

An Ambitious Approach to Repairing America's Pets

Jennifer Lauren Peterson

Castro Valley High School

19400 Santa Maria Ave.

Castro Valley Ca. 94546

(510) 537-5910

Supervising Teacher:

Michelle Trueblood

Personal Statement:

My life is a whirlwind. I have a planner full of due dates, work hours, and dance practices. I work hard to succeed and be the best, however I accept defeat as a chance to grow and learn. Overall, I have big dreams and the drive to fulfill them.

Every year five to seven million pets enter animal shelters in the United States. Of these, nearly 65% are euthanized. (Source 1) This is not just a frightening statistic or a concept to ponder. This is an epidemic; a slaughtering of innocent lives, an American tragedy, a shameful, seriously overlooked situation. Something must be done. When I began volunteering at the local animal shelter at age eleven, I thought I was embarking upon a new hobby and discovering a fun new way to spend my weekends, but I quickly realized that I had just become witness to the most explicit act of human cruelty. Something needs to be done to change these horrific statistics and to increase public awareness. I plan to dedicate my career to doing just that. My goal is to become a veterinarian and make the world a better place for pets.

Today's pets and pet owners are faced with a variety of problems ranging from homelessness to over-crowding in shelters, and from cruelty to costly veterinarian bills. The ASPCA claims it is nearly impossible to give a count of the number of dogs and cats living on the streets, however they estimate seventy million cats alone roam the US. * With this many homeless animals, it's understandable that we have a growing number of pets, and a lack of suitable homes. Feral cats have, on average, up to twelve kittens in a year.* Those kittens will grow up and have more kittens, and until these animals get off the streets and into loving homes, they are likely to continue to produce at terrifying rates. Without public support for spay and neuter programs, these animals will continue to contribute to over-crowding in shelters. As more and more animals enter the shelters, each animal is allotted less time to become adopted, simply because there is not enough room to keep them, or enough people to adopt them all. Furthermore, homeless animals are not the only animals coming into shelters. Pets seized from abusive homes are brought to shelters with the hope of finding new homes and loving owners. Every year, thousands of pets are found in abusive homes suffering either from physical abuse, starvation, or neglect. Though there are serious legal consequences for abusive owners, the number of abused and neglected pets is still truly shocking. Finally, veterinarian bills are at an all time high. Many US families bring pets into their homes and make them part of their family. Pets can bring joy to a family, provide irreplaceable support, and serve as a much needed best friend. However, in the case of a medical emergency, this beloved pet can engender thousands of dollars in veterinarian bills. Unfortunately, many loving families find themselves financially unable to provide adequate medical support for their pets, and as a result, even more pets end up entering shelters. I have a plan to fix these problems and to bring justice to pets in the US.

There is nothing that excites me more than the possibility of fulfilling my dream of becoming a vet and making a real difference in the world. I understand that becoming a vet is a long process that requires demanding amounts of work and dedication, and I can't wait to get started. There are so many things I plan to do. First of all, as I start my career, I want to work closely with other established, compassionate vets who have been in the field for several years. This will help me to gain experience and multiple points of view, so that I can ultimately become the best.

After a few years of working alongside experienced veterinarians and saving all the money I can, I aim to open my own clinic. Opening my own practice will most likely be very expensive and require countless hours of work, but I believe the rewards will be worth all the effort. Once I'm operating my own clinic, I will be able to begin to have a real effect on my community. In an effort to eliminate the problems within the animal society in the US, I plan to focus my work on reducing the number of animals coming into shelters every year. To begin, I hope to be able to offer reduced prices to families who struggle to pay their vet bills. This way, more families will be able to keep their pets even if they suffer financial struggles. I also want to work in my community to perform free spay and neuter surgeries to reduce the number of local strays. Needless to say, my goals are not necessarily to develop a high income, but moreover to feel productive in helping the people and the animals in my community.

As my career grows, I would like to start public awareness programs throughout the state. I believe that as more people learn about the abuse rates and the overwhelming number of homeless animals in the country, the number of neglected animals will rapidly begin to drop. Public education is key to solving these issues. As my program starts, I will focus on educating California's youth, with the hope that they will grow up understanding the importance of properly caring for their pets. Gradually, I hope to use my resources to expand my educational program and possibly develop an interactive website where people can have access to comprehensive animal care tips. In addition to offering reduced price service to low income families, and educating the public to the issues facing America's pets, I plan to stay current on my animal care procedures. Being a vet, just like being any other type of doctor, requires a commitment to keeping up-to-date on the newest and most current medical practices and procedures. I want to be the best that I can be, and offer quality care for my patients, and therefore it is imperative that I continue to study throughout my career.

Finally, once I have my career underway and am providing my customers with the best possible care, I would like to start my own rescue group. Rescue groups are similar to animal shelters in that they offer a safe place for homeless pets; however rescue groups are able to select the animals they admit, and consequently, do not use euthanasia. I will start off small, taking in only one or two animals, but over time, I hope to increase the number of homeless animals that I am personally able to provide shelter and comfortable lives for. I understand that I have big dreams and cannot possibly accomplish all of this by myself, which is why I will work closely with my staff and hopefully, with interns and student volunteers. I'm certain there are other members of society that have similar hopes to make the animal industry better, and I look forward to involving myself with them and my work. Accomplishing these tasks will take many years of hard work, but I aim to become the best at what I do. The dedication required to achieve these dreams is bubbling within me and I cannot wait to get started.

My dream, once accomplished, will change California, the United States, and ultimately the world, forever. Within the state, I hope to help in significantly decreasing the number of homeless animals and the number of animals in shelters. By offering low cost care to families unable to provide extensive treatment for their pets, the community will find its pets healthier and happier. The community will find fewer animals on its streets and in its shelters because of my free spay and neuter program. My public education systems will enlighten not only Californians, but people all over the United States, informing them of proper pet care and how to help in reducing the number of homeless pets. I also hope that my program will help people to spot animal cruelty cases within their neighborhoods, and encourage them to turn in abusive owners. In essence, there will be fewer animals on American streets and more people who understand what it means to be a good pet owner. In the big picture, I hope to change the world. When people from other countries visit the United States they will find fewer animals on the streets, less cases of animal cruelty, high rates of pet care, and hopefully they will take these positive values back home with them. Furthermore, I hope to inspire other animal activists throughout the world to reach for their dreams and to work to improve the lives of animals within their communities. People all over the world have pets, and whether they are dogs, or monkeys, or cattle, they need to be taken care of. My hope is that my work can help to make this possible.

Twenty years from now, when I'm working as a successful veterinarian, I do not want millions of pets to be entering animal shelters in the United States, and I certainly don't aim to have nearly 65% of them euthanized every year. I know my work will make a difference in the lives of people and animals all over the world. I am so excited to begin college this fall and to begin preparing for my professional life as a veterinarian. It is time for someone to step up and put an end to the painful, alarming statistics surrounding animal cruelty and homelessness in the United States, and I am just the girl to do it.

Sources:*Source 1: Sept. 28, 2009. ASPCA. <http://www.aspc.org/about-us/faq/pet-statistics.html>