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## Your Pets Need a Plan, Too

by Robert Casserly, Executive Director  
 Sanctuary One at Double Oak Farm

With every passing year, Americans share their homes and their hearts with more and more house and pasture pets. According to the 2011 American Pet Products Association national pet owners survey, 73 million American households count at least one animal as a member of the family. Eighty-three percent of Americans call themselves "mom" or "dad" in relation to their pets, and about half even allow their house pets to sleep in the same bed with them.

Just counting dogs, cats, and horses, Americans provide food, shelter, love, and medical care for 172 million pets. Birds, fish, reptiles, and other species of pets add up to 188 million more. In other words, there are now more pets in the U.S. (360 million) than people (310 million).

As the number of pets in the U.S. grows we are increasingly challenged by the ethical and legal responsibilities of caring for so many animals. While our society has made good progress in some areas, including the mainstreaming of spay/neuter for house pets, a growing preference for adopting a homeless pet instead of buying one, and the quality of veterinary care, when it comes to planning for the lifetime care of our pets we have barely begun to realize the serious challenges before us.



Consider this: 76 million American children were born between 1945 and 1964 – the Baby Boomer generation. Varying in age from 66 to 47 years old, Baby Boomers represent a silver-haired tsunami on the demographic chart. As the vanguard of the Baby Boomer generation starts passing away the next 10 to 20 years, what's going to happen to their millions and millions of pets?

In general, many people feel vaguely entitled that someone, somewhere will take care of their pet, but they haven't made any specific plans about it. Nearly every week Sanctuary One receives a call from people who need help figuring out what to do with a pet left behind by a parent or grandparent who passed away or became incapacitated by a medical condition.

The best time to create a plan for what will happen to your pet if you can't care for him or her was before you brought the pet home. The next best time is now. If you find it hard to think about life without your pet, imagine your pet's life without you.

Your plan for your house or pasture pet should include:

- Who, specifically, will take care of my pet in

the event of my death or if I become medically incapacitated? You need to have a heart-to-heart talk with this person or organization to ensure they are truly committed to providing lifetime care for your pet.

- Write down all the instructions for taking care of your pet and make sure everyone who is involved with caring for your pet gets a copy. Make sure to include a copy of all your pet's veterinary records.
- Make a plan for financing the lifetime care of your pet. If you don't provide any funding for your pet's care, it decreases the chances that he or she will be well taken care of. The plan can be as simple as naming the pet's caregiver as beneficiary of your life insurance policy or retirement account. If you have no financial resources and no family or friends who

are sure you can count on, your best option may be to re-home your pet while you are still healthy enough to meet the adopter and personally inspect the animal's new home. Although it may be very difficult to give away a beloved pet, try to focus on what's best for them, not you.

Another option for people with scarce resources who need to re-home a pet is to contact your local animal shelter or humane society and discuss your situation with them. Animal shelters and humane societies typically do a great job finding good, loving homes for reasonably healthy and friendly animals.

There are a lot more options to choose from if you have some kind of financial resources available to fund your pet's lifetime care. Most people have assets of some kind, even if they are not wealthy. Thoughtful planned giving can provide substantial tax benefits for your heirs while balancing what you wish to accomplish for yourself, your family (including house and pasture pets), and your charitable interests.

Because planned gifts of \$10,000 or more help us rescue more abused, neglected, and abandoned animals, Sanctuary One provides lifetime care for a limited number of house and pasture pets transferred in the event of a donor's death or medical incapacity. We would be glad to discuss such planned giving options with you – in confidence and without obligation.

For more information, visit Sanctuary One on the Web at [www.SanctuaryOne.org](http://www.SanctuaryOne.org), or call 541.899.8627.

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