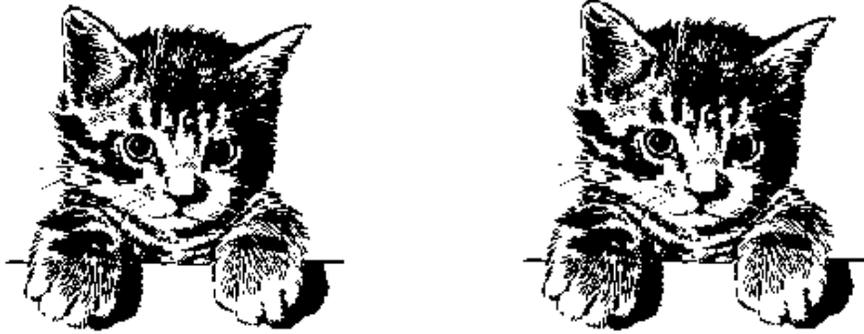

Unwanted Kittens – Spring’s disturbing legacy



By: Gina Spadafori

The sound of caterwauling drifts eerily through my neighborhood these days, carried on the same spring breezes that scatter golden pollen and pink flower petals on the sidewalks.

In March, caterwauling means cats on the streets, heeding the call of an instinct they do not question. The urge to mate is primal and overpowering, pulling tomcats from their homes, across busy roadways and into fights.

In May, caterwauling gives way to gentle mewing as the kittens burst into this world, soft, blind and helpless. Their arrival is witnessed by people who whisper reverently about the “miracle of life,” and use the lovely sight of a mother cat with her babies to teach lessons to their own.

In June, many kittens hit the shelters, and shortly after, the euthanasia rooms. Far from the view of those responsible for the tragedy, out of the sight of the children who are protected from the sad part of the tale, the “miracle of life” ends, and the victims are stacked into barrels bound for the rendering plant.

Such is the true nature of even the loveliest spring.

What’s so confounding, so disturbing about this black drama played out in towns and cities throughout the land is that it is completely preventable. Not one kitten or cat, or puppy or dog, needs to meet death in the euthanasia room for the crime of being “surplus”. Not one kitten or cat, or puppy or dog needs to be shipped from county pounds to biomedical laboratories, to spend the rest of its miserable life serving science. Not one kitten or cat, puppy or dog, needs to wander confused and hungry down a country lane until a motorist or a farmer protecting his stock ends the suffering once and for all.

Not one. Not one in your neighborhood, not one in your town, not one in your country, not one in your state.

If you shudder when you think of animals being euthanized at the shelter, if you’ve ever signed a petition against the controversial practice of “pound-seizure,” and especially if you’ve ever dumped an animal on a country lane, convincing yourself that a kind farmer will give it a good home, it’s time for a little self-evaluation.

Are you part of the problem, or part of the solution?

Are your pets spayed and neutered? By that, I mean all of them. If you’re the kindhearted type who puts out food for the neighborhood strays, take it a step further and spring for neutering. If your pets see your vet so often that you’re on a first-name basis with the office staff chances are you could sweet-talk the vet into a discount rate to fix an extra pet or two a year. Veterinarians love animals, too, after all, and although they can’t give everything away, the ones I know – and I know a great many – are generous when it comes to pro bono work, especially if you’re a regular customer, asking for help on others’ behalf.

When you choose your own pets, pick shelter animals or animals from a rescue network. Buying purebred kittens or puppies – especially from a retail store that serves as a “puppy mill” outlet – encourages the continued production of animals for sale. You can get almost anything second-hand and better than new, even animals. In doing so, you’re giving an innocent pet a second chance at a happy life.

Let your feelings be known. Politely suggest to a friend or neighbor that spaying and neutering not only helps all animals, but helps each individual animal. Tell them spaying and neutering eliminates the possibility of some cancers, and will help keep pets close to home and off the roadways. Some behavior problems are also lessened or eliminated by the procedure.

Do what you can for animals, as often as you can, and maybe, someday, we animal lovers can spend the springtime sneezing, instead of grieving as the tragedy unfolds.

For this spring, though, like all the others. I'm doing both.