner phone number—in which case the dog can be easily returned without having to go through the impoundment process.

Of course, social media can also be useful for communicating about stray pets. One example is the Facebook site Lost and Found Pets of Flathead Valley.

Back to today's story. The newly rescued pup languished in the shelter for a week without being reclaimed—waiting in vain for an owner who would never return. So, our bleeding hearts compelled us to adopt the handsome Chow-Lab mix (a "Chabrador").

Long story short, Mokey lived his best life for 14 more years before succumbing to old age in 2012.

Shortly afterwards, fate led us to adopt yet another abandoned black dog! In 2013, Sammy was a 6-month-old Border Collie-Lab mix (a "Borador"), and here's his story.

The pup and several siblings were found at a roadside dumpster site and taken to the county shelter.

Staff scuttlebutt suggested that these were puppy mill dogs dumped when their Sell-By dates had expired. Sadly, such practices are disturbingly common in the U.S.

Such cruelty can also have lasting impacts on pets. Indeed, both of our rescue dogs exhibited lifelong shyness due to abuse and/or a lack of early socialization.

Nonetheless, both pups evolved into fine “one-man” dogs (despite what my wife thinks!).



According to state law, abandoning animals on highways, railroads, or other places where it may suffer is considered cruelty. A first conviction results in a possible \$1,000 fine and/or 1 year imprisonment—with graduating penalty enhancements for subsequent convictions.

Today, the homeless pet problem is only expected to worsen in rapidly growing Flathead County. So maybe you too can consider adopting and spreading the word among friends and neighbors.

By the way, did you know about the Senior Pet Voucher offered by Flathead Shelter Friends? The free voucher pays up to \$250 toward veterinary care for dogs and cats who are 7+ years old.

For more information, please contact Flathead County Animal Shelter, phone number (406) 758-1310, or visit the website at <https://flathead.mt.gov/department-directory/animal>.

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