



## Pet Talk

Welcome to *Pet Talk*, an occasional column about homeless pets and related topics. Today we're focusing on some historical and current aspects of pet adoption in the Flathead Valley.

For insight, we recently interviewed longtime pet advocate Myni Ferguson, who is the immediate past President of the all-volunteer nonprofit Flathead Shelter Friends.

**Editor:** So Myni, please give us a brief history. For example, why and for how long have you been involved in advocacy for local homeless pets?

**Myni:** I have been involved with Flathead County Animal Shelter for 40+ years. The first time I saw the shelter I was so appalled that I

knew stepping up for the animals was imperative.

**Ed.:** You've also rescued numerous pets yourself. Can you tell us about some personal experiences—such as how you came to rescue multiple Doberman Pinschers!

**Myni:** My beloved Doberman "Gretchen" had just passed away when I was asked by the shelter staff to come and see their new arrival, an abandoned old Doberman named Maxwell. Well, I readily adopted him—in the nick of time because he was already in the shelter's euthanasia room! I also set up a Doberman Rescue and Adoption Service where I could evaluate potential adopters to ensure good matches.



**Ed.:** Please give a brief history of the Flathead County Animal Shelter. For example, can you briefly discuss the how and

why of the first shelter in 1983 at the county landfill?

**Myni:** A County Commissioner at the time told me that the county could not afford an actual shelter, so it was built to be a '*pickup, drop off and disposal facility*'—and it sure lived up to its name. So a small group formed the original Humane Society in the Flathead to help improve the lives of homeless pets and shelter conditions.

**Ed.:** Can you give some perspective about those early conditions? For example, is it true that most were immediately taken out the back door and euthanized—with a shotgun no less!

**Myni:** The shotgun method was before my time but, yes, most animals brought to the shelter were quickly euthanized. A Carbon Monoxide Chamber was used when I started volunteering — and it should be noted that the monoxide method was (and still is) considered by all advocacy organizations to be inhumane. Instead, most

shelters today use painless lethal injections.

**Ed.:** Can you provide more details about the ‘modern’ shelter? How did it evolve from its early landfill days?

**Myni:** The Landfill building was becoming very dilapidated and when the county-owned building on Cemetery Road became available the shelter was moved there. It was then restructured as the Animal Control Center, with a still high euthanasia rate. Animal Control Officers operated out of this facility until the change was made to put Animal Control under the Sheriff’s Department, whereas the shelter came under the City-County Health Department. Subsequently, conditions greatly improved for homeless animals.

**Ed.:** What’s your take on today’s homeless pet problem? For example, briefly discuss necessary infrastructure, funding needs, valley growth issues, and so on.

**Myni:** Due to the influx of people moving to the

Flathead, the shelter is frequently filled to capacity because some residents can’t find pet-friendly living arrangements. For example, with rental costs rising and some landlords prohibiting pets, renters often must make difficult decisions about pet ownership.

**Ed.:** Please discuss the importance of personal donations to Flathead Shelter Friends versus those to the county shelter. Why are there 2 possible donation options?

**Myni:** Flathead Shelter Friends is a 501c3 non-profit registered with the IRS – and some donors prefer to donate to this type of organization because FSF spends their gifts promptly and responsibly. For example, readers can check the FSF website to see photos of our many shelter improvements and programs. Conversely, donors can also donate directly to governmental agencies like the Flathead County Animal Shelter.

**Ed.:** Can you tell us about last month’s exciting

shelter news?

**Myni:** We received a generous donation that allowed the shelter to reduce its adoption fees. Donations come in all sizes and we treasure them all. But when someone donates a large amount of money we can facilitate major changes to improve conditions for our local homeless pets.

**Ed.:** You recently stepped down as President of Flathead Shelter Shelter Friends. What are your hopes for the future of this nonprofit?

**Myni:** FSF has an amazing, dedicated, and energetic Board of Directors. So, I see nothing but growth and the continuing development of programs and shelter improvements to assist the Shelter and their animal residents.

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Well, that’s it for today’s Pet Talk. We hope you found this perspective helpful and useful.

We would also like to take this opportunity to thank Myni Ferguson for her many years of hard work on behalf of our local

homeless pets.

Whether you love dogs or cats (or both), there are always plenty to adopt at the Flathead County Animal Shelter!

And remember to ask about the shelter's generous adoption incentives. First, as described above, fees have been markedly reduced thanks to a recent donation from a local animal lover. Flathead Shelter Friends also offers a Senior Pet Voucher, which pays up to \$350 toward veterinary care for 7+ year-old adopted pets.

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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***Personal donations are always appreciated! For more information, see [www.flatheadshelterfriends.org](http://www.flatheadshelterfriends.org)***