

# The Latham Letter

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SPRING, 1991



## Stressful Life Events and Use of Physician Services Among the Elderly: The Modifying Role of Pet Ownership

Judith M. Siegel, Ph.D.

The physician utilization behavior of 938 Medicare enrollees in a health maintenance organization was prospectively followed for 1 year. With demographic characteristics and health status at baseline controlled for, respondents who owned pets reported fewer doctor contacts over the 1-year period than respondents who did not own pets. Furthermore, pets seemed to help their owners in times of stress. The accumulation of prebaseline stressful life events was associated with increased doctor contacts during the study year for respondents without pets. This relationship did not emerge for pet owners. Owners of dogs, in particular, were buffered from the impact of stressful life events on physician utilization. Additional analyses showed that dog owners in comparison to owners of

other pets spent more time with their pets and felt that their pets were more important to them. Thus, dogs more than other pets provided their owners with companionship and an object of attachment.

Current and projected demand by the elderly for health care services has prompted the study of their physician utilization behavior. These studies and others show that factors in addition to physical health status influence decisions to use medical services. Psychological stress, for example, has been positively associated with the frequency of primary care physician visits among the general population (Barsky, Wyshak, & Klerman, 1986; Regier, Goldberg, & Taube, 1979; Shuval, 1970; Tessler, Mechanic, & Dimond, 1976) and among the elderly (Waxman, Carner, & Blum, 1982). Stressful life events also contribute to higher utilization rates (Rahe & Arthur, 1975).  
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## Population Growth and the Environment

Population-Environment Balance's position is based on the realization that a stable U.S. population size is essential if we are to prevent further deterioration of the very system that supports us—our environment and natural resource base. Regardless of how conservatively we use resources, the fundamental fact is that growing numbers of people unavoidably place increasing demands on our natural and social environment. More people mean more energy use, more traffic jams, more production of toxic wastes and increased tensions which result from living in crowded urban environments. However efficient we may be in use of resources and however much we conserve in our attempt to preserve our environment, more people simply mean more stress on the environment as the phenomena of crowding, deforestation, acid rain, global warming and the whole litany of environmental ills amply demonstrates.

### Water Availability and Population Growth

The United States is facing grave water shortages, particularly in those areas of the country with the highest population growth. Groundwater is being pumped out of the ground faster than it is being replenished in 35 of the 48 contiguous states. This depletion,

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## Overpopulation: A Human Welfare Concern

Self preservation is necessarily a primary defensive motivation common to all creatures. Except for human intervention, the basic instincts of most life forms assures the practice of various methods of successful self preservation. Pogo's sage remark, "We have met the enemy, and it is us!" could not more concisely express the parody of human behavior with respect to its own self preservation.

History is replete with accounts which attest to the fact that human nature's gift of intelligence is regularly employed in the accomplishment of destruction. Little discretion has ever been given to the inevitable consequence of what is lost. In light of this continued failure of humans to recognize their interrelationship and interdependence with all other life and the limitation of the earth's resource, a gloomy future is forecast. Human over population is one very serious manifestation of that continued myopic perspective. The subject is frankly addressed by articles appearing elsewhere in this issue of *The Latham Letter*.

Humane organizations and animal control agencies continuously express concern about the over population of domestic companion animals and reflect on the need for abatement through spay and neuter procedures. The U.S. Bureau of Land Management and other regulatory agencies which periodically announce the over population of mustangs and various other wild animals, conduct programs to "thin" their numbers. Are these other life forms over populated or is it us? Read Population-Environment Balance's thought provocative comments concerning: Farmland Loss, Water Availability and Population Growth, and Why Excess Immigration Damages the Environment. The organization Zero Population Growth presents a view on the effects of overpopulation on wildlife; representative opinions of the world's major religions also appear in this issue. So frequently, one reads published reports of suffering caused by human over population. A current illustration of a consequence of over population is found in the State of California now in its fifth year of water shortage, a drastic phenomenon which has and will continue to have serious impact on the quality of life for both of that State's human and wild life populations.

Hugh H. Tebault



## Why Latham?

The Latham Foundation has promoted respect for all life through education since 1918. Its many services include:

FILM AND TELEVISION: (Subjects range from wildlife and the environment to basic pet care and the use of animals in therapy programs.)

- Brother Buzz (Remember him?)
- The WITHIT series, a very popular series of half-hour films with study guides, subscribed to by schools around the world
- Public Service Announcements
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PUBLICATIONS:

- *The Latham Letter* (\$10/year)
- *The Loving Bond: Companion Animals in the Helping Professions*

OTHER:

- Resource library
- Computer-accessible bibliographic reference service

To receive information about the above services, see the subscription form on page 24 or call us at (415) 521-0920.



## Our Compliments to Professor Carmack

Great strides have been achieved in gaining the serious, public recognition of the valuable but latent benefits inherent in human companion animal relationships. However, there remains a large number of important human health professionals yet to be convinced of the salutary effects to be realized from animal assisted therapy.

At an early date, Betty J. Carmack, Ed.D., R.N., recognized the importance of animal assisted therapy and contributed much toward its adoption and application by her profession. Her most recent promotional success in that respect is attested to by the present issue of the prestigious quarterly journal *Holistic Nursing Practice*, which is entirely addressed to The Human-Animal Bond: Implications for Professional Nursing, for which Professor Carmack served as Issue Editor. The publication is a valuable resource for practitioners and researchers pursuing a holistic and human approach to nursing care.

*Holistic Nursing Practice*, Volume 5, Number 2, January, 1991

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## Stray Cats/Home Turnovers 1990 Is There An Overpopulation Problem?



*Frank M. Rogers*

Our new Shelter Coordinator, Diane Smith, expressed concern the other day over stray cats not being claimed by their owners, and gave us all food for thought.

My first words were: "So what else is new?" I wasn't trying to be sarcastic but this is the way it has always been. Very few stray cats are ever claimed. Why is this fact true?

I think it is because cats are still very plentiful as a result of overpopulation. Maybe it is not as bad as during the mid-sixties, but any increase is an overabundance on the cat-adoption market. We find ourselves still trying to adopt out cats when we know there are not enough homes readily available. We are then forced to resort to euthanasia.

I get a little sick at the thought of this solution. It brings to mind the slogan that the United Humanitarians used in the late sixties and seventies describing the situation brought about by overpopulation: "Born to be Killed." How true those words still seem.

Why have we regressed? I don't really believe we have. This overpopulation of cats has been with us right along. As the greater population of canines reduced, we just presumed that all pet populations were being cut back. I think we will have this situation on our hands until some legislator gets a bill introduced that controls cat population through licensing and other

laws. This could be set up the same as dog licensing. Without such a measure being taken, I feel that the situation will continue to worsen.

Many people might turn from licensing and protective laws as a solution. They will recite that dog licensing has never been fully satisfactory; it needs lots of improvement before we attempt anything else. However, there are provisions in State laws for the control of dogs enabling us to prevent some of the overpopulation. Just having a law on the books makes it easier to control the population. If it works in principal for dogs, it certainly should help in the case of cats. Although neutering programs show that more cats are being neutered than in the past, it still is not enough to overcome the rising population.

There are people who believe in the right of cats to be "Free Roamers." These are the same people who continue to put their cat out with the milk bottles at night. "Free roaming" means their cat has the right to be hit by cars, chased by dogs or to try to find a safe place to stay before returning home after dawn. One of the most common dangers we encounter here is that while seeking warmth, the cat tends to find a recently parked car and climb onto its warm motor for refuge. This is no refuge at all should the motorist return and start the motor. A sad and painful end for a pet that has been

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## A Different Kind of Dump

When it comes to taking out the trash, Wellesley, Massachusetts has combined the folksiness of a New England town with the practicality of a recycling center. For the past 15 years, the 28,000 townspeople there have voluntarily recycled 19 types of materials and built a waste transfer station that boasts a swap shop, a free flea market, and a used book library, organized by category and complete with a "dump librarian."

The Wellesley Recycling Disposal Facility (RDF) actually got its start back in 1960, says George Barry, RDF's superintendent for the past 12 years. At that time, the town had closed down its landfill facility in favor of a refuse incinerator. The incinerator was done away with in 1975, and the current RDF literally rose from its ashes.

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***By transforming a dump and encouraging recycling, the town has never had to provide curbside rubbish removal.***

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In addition to recycling paper, glass and aluminum cans, the facility also accepts plastic, copper, brass, iron and more. Free information sheets describe a list of items which can be recycled that homeowners may be unaware of, as well as ecologically safe alternatives to things like chlorine bleach, air freshener, oven cleaner and paint remover.

Perhaps most practical is the swap shop bulletin board. Here citizens can put up cards notifying neighbors that they have or want toxic materials to trade. "Wanted: oil-based paint," one might read, or "Available: flea powder." Everything from anti-freeze and benzene to roach spray and turpentine is exchanged. In the "Take It or Leave It" section, one resident might toss an unwanted but usable infant's car seat, toaster or patio chairs for another to take home. Town officials say the RDF also functions as a social gathering place for Wellesley-ites.

This seemingly visionary world of waste management, say many, is simply an illustration of the frugality and resourcefulness that New Englanders are known for. By transforming a dump and encouraging recycling, the town has never had to pro-

vide curbside rubbish removal. The RDF brings in capital and saves tax dollars. "It pays off in cost avoidance," says Barry, explaining that it is more expensive for a municipality to bury its garbage than it is to have a recycler come in and haul it away. "Eighty-five percent of the population willingly participates with about 3,000 cars passing through the RDF on an average Saturday," notes Barry, "so many that the local Girl Scouts now use the site to sell their cookies!"

Barry adds that over the years government officials from Massachusetts to Armenia have come to Wellesley to study the operation, and have gone home to implement their own version of the RDF. "We've had an influence on other communities, absolutely," states Barry in a characteristically low-key Yankee manner. "We're not what you'd call high-tech. But I would have to say we do a pretty good job for a dump."

C.W. Vrtacek

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## Photodegradable?

Last year we made a purchase at a local branch of a large drug store chain. The merchandise was placed in a bag that displayed the store name and the claim that it was "photodegradable." The concept was intriguing. The material, the claims asserted, would degrade to a fine powder that can be consumed by common microorganisms. All we needed to do was ensure that the bag would receive optimum exposure to ultraviolet rays (glass filters out the UV spectrum) and watch it disintegrate.

In June, the bag was placed on a brick surface, next to a white wall and where it would receive southern exposure. When it had not shown any appreciable (detectable to the naked eye) change by November, we wrote to the Senior Vice President of Merchandising at the head office of the drug store chain and received the following reply (excerpted):

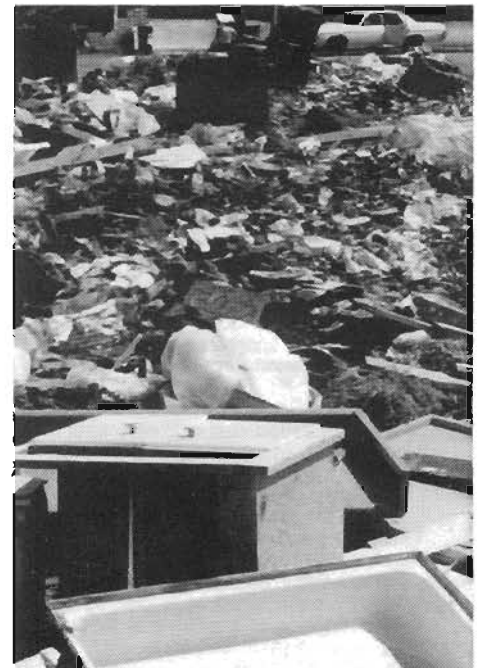
"Basically in reading through all of the information I did receive, there is no specific time frame given for the decomposition of 'photodegradable' plastic. The only statements given are:

the plastic bags contain a light sensitive ingredient. The ingredient is sensitive to ultraviolet light and once exposed will begin to break up. This destruction through direct sunlight exposure is commonly referred to as photodegradability. The thickness of the film will effect the rapidity of degradation.

"Since you were looking for any information on this subject, I have taken the liberty of forwarding you copies of the literature I obtained from our suppliers."

An examination of the above mentioned literature revealed that "Breakdown time is measured in months depending on the length of exposure. This process once started will continue even in the dark." "Ultra-violet exposure starts a sequence of reactions which cause the chains to break down into shorter and shorter units. Finally the chains are so short that the plastic article becomes brittle and eventually disintegrates." This last statement appeared above photographs which showed the disintegration of a tray which looked similar to those used for meat in large supermarkets. The sequence demonstrated the disintegration of the tray in 10-day increments with the small fragment level appearing after 50 days.

The bag remains in the yard at the Latham Foundation where it still has not shown any sign of disintegration. It receives full sunlight and no protection from the elements. Have any of our readers observed different results, or is "photodegradable" just a meaningless word?



*The Latham Letter, Spring 1991*

# Wildlife Sends S.O.S.: "Save Our Species"

What do the snow leopard, giant panda, whooping crane, green pitcher plant, noonday snail and the Queen Alexandria birdwing butterfly have in common? They are all endangered species.

But not only do these, and thousands of other plants and animals share the threat of extinction, they also share a common enemy—the human species. The phenomenal growth in human population is taking its toll as natural habitats are paved over, built on, polluted, lumbered and mined— all to "benefit" encroaching civilization.

The planet's dwindling biological diversity is of urgent concern, say scientists. Although extinctions have been occurring naturally for hundreds of millions of years, the current rate of extinction is something new. According to Harvard biologist E.O. Wilson, we may be losing as many as 17,500 species each year—and the trend is accelerating. By the early 21st century, we could witness *several hundred extinctions per day*. This alarming increase is directly linked to the rise in human population.

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***"Nearly all national parks have lost some wild animal species, chiefly because the parks are too small to sustain them or because of encroaching development."***

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Plants and animals represent a pool from which humanity draws for agriculture, medicine and industry. The global food supply depends on a very few species of plants—less than 20 species for 90 percent of world food consumption. About one-half of the pharmaceutical products on the market include ingredients derived from sources in the wild. But biological diversity gives us much more than just products. It also provides us with crucial "ecosystem services"—such as clean water, a breathable atmosphere and natural climate control—upon which all species, including human, survive.

The estimated number of plant and animal species worldwide ranges to 30 million or more, although scientists



have only catalogued 1.4 million species. More than half live in tropical rainforests. Considering that at least 40 percent of the Earth's tropical forests have already been destroyed, the enormity of this destruction, in terms of both number of acres and number of plant and animal species, is staggering.

## **Survival of the Fittest?**

According to an article appearing in *The Christian Science Monitor*, the clash between humans and wildlife is evident in virtually every part of the country. Consider Florida, where each week some 10,000 people move into the state. It is a rate of growth that is "literally overwhelming everything," says Bill Partington, who heads up the Florida Conservation Foundation.

As man continues to crowd into Florida, the endangered manatee is harder pressed to avoid propeller blades while looking for vanishing seagrass beds for grazing. Fifty-one manatees were killed by boats in 1989, more than twice as many as were killed annually during the early 1980s. An estimated 1200 manatees still survive, but more people than that move into the state in any two days. "It doesn't take a real genius to figure that the problems they face today are going to multiply in the future," says Richard Frohlich, a marine mammal

biologist, with Florida's Department of Natural Resources.

The Florida panther has a much weaker hold on survival. Between 20 and 50 of the cats remain. Highway traffic across the Everglades remains a major threat to the nearly extinct animals. The biggest problem, according to state researchers, is the loss of panther habitat to subdivisions, citrus groves, and other development.

Humans have another devastating influence on wildlife—pollution. Nowhere was this more graphic than the massive Valdez oil spill, affecting more than 700 miles of Alaskan coastline, and killing thousands of waterfowl, seabirds, bald eagles, otters, seals, and threatening the survival of the state's largest pink salmon fisheries.

Our polluting ways continue to threaten wildlife across the nation. The Chesapeake Bay, for instance, is the nation's most productive estuary, and ranks behind only the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans in harvests for U.S. fishermen. But the number of people living close to the Bay grew from 3.7 million in 1940 to 12.5 million in 1985 and is expected to swell by an additional 2 million by the year 2000. The press of population has turned the Chesapeake into a catch basin that collects the refuse of 5,000 pollution sources, including factories, farms

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and sewage treatment plants. Runoff from lawns, roads, parking lots and farmland carries pesticides, petroleum and other toxic materials into the Bay. The wastes produced by the soaring population have reduced the Chesapeake's seafood catch to a shadow of 19th-century levels.

"At our current pace, we are losing ground to growth," says Virginia's plant ecologist, E. Spencer Wise. "We never dreamed that there would be more McDonald's than sand dunes in Virginia Beach."

In 1984, in an effort to help save the Bay, a sweeping land-use control measure was introduced. Known as the Maryland Critical Area Program, the legislation aims to preserve the natural lands that remain around the edges of the Bay and its rivers. It also gives a 21-member commission the authority to reject local development in the critical zone that will degrade water quality or destroy wildlife habitat. By linking land use policies with wildlife protection and water quality, the Critical Area program has broken new ground. In the bill's preamble, the legislature went even further, recognizing that even when traditional sources of pollution are controlled, *"the number, movements and activities of persons in an area can create adverse environmental impacts."*

## Federal Retreat

As development and agriculture consume an ever-expanding share of the natural environment, wildlife refuges play a key role in protecting the nation's wildlife. But according to a recent report by the General Accounting Office (GAO), the birds, fish and other animals in the nation's 452 wildlife refuges are seriously threatened by human intrusions.

Finding that 60 percent of the refuges in the 89-million-acre system are threatened by such human interferences as military training flights, off-road vehicles, oil and gas drilling and water skiing, the report warns of irreversible wildlife declines unless refuges are protected. In Louisiana's 17,000-acre D'Arbonne National Wildlife Refuge, for example, 165 gas wells have been drilled, destroying habitat with salt water used in drilling operations and threatening to drive out the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker.

"We are only kidding ourselves if we think we can protect wildlife resources while at the same time pol-

luting their water, destroying their habitat and harassing their young," said Rep. Gerry E. Studds (D-MA), chairman of the House Merchant Marine and Fisheries subcommittee on fisheries and wildlife conservation.

Wildlife in national parks are also at risk as the country continues to be developed at an unsustainably high rate. Nearly all national parks have lost some wild animal species, chiefly because the parks are too small to sustain them or because of encroaching development. Evidence of the big squeeze is everywhere. Ninety percent of the wading-bird species, the Everglades' prime wildlife attraction, have disappeared from the park in the past 30 years. Yellowstone, the oldest national park, is experiencing an ever tightening circle of mining, oil wells, timber clearcutting, vacation homes and suburban sprawl. This development is threatening the bison, moose, antelope, elk, grizzlies and other incomparable wildlife that depend upon grazing ranges that extend throughout the greater Yellowstone region.

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***"... our grandchildren may live on a planet inhabited by less than half the species of plants and animals populating ours."***

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Wetlands, which support a vast and beautiful array of wildlife, have also become a major focus of concern. Of the list of endangered or threatened species, it has been estimated that about 45 percent of the animal species and about 25 percent of the listed plants use wetland habitat. But the nation's wetland acreage has been shrinking rapidly in recent decades as they are drained for agriculture, industry, shopping malls, housing subdivisions and other development or dredged for transportation or other purposes. The United States has already lost over 54 percent of its original wetlands.

Even the 16-year old Endangered Species Act is racked with problems. This legislation requires the federal government to develop and implement specific programs to aid all U.S. species listed as "endangered" (facing imminent extinction) or "threatened" (likely to become endangered soon).

Unfortunately, recent studies show that federal programs aimed at recovering these species—returning them to a non-threatened status—fall short of what the law mandates.

According to a GAO report, as of May 1988, no recovery plans have been developed for 113 U.S. endangered species—26 percent of those listed at that time. Moreover, GAO found, even for the 271 species having recovery plan, completion of recovery activities—such as creating a captive breeding program, monitoring wild populations or buying critical habitats—averaged 6.5 years.

## Restoring Earth's Nest Egg

If trends continue, our grandchildren may live on a planet inhabited by less than half the species of plants and animals populating ours. "The loss of genetic and species diversity," E.O. Wilson once wrote, "... is the folly our descendants are least likely to forgive us."

Hope? Many are trying to pull the reins of runaway habitat destruction. Scientists and conservationists are working hard to find out more about the habitat needs of particular species, how to recover habitat that has been destroyed and how people's needs can be balanced with the needs of plants and animal species. Concerned citizens are battling local growth and development and pushing for legislation to protect their community's natural surroundings.

It seems inevitable that if the human population continues to grow as projected, habitat loss will occur at an even greater pace than it has in the past. In this country alone, our population is projected to increase by more than 30 million in the next two decades—nearly doubling our 1950 population.

*The above information was provided through a fact sheet distributed by Zero Population Growth. For further information, write: Zero Population Growth, 1400 16th Street N.W., Suite 320, Washington, DC 20036.*

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*Nature is one connected whole. At any given moment every part must be precisely what it is, because all other parts are what they are, and not a grain of sand could be moved from its place without changing something throughout all parts of the immeasurable whole.*

— J.G. Fichte:  
(*Die Bestimmung des Menschen*, 1880)

*The Latham Letter, Spring 1991*

## Religion and Birth Control

The following essays are in response to a solicitation, from the editors of *The New Road*, to scholars within all major faiths to provide their views on the population issue. They are reprinted courtesy of *The New Road*, the bulletin of the WWF (World Wildlife Fund) Network on Conservation and Religion.



### Judaism

The world's need is not the Jewish need. A line on a graph depicting world population growth since 1880 rises almost vertically. Previously it described a slow gradual horizontal ascent. From 1 billion to over 4 billion in under a century is a catastrophe for the human race, underlying our problems of environment, water, food, famine, disease, conflict. The spread of new diseases, like AIDS, has had little impact on this unprecedented growth, assisted as it is by the advance of medical science. This is a major challenge for all world religions.

For us Jews the problem is almost the reverse. Behind every facet of Jewish life, especially the policy of the State of Israel, lies the shadow of the 1939-1945 Holocaust. One-third of our people were destroyed in six years. It was, and remains, shattering for the Jewish people. Hence our approach is one of survival rather than overpopulation.

Jews, particularly orthodox Jews, try to follow God's first Biblical injunction: "Be fruitful and multiply." Hence Jewish teaching is totally against

celibacy, monasticism, homosexuality, non-marriage. According to the Talmud, a great Rabbinical code compiled about 1500 years ago, "an unmarried man is not a man in the full sense." It adds, "In the world to come, one of the first questions to a man will be 'Did you raise a family?'"

Monogamy was the Biblical ideal and remains the Jewish ideal of marriage. The Hebrew word for marriage is "sanctification." Childlessness was tragic. In the Bible, Sarah, Rachel, Hannah are all barren, yet their prayers are answered. The Patriarch Abraham cries, "O Lord God, what will thou give me seeing that I go childless?" Absence of children after 10 years is an automatic ground for divorce.

Our duty is to have children and pass on our religious heritage. Birth control and contraception are frowned upon unless the mother's life is endangered, but permitted if appropriate in individual circumstances. Sex is not sinful, but a crucial part of our make-up, to be enjoyed, within marriage, as a means of procreation and a channel of love. Adultery remains a sin, condemned since the time of Moses.

Abortion is not favored in Judaism but permitted to save a mother's life or health. The mother's importance to her husband and family is given preference over the life of an unborn child.

Democratic debate within Judaism continues today on issues such as artificial insemination (a debate started by the Rabbis over 1700 years ago), surrogate motherhood and medical ethics.

For the tiny Jewish population the old injunction remains: be fruitful and multiply, have children, pass on the Jewish witness to God and to human progress. On the other hand, if a population explosion can only lead to the destruction of nature and human dignity, another view has now to be considered on the basis of the Jewish environmental precept, "Thou shalt not destroy."

*Aubrey Rose OBE  
Chairman, Jewish Working Group on  
the Environment, UK*

### Jain Faith

The notion that the population of a society can increase to a point where it threatens the health and welfare of that society is, for Jains, entirely modern. Indeed, Jain literature, some of which dates back to the fifteenth century BC, teaches that birth as a

human being is a rare and fortunate event in the cosmic theme. In addition, the Jain population has always been so small, relative to the surrounding non-Jain community (less than seven million in modern India) that Jains may



well have been more concerned about too few people rather than too many.

However, self-restraint and non-harm in thought, speech and action are the essence of the Jain religion and way of life. Viewed in this light, birth control through self-restraint can be seen as a religious command.

Birth control should be an ethical pursuit based on the attitude that all life is sacred. Thinking, ethical people accept as good the preservation and promotion of life and nurturing of each life so that it may develop. They recognize as evil the destruction and injury of life and the suppression of its development.

Jain society has always included a vital community of monks and nuns whose lives are seen as models of the spiritual life and who take permanent vows of celibacy. Celibacy is also encouraged for the lay person, not for purposes of population control but because it involves the kind of self-control and transcendence of passions that are conducive to spiritual progress. Recognizing that such self-control may be too difficult to maintain in the context of marriage, Jain lawgivers have taught that married couples should remain monogamous and should find contentment through moderation in their conjugal activities.

Because Jains believe that a soul takes birth as a result of its own actions (karma) and not as a part of a

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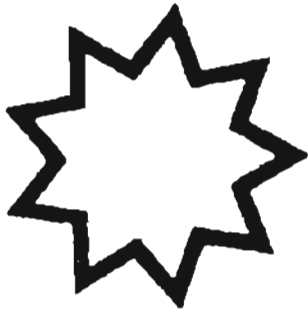
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# Religion and Birth Control

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divine plan of creation, they are under no doctrinal obligation to bear children and may choose to take vows of temporary abstinence, particularly during times in which the risk of pregnancy is greatest. If abstinence proves too difficult to maintain, they may independently decide to use medically approved methods of birth control that interrupt the procreative process prior to fertilization. Because Jains believe that life begins at the moment of conception, those methods are considered not to kill and are therefore consistent with ahimsa, non-violence. Post-fertilization methods of birth control such as abortion, however, do violate that principle and are therefore unacceptable.

*Prof. Padmanabh S Jaini  
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## Baha'i Faith

*"The well-being of mankind, its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established."*

— *Baha'u'llah*

The prophet-founder of the Baha'i Faith thus outlines the pivotal principle of the Baha'i approach to the environment and related issues. Our efforts now and in the future to safeguard our common habitat and to promote the well-being and development of all peoples must be characterized by a unified approach within an effective universal framework.

The unity envisioned by the Baha'i teachings recognizes the essential oneness of humanity, living inter-dependently as one world community on one earth. The problems of economic relations and the use of natural resources must be addressed from a global perspective with due regard for the differing needs of the wide diversity of peoples and cultures.

Nothing short of a world system responsible for the global management of the ecosystems and resources of the planet will be able to resolve the current situation, which finds nation states clinging to short-term, national self-interest while trying to manage an integrating and rapidly changing world.

Such a radical change in society will only be possible through the widespread adoption of universal values which give primacy to global solidarity and the long-term interests of the human race.

Within this context Baha'is address population control and related issues. Although not specifically addressing the issue of birth control and the problems of overpopulation, the Baha'i Sacred Writings do outline a new model for the effective social and economic development of the world community.

This model, which is built around a new system for non-adversarial community decision-making, advocates economic justice, universal education and adequate health care for all. It emphasizes the importance of the family in the development process, and respects human rights and human dignity. Currently, Baha'is sponsor more than 1000 social and economic development projects world-wide.

Time and again it has been shown that improvements in health, education and living standards contribute greatly to a decline in the population growth rate. The question of population is best addressed as part of an integrated approach to the development needs, rights and responsibilities of all members of a united world community.

The Baha'i Sacred Writings carry the implicit promise that the earth has the capacity both to heal its ravages and to sustain an ever-advancing civilization. Guided by this promise, Baha'is are confident that, despite the current signs of impending environmental catastrophe, it is possible to create a sustainable new world society that meets the needs of all its

peoples while protecting and preserving the natural environment.



## Sikhism

This precious world has immense physical resources for agricultural and mineral production which are still unused, but they are not infinite.

In recent years the population has increased at an alarming rate. This growth in population has been due to various reasons, amongst them the advancement in medical science and a number of social and economic pressures facing people in poor countries.

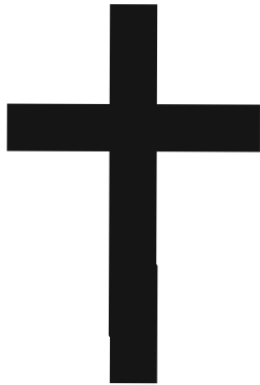
Sikhs, along with everyone else, are concerned that the demands imposed on the earth's natural resources by the rapid growth in numbers will not be met indefinitely. In seeking solutions to this problem, Sikhism offers a common sense approach.

Sikhism accepts that there are enough resources placed on this planet by God to fulfil the needs of its inhabitants. It is up to the occupants to ensure that these resources are not misused. If, however, we are not in harmony with His Hukam (divine will) then the human race will suffer the consequences of its own actions. In this respect we will have to heed His word and make efforts to help bring human population into balance with the natural environment.

In order to restore the balance Sikhism believes that population control methods should be adopted. However, in adopting these methods Sikhism advocates that we should not plunge into intrusive and coercive

methods of family planning. God has provided us with more natural methods, based on restraint and self control, which ensure that birth rates approach more acceptable levels.

*Dr. B.S. Bagga, General-Secretary,  
Sikh Education Council, UK*



## Christianity

Over the last 60 to 70 years, the Anglican Communion has shifted its position on birth control and population issues. In 1920, it was firmly opposed to artificial birth control.

"The Lambreth Conference\* ... regards with grave concern the spread in modern society of theories and practices hostile to the family. We utter an emphatic warning against the use of unnatural means for the avoidance of conception ..."

By 1930, the bishops were back-pedaling on this line. They recognized that there was a strong tradition against contraception, but found it to be un-Biblical and not to have the authority of any of the ancient Councils of the Churches behind it. They then went on to acknowledge that there were valid circumstances which justified birth control—such as health or the ability of the family to survive yet another child. They favored abstinence, but were realistic enough to realize this was unlikely to be heeded!

The main shift came in 1958 when an Encyclical Letter was published which linked the fact that there "are many lands today where population is increasing so fast that the survival of young and old is threatened" with the

fact that "In such countries population control has become a necessity." While condemning abortion and infanticide, the Letter backed "methods of control, medically endorsed and morally accepted."

The church placed all this in a much wider framework, however. In 1958, while acknowledging that population growth was a major threat to the world, they also spoke of the social injustice which undermined the world and meant an unjust distribution of the world's resources.

In 1988, this was put more strongly. The Anglican Communion accepts the need for birth control, but does not succumb to the simplistic idea that size of population alone affects the use of natural resources. Its understanding of the need for population control is set first and foremost within the need to create a more just society and to eliminate poverty. While the rich countries have largely controlled their population, they still continue to devour most of the world's resources. In 1988 the Conference issued the following statements:

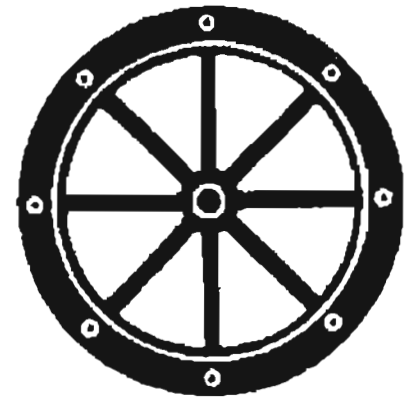
"This Conference: calls attention to the life-and-death urgency of the problems of world poverty ... and calls for an international, cooperated settlement, negotiated by both industrial and developing countries, that will establish policies to reduce interest charges and the level of indebtedness, based upon shared responsibility for the world debt and in accordance with Christian and humanitarian principles of economic justice and social and ecological interdependence."

\*The Lambreth conferences take place about each ten years and allow Anglican bishops (who represent 68 million members) to discuss topics of importance.

*Martin Palmer  
Anglican Layman*

## Buddhism

In the Buddhist picture of the Wheel of Life the pig, cock and the snake, symbolizing greed, ill-will and ignorance, pursue one another in an endless circle. What drives them is the deep-seated anxiety and dread arising from the sense of impermanence, fragility and insecurity in our lives. To escape from our fear we try (unsuccessfully) to cover it up with a strong sense of self. So we are forever chasing after possessions we don't really need (consumerism). And we badly need to "make our mark on the world,"



which commonly amounts to selfish, aggressive and competitive behavior of one kind or another. And these personal drives have become consolidated in destructive social institutions and habits. We get a lot of hot-blooded satisfaction, for example, from belonging to an in-group set against others who are "different." Nations oppose nations, white against black, men against women, and, not least, "Man" against "nature."

Instead of seeing ourselves as part of nature we see it as something "out there" to be conquered. And so we have greedily exploited it and poisoned it without regard even for our own future. The environmental crisis is thus, for Buddhists, a direct result of our characteristically deluded reactions to the problem of being human.

Buddhism offers a path of meditative spiritual practice which can lead us to a whole-hearted acceptance of our vulnerable human condition. For within all of us lies a clear-seeing Buddha ("awakened") Nature which, freed of the struggle to maintain a sense of being "separate" over and against everything else, can do no other than to respond selflessly to the needs of people and the planet. The Buddha enjoined us to cultivate loving-kindness and compassion for all beings and to give freely of our time and energy in service. A simplicity and frugality of lifestyles comes naturally with the clarity and joy of awakening Our True Nature. We are no longer driven to consume more than we really need and are happy to share what we have.

Here there is no place for dogmas and the lust to be always in the right. "Be a light unto yourselves."

*Continued on page 10*

*Page 9*

# Religion and Birth Control

continued from page 9

proclaimed the Buddha. In both public and private life many difficult and problematic choices and decisions have to be made. We can only do our best, in meditative reflection, to be both honest, compassionate and well-informed, and to approach each problem (such as abortion) in the light of the particular situation.

The Buddhist belief in one world and the interconnectedness of all beings is beautifully expressed in the metaphor Indra's Jewelled Net. At each intersection of the web there is a jewel in which the light of all the other jewels is reflected and which reflects light back to them. None can exist on its own and yet all exist "separately." It is worth pondering this truth of our interbeing. For example, human greed and destructiveness is causing the loss of a species of creature or plant every four hours. Indra's Net is being torn apart, and yet we are Indra's Net!

Ken Jones

Network of Engaged Buddhists



## Islam

It was 5:30 a.m. when I decided to jog across the deserted sandy beach near Jeddah. The sea was calm save for the breeze of the early morning as it awakened the sleepy date palms to the dawn prayer call which echoed from a peaceful mosque. I was rather concerned about what to say to the audience I would be addressing that evening. The topic was family planning and my initial feeling was that of a Muslim who has been educated in the West to assume that the smaller the family, the better attention we can

give it. An Arab man passed me and in a typical way shouted, "Go and Pray."

I looked at the man as I jogged, he appeared to be in his late fifties; his face looked healthy despite the wrinkled cheeks and decayed teeth. I decided to follow his advice since I was tired anyway. After the prayer I thought it is now my turn for remonstration so I smiled and said to him as we were leaving, "You should pay more attention to your teeth, my friend. A good Muslim is expected to brush his teeth more often." The man looked at me and unexpectedly laughed saying, "Young man, I kept my teeth in very good order until I was seventy then they started to decay. They only started decaying when I ate imported food and breathed air-conditioned air."

I was stunned ... then I thought to myself, here is a man who might be able to help me with some ideas for the lecture that I had traveled a long way to give. I said to him with apprehension, "What do you think of birth control?" He looked at me as I was trying to guess his real age and said, "In birth what? Are you not a Muslim?" I responded to him, "Why not?" He then said, "Mohammad said: Muslims should increase their number since their number is part of Muhammad's pride. Isn't that reason enough?"

At that point I thought I'd better put it to him straight, "Isn't it better for mankind to organize their numbers in order to fit their resources?"

He grabbed my hand and walked out of the tiny mosque and pointed to the sea saying, "Who controls the birth of the fish, or any of the inhabitants of this womb ... hah? Go answer me."

Dr. Mawil Izzi Dien

University of Wales, Lampeter

## Hinduism

Sexual union in Hinduism is essentially a religious act. In the Bhagavad Gita Krishna declares that He is present in sex which is in with Dharma, or religious purposes (BG 7.11). The basic Vedic religious principle for sex is that it is intended for procreation. Union should be between husband and wife, at the time most appropriate for conception to take place and the act should be preceded by the ceremony known as garbhadhana samskara, or the blessing for conception, in order to ensure an auspicious outcome.



The Vedic histories abound with stories of royal families of epic proportions, such as the hundred sons of King Dhritarashtra or the hundred sons of King Rishabhadeva. Krishna Himself was said to have had sixteen thousand queens each of whom bore him ten sons. The exception among the great personalities of Vedic history was Rama who had only two sons, Luv and Kush, and the five Pandava brothers, each of whom had only one with their single wife Draupadi, and who between them left only one heir.

The Vedic tradition has however always held aloft the virtue of celibacy, called brahmacharya, and there are more important Vedic personalities who had no issue, such as Narada Muni and Bhisma. In keeping with this tradition birth control could only really be practiced by self-restraint. It would seem that the truly authentic Hindu response to the practice of contraception would have to be to reject it as unnatural and harmful.

In the present-day context of runaway increase in human population on the Indian sub-continent this may seem bad news. But it should be remembered that traditionally the Vedic culture has not considered overpopulation as an issue. In His city of Dvaraka, built in the bay of Dvaraka five thousand years ago, Krishna is said to have housed a population of millions. Sheer human numbers have never been seen by Hindus as an obstacle to prosperity, but the way in which society has lived, has been. For example, the Bhagavata Purana explains that the descent of Lord Krishna was in order to reduce the overburden of materialistic armies who were living on the earth at the time and whose

The Latham Letter, Spring 1991

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## Rewarding Research

greed was destroying the peaceful life of Vedic religiosity.

Hindu teaching, therefore, would say that overpopulation is itself not a threat, but wasteful, materialistic living which promotes greed and materialism is. There is enough in the world to support a population many times the present one but not to cater for the greed of modern industrial society which has abandoned the simplicity of previous ages.

Hindus today must be asked to remember the example of Lord Rama, whose life is always considered to have been the ideal for human behavior, and be satisfied with a small family. But at the same time the God-given resources of this planet must be more equitably distributed and their exploitation for the sake of ever-increasing luxuries at the expense of the needs of the poor must be controlled. To attempt to limit the size of the families of the poor while encouraging the rich to continue consuming many hundreds of times more than is either necessary or healthy for them cannot be supported anywhere in the spiritual teachings of India.

*Ranchor Prime*

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## Ecology in Poland

After so many years of state managed news from behind the Iron Curtain, it is now fascinating to learn of an Eastern European population's sincere preoccupations and concerns. Latham Letter readers will find that Poland's *Green Brigades: Ecologists Paper*, Winter 1990/91 issue provides a number of candid articles by its freedom-loving citizens, in which they express deep and abiding concerns for the quality of life supporting elements of their nation. The interesting 24 page, green ink, pamphlet, printed in English, is published by and available through:

The Faculty of Chemistry of the Jagiellonian University  
Karasia 3/100  
30 060 Krakow  
Poland

In the last decade, Dr. Aline H. Kidd, professor of psychology at Mills College in Oakland, California, and her husband Robert M. Kidd have produced groundbreaking research on children and their pets.

It was the Kidds' 1987 study, "Reactions of Infants and Toddlers to Live and Toy Animals," which showed for the first time that year-old infants can distinguish between real animals and stuffed toys and by 18 months are strongly attached to the family pet.

These findings led the couple to examine the relationship between children and pets more closely. Since children at such a young age care so deeply for their pets, the Kidds "felt it important to study some of the factors which influence children's attitudes toward pets."

During the past two years, the Kidds have sifted through a mammoth amount of paperwork—questionnaires, eight pages each, literally filled the living room of their home—to produce some of the first studies concerning how children and adults form their attitudes toward pets.

"The real influence here is childhood," Aline Kidd says, summing up this new work. "Eighty-eight percent of pet owners had pets as kids, and three-quarters have exactly the same kind of pet which they had as kids. In other words, if you had a cocker spaniel as a child, nothing else will do."

In total, the Kidds received data from 700 parents who answered questions about their own and their children's interaction or lack of interaction with pets, and 200 adult pet owners and non-owners.

The study of adults revealed that women care more about their pets than men do; single men and women were more attached than married couples; childless couples cherish pets more than those with children.

Dr. Kidd explains: "The real variable is time and space to nurture. If you're taking care of little ones or elderly parents, you have less time for your dog or cat."

It is not surprising, perhaps, that women were more involved in activities with pets and ended up doing more pet chores than men.

"Women are more inclined—and more encouraged by society—to nurture," Kidd notes. "Singles and childless couples also have more time and energy and less opportunity for nurturing" than parents.

The majority of men and women who didn't own pets reported that they were quite happy with their status and that 40 percent had not had a pet as a child.

The study of children's attitudes toward pets included three age groups—preschool, grade school, and high school—and families of varying size.

The Kidds discovered that "grade schoolers have the most interaction with, activities with, and responsibility for pets." They reasoned that preschoolers were too young to have much responsibility for animals and that as teenagers become more involved in peer group activities, they tend to draw away from family and pets.

Again, the Kidds found that girls interacted more than boys; however they found "no difference in interest between single-child families and large families."

Using this information, the Kidds handed out 300 new questionnaires to preschool through high school-age children. Their responses showed that books, TV programs, movies and school assignments about animals; caring for a neighbor's pet; and enjoyment of zoos and wildlife parks were all "significant and positive" experiences that encouraged children to like pets. The only difference was that children who owned pets reported doing more of these things than those without pets.

Kidd also mentioned that "boys read more books on breeds of animals, animal caretaking, habitats and lifestyles, while girls read more of the classical novels such as *Black Beauty* and *The Yearling*."

Together, these studies demonstrate clearly that children are influenced by pet ownership, movies, TV shows, books, schoolwork, zoos, parks, and their parents' attitudes toward pets. A child living in an environment where people care for pets seeks out further experiences with and information about pets and animals; this in turn may help children "to develop positive attitudes toward conservation and preservation of the wilderness in general and of wild animals in particular."

"Pets teach children an awful lot," Kidd concludes, "including that hardest lesson—death. Children learn about the natural order from animals. They can also be taught respect for natural life through pets."

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## National Right to Life Committee

Douglas Johnson, the Legislative Director of the National Right to Life Committee, Inc. (NRLC), wrote a letter to the Washington Post newspaper in response to an opinion piece which appeared in that publication, that Mr. Johnson perceived as "grossly distorted the positions of the National Rights to Life Committee."

The opinion piece alleged that certain environmental groups "offended" the NRLC by supporting "international population control." Mr. Johnson's letter to the editor clarified the position of the NRLC as taking no position on population control programs that do not include abortion.

To further clarify the position of the NRLC regarding population control, Mr. Douglas provided material to Latham, and portions of it are reprinted here without the endorsement or criticism of the Latham Foundation.

Pro-abortion groups will press hard to restore funding to overseas pro-abortion groups during the 1991-92 Congress. The National Right to Life Committee (NRLC) strongly supports continuation of the Reagan-Bush "Mexico City Policy," under which overseas agencies must agree to adhere to contraceptive measures in order to qualify for U.S. "population assistance" funding.

During the 1970s and early 1980s, this program was the major source of funding for a number of organizations which vigorously promoted abortion, in many less-developed countries. In 1984, President Reagan adopted the "Mexico City Policy," under which private organizations which "perform or actively promote abortion as a method of family planning in other nations," or which campaign to repeal anti-abortion laws in foreign nations, are ineligible for population assistance funds. There are exceptions for abortions performed to save the life of the mother, or in cases of rape or incest.

Most overseas family-planning groups have complied with the Mexico City Policy and continue to receive U.S. funds. Two organizations which are strongly committed to the repeal of foreign anti-abortion laws have refused to comply; they are the London-based International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) and its U.S. affiliate, the Planned Parenthood Federation of America (PPFA). However 57 other IPPF affiliates have accepted the Mexico City Policy.

The Mexico City Policy is not an "anti-family planning" policy. As the

U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has repeatedly assured Congress, every dollar removed from IPPF-London and PPFA has been re-programmed to other agencies which agree to adhere to contraception.

NRLC takes no position on contraception or on federal funding of contraceptive services, at home or overseas. In 1990 as in earlier years, NRLC representatives testified before the House and Senate Appropriations subcommittees that NRLC does not oppose funding increases for population assistance, so long as the funds continue to be governed by the Mexico City Policy and by the Kemp-Kasten anti-coercion law. [Note: the Mexico City Policy should not be confused with the Kemp-Kasten anti-coercion law, which denies "population assistance" funds to organizations which "support or participate in the management of a program of coercive abortion or involuntary sterilization." Under this law, the U.N. Population fund has received no U.S. funds since 1985, due to that agency's extensive involvement in China's coercive population-control program.]

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*If government knew how, I should like to see it check, not multiply the population. When it reaches its true law of action, every man that is born will be hailed as essential.*

— R.W. Emerson

*Man tends to increase at a greater rate than his means of subsistence; consequently he is occasionally subjected to a severe struggle for existence.*

— Charles Darwin



## Stray Cats

continued from page 3

turned out to the dangers that lie in wait for those free-roaming animals.

As laws now stand, there are no cat rights or protection provided. This is a sad situation when one stops to think about it.

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***"...until some legislator gets a bill introduced .. I feel that the situation will continue to worsen."***

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I've noted that among pets being adopted from our shelter, cats are really becoming more popular. I'm sure it is because landlords are inclined to accept cats over dogs in rental properties.

A major problem is caused by people we consider "animal collectors." Their very being adds to our cat overpopulation problem. These are people who start by taking in one or two cats that appear to have no homes and continue this trait until the house is overrun with cats. They do not bother to segregate the sexes nor do they have the cats spayed or castrated, so the numbers multiply rapidly. A solution is to have an ordinance allowing 1—3 cats per household.

Cat fanciers, cat breeders, and people who just love the feline species, approve wholeheartedly of cat licensing as a means of protection for all cats. Laws providing licenses would also offer incentives, as do the dog laws, on reduction of license costs when the cat is neutered.

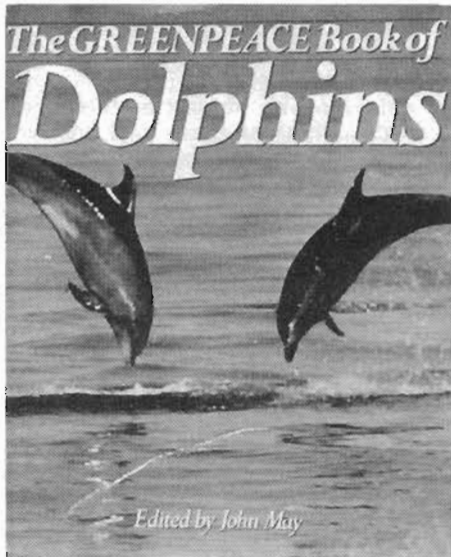
I fully believe cat licensing can be the answer to a host of problems in the specie overpopulation. It's not going to be easy at the start, but after the first year or so, we would see a population reduction. At that time, hopefully, stray cats in shelters might have a better chance of being claimed by their owners.

I predict that such legislation requiring the licensing of cats will be forthcoming in the not too far distant future. When this does occur, I hope all those that have concern for cats will pick up the banner, contact legislators and encourage its passage into law.

Frank M. Rogers is the Executive Director of the Humane Society of Rochester & Monroe County. For further information, Mr. Rogers may be contacted through the: Humane Society of Rochester & Monroe County, 99 Victor Road, Fairport, NY 14450. ✠

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## Relevant Reading



### **The Greenpeace Book of Dolphins**

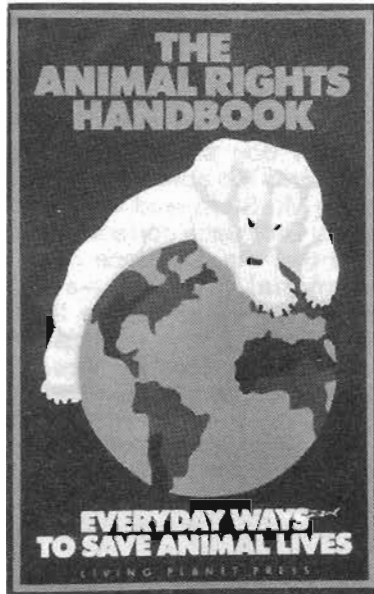
Edited by John May  
Sterling Publishing Company  
387 Park Avenue South  
New York, NY 10016-8810  
160 pages, hardcover \$29.95

*The Greenpeace Book of Dolphins* is a wonderfully detailed account of the dolphins' environment. Beautifully illustrated with charts, maps and nearly a hundred color photographs, it provides information from the physiology of the mammal, through its behavior to the hazards it now faces in its fast changing world. The book is arranged in several sections, each of which provide in-depth information.

Much of the material has been presented before, although in many cases not nearly as well, but there are segments which explore areas less familiar to the lay reader. Any book that represents itself as being a definitive account on dolphins cannot ignore the many dangers these unique mammals face and *The Greenpeace Book on Dolphins* certainly does provide that information. It is a riveting discourse on the perils of pollution, fishing and even on the ethics of captivity.

This book is more than a recount of dolphin life, it also explains how we can all join the effort to protect the dolphins and become involved in the overall endeavor to improve the environment. In a passage that illustrates the interdependence of all living things, it states: "Through our arrogance and ignorance we have already managed to wreak tremendous damage to extensive areas of our *The Latham Letter*, Spring 1991

planet. By the time such damage shows up in animals such as dolphins, then you can be sure that there is devastation being wrought on a far larger scale further down the food chain. In that sense, dolphins are symbolic of what we have done, and what we are still doing, to the marine ecosystem."



### **The Animal Rights Handbook: Everyday Ways to Save Animals and Lives**

Laura Fraser, Stephen Zawistowski,  
Joshua Horwitz & Stephen Tukul  
Living Planet Press  
558 Rose Avenue  
Venice, CA 90291  
113 pages, \$4.95 plus postage

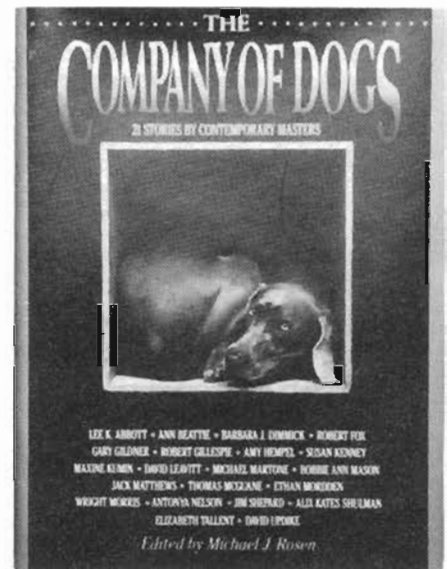
The recent increased assertiveness of those in the ranks of advocates for animal rights have, in a number of instances, engendered the opposition of others who consider their position scientifically unjustified. Meanwhile, misguided proponents for each side of the controversy have spoken and/or acted irrationally, illegally, or at least in total ignorance of the rationale held by their opposition.

For the opponent, *The Animal Rights Handbook* offers the open minded reader with a clearly expressed, unemotional explanation of the position taken by those convinced that animals have legitimate rights and

the need for those rights to be respected. For those proponents concerned with the enforcement of animal rights, *The Animal Rights Handbook* provides references and constructive suggestions on how they, as individuals, can assist their implementation.

*The Animal Rights Handbook* should be required reading for everyone concerned with its subject, whether pro or con.

Hugh H. Tebault



### **The Company of Dogs**

Edited by Michael J. Rosen  
Doubleday  
666 Fifth Avenue  
New York, NY 10103  
323 Pages, Hardcover \$19.95  
(\$24.95 Canada)

After reading the advance notices announcing *The Company of Dogs*, I eagerly anticipated reading the book. The concept of an anthology of 21 stories by contemporary writers exploring the relationship that we have with dogs was exciting and, even better, the royalties and a portion of the profit from the sales will be donated to animal welfare agencies around the country. The book itself was not at all what I expected.

There are, in addition to the short stories, a section of photographs and a section of cartoons. The photographs by William Wegman of a Weimaraner are, in an artistic sense,

Continued on page 14  
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## Relevant Reading

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quite remarkable although the dog did look uncomfortable in some of them. The cartoons by Charles Barsotti are delightful.

Like many anthologies, there are stories that one likes better than others. What I found surprising was that some of the stories dealt with distasteful subject matter. Some of the dogs were abused, i.e., one was not euthanized, even though it was suffering, because a young child could not bear it. Consequently, it was allowed to suffer prolonged pain until it finally died.

This book is not for the squeamish or tender-hearted. *The Company of Dogs* does indeed explore the many facets of the relationship we have with dogs and, true to life, not all of them are pleasant.

### ***The Loving Bond: Companion Animals in the Helping Professions***

Edited by Phil Arkow

R & E Publishers

P.O. Box 2008

Saratoga, CA 95070

420 pages, soft cover, \$19.95 plus \$2.00 postage and handling

Originally published and distributed by the Latham Foundation under the title of *Dynamic Relationships in Practice: Animals in the Helping Professions*, the updated edition, *The Loving Bond: Companion Animals in the Helping Professions* continues to enjoy a wide distribution as a textbook in universities and colleges, reference material in libraries and among individuals pursuing information about the various aspects of the human/companion animal bond. One of the first books to explore the many facets of the bond, it remains one of the most definitive publications on the subject. Its contents range from a historical perspective on the relationship between humans and companion animals through the pets' roles in society, pet behavior, pet loss and human bereavement to the publicizing and promotion of the alliance.

A vital resource for anyone interested in learning about the field as well as those involved with it, *The Loving Bond: Companion Animals in the Helping Professions* is, "an extraordinary publication ... provides

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## Letters to the Editor

Editor:

On behalf of the Peninsula Humane Society, I would like to respond to some misconceptions which appeared in an article (Winter Issue, *The Latham Letter*) by Alan J. Stern of the American Kennel Club. In his article, Mr. Stern states that "if there is one single cat in the Peninsula Humane Society which has not been adopted in five days, there is not a single dog in the county which may breed; not a single dog in the county which shall go unsterilized; not a single dog in the county which shall come into San Francisco International Airport; not a single dog in the county which shall attend shows held at the Cow Palace or other dog show events." These statements are absolutely untrue.

Had Mr. Stern read the San Mateo County Ordinance correctly, he would know that the ordinance *does* allow for animal breeding—although, granted, breeding will be limited to those who apply for a special license. In effect, this breeding license program allows responsible breeders to continue their business legally, while "backyard breeders" and irresponsible pet owners will be forced to discontinue breeding practices which only add to the pet overpopulation problem.

Mr. Stern's statement that there would be no unsterilized dog in the county nor any dogs able to attend dog shows is also unfounded. The ordinance calls for mandatory spay or neuter of dogs and cats, but those people who wish to keep their animals

practitioners with reference materials to direct their efforts more effectively and efficiently." [American Humane Association]



intact may apply for a special license. (Perhaps the AKC will reconsider their provision that only "intact" dogs and cats may be shown at their shows. Although they claim that this is the only way to protect the bloodlines, this attitude merely perpetuates the outdated idea that spayed or neutered animals are not as valuable as intact animals.)

Mr. Stern's point about dogs not being able to enter the San Francisco airport is also misconceived. The ordinance actually reads that dogs or cats will not be transported to, from or within the unincorporated areas of San Mateo County for the purpose of breeding those animals during the moratorium period.

It's unfortunate that Mr. Stern and other AKC members seem to feel that the San Mateo County ordinance is directed solely at them. The San Mateo County ordinance is not, and never was, intended to single out any group of people such as professional breeders. The ordinance is directed at *all* animal guardians. The responsibility for thousands of "excess" dogs and cats in San Mateo County should not fall completely on the humans society. Overbreeding is a problem *everyone* must account for.

Although Mr. Stern disagrees with the way PHS chose to educate the community about this horrendous problem—through hard-hitting media stories and advertisements—this was the only way we could convince our community of the tragedies behind pet overpopulation. Many "softer," less emotional educational campaigns were attempted in the past, all with little effect.

Pet overpopulation is our number-one concern. We have been doing, and will continue to do everything we can to ensure that the public is educated about animal adoption, animal care and the pet overpopulation problem.

Peninsula Humane Society will continue to enforce the leash law. We will continue to use purebred rescue clubs to enhance our adoption program. We will continue to expand our educational campaigns and low-cost spay/neuter programs. We will keep encouraging our voluntary cat licensing program. We will further promote our adoption counseling program and animal behavior classes.

Peninsula Human Society is excited at the prospect of working with the newly-formed County Animal Advisory Committee. Hopefully others who sit on the committee—including mem-

*The Latham Letter, Spring 1991*

## Pet-Loss Counselor Eases Owner's Grief

bers representative of the AKC— will join us in the effort to combat pet overpopulation. We all need to work together to prevent the senseless killing of millions of dogs and cats in the U.S. each year.

Sherry Richert  
Public Affairs Manager  
Peninsula Humane Society



Dear Mr. Tebault:

I want to thank you most sincerely for including our request for help in finding research subjects in the Winter issue of *The Latham Letter*. The request asked for responses from people who have recently adopted stray animals. We have received letters from a number of adopters and from people who have made suggestions for finding these subjects. In addition, a number of animal shelters and SPCA's have asked to be included in the study.

It must be very gratifying to you to realize that your readers are so interested in humane concerns that they offer their services even when these services require time and effort.

We wish to thank all of the responders and the Latham Foundation for their much-needed help.

Sincerely,

Aline H. Kidd, Ph.D.  
Research Professor in Psychology,  
Mills College  
Robert M. Kidd, M.A.

# MILLS



*The Latham Letter, Spring 1991*

*The following account of one pet owner's experience with grief following the death of his companion animal appeared in the Journal of the American Veterinary Association (JAVMA). It is reprinted here with the permission of the American Veterinary Medical Association*

*This personal account of one man's struggle with grief, guilt, and anxiety following his pet's death was submitted to JAVMA to illustrate how specialized pet-loss counseling can benefit clients who suffer deep emotional pain, as the author did. The author's name is withheld at his request.*

I am a 40-year-old professional man living in Davis, California. I am loosely affiliated with the University of California campus here. Generally, I am a strong person, able to handle a lot of pressure.

In early 1988, my cat became extremely ill. She was approaching 18 years of age and was the only real pet I had ever had. She had been with me, and later with my wife and me, through many stages of our lives, many homes, many experiences; our cat in many ways represented all those things.

We did everything we could to save her. We took her to the university veterinary hospital. We paid for sophisticated tests. We tried an unusual treatment. But soon it became clear that our cat had no chance. After several days, my wife and I stroked our cat's beautiful body as the kindly veterinarian injected the euthanasia solution.

My wife and I left the hospital in tears but in relief. Our cat's suffering was over. Our decision-making agony was over. A few hours later, however, I began feeling tense. Over the next few days, I became surprisingly agitated and depressed, and I became rather obsessed about the cat. Over and over I wondered whether we had checked every last way to restore her health, whether the euthanasia had been painless for her, whether we had treated her well in every year of her life. I felt a certain guilt, even though I believed I had been a loving, highly responsible pet owner.

In the midst of my agitation, I spoke with the veterinarian who had so ably treated our cat. I asked him, "What about me?" He told me about Bonnie Mader.

Bonnie Mader is something of a pioneer. She is a counselor with a master's degree in counseling. She is a pioneer, however, because she is one of the first professionals in the country to frequently help pet owners with their distress during or after life-threatening or life-ending crises with their pets. The School of Veterinary Medicine at the University of California, Davis, has funded her to spend part of her time in the counseling of pet owners.

I frankly and honestly told Bonnie just how upset I was. I told her that as a busy person with a stressful life, I didn't have time for a psychological crisis. She was supportive but honest: "I don't have a magic wand," she said.

In my case, however, she did have just such a device. It was so magical it was invisible. In most cases, a counselor could not help a bereaved pet owner as much as Bonnie helped me, because Bonnie and I that day were almost a perfect fit. As it turned out, what I needed to hear more than anything else was that my reaction to my pet's dying and death was normal. Before seeing Bonnie, I had felt that something was seriously wrong with me. I thought a person should not be feeling so bad, so anxious over "just a cat," even my wonderful cat. I feared months of psychiatry and thousands of dollars in therapy expenses.

Bonnie was able to tell me I was normal and to convince me of it. She could do these things because even as early as 1988, she had counseled some 200 other bereaved pet owners and had seen my general reaction in most of them. While I might not have believed someone who had counseled only a few grieving pet owners, the fact that Bonnie had counseled 200 others was extremely persuasive.

Other people often present counselors with more complicated problems. They need more than to be told that they are normal. But much of what Bonnie did for me had nothing to do with the specifics of my case. Besides assuring me I was having a normal reaction, she provided two things that any skilled counselor should be able to furnish: support and an opportunity for emotional catharsis. Bonnie said, in words and demeanor, "I feel for you. I know what you're going through. You're a good person. In time, particularly if you can explore your feelings in a caring environment, you will recover from this acute pain." Bonnie listened while I spewed out emotional

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words I would not have wanted to share with my friends or even with most relatives, and she listened for enough time for me to tell her quite completely what I was feeling and thinking.

I left Bonnie's office feeling dramatic relief. I wasn't "all better," but I was getting close. Within a couple days, my recovery had solidified, all the color had returned to my life, and I could view my cat's death calmly and rationally. I still missed my old friend, but my life was essentially back to normal.

What is the message in all this? That each month, there are thousands of people like me who need the help that Bonnie provided, but who, because there are thus far few Bonnies, are not getting that help. Without that help, they are in emotional pain for too long, perhaps many months too long. Some run up unnecessary psychiatric bills. I am writing this article—on my own initiative—out of my concern for fellow owners of pets, in the hope that I might alleviate their distress.

What can be done? Veterinary associations, veterinary hospitals, and individual veterinarians can find counselors who have expertise or who can gain expertise in counseling grieving pet owners. Every veterinarian should have an information sheet to give to every client whose pet is in a life-threatening or life-ending crisis. This sheet should list counselors, support groups for grieving owners (such groups do exist), and books and articles that may offer such owners support or insight. So that clients do not feel they are being singled out as being unusually distressed, the veterinarian and the sheet itself should make clear that the sheet is given to every client whose pet is in crisis.

Counselors should become familiar with the signs and symptoms of grieving pet owners, as well as the therapies appropriate for them. In particular, counselors should know that owners need to hear that they are not alone, that they are not abnormal. For this and other reasons, counselors should make clear that they know what they are talking about; they should briefly note their experience, training and other qualifications. Counselors should know that pet owners—like people who have lost a loved one—may feel undue guilt. They should know that a pet loss, though not a human loss, can be of human dimension, can be more painful than many a human loss. A pet, after all,

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may have shared long periods of the owner's life, may represent many life experiences, and likely has given the owner one thing that few people can give, namely, unconditional affection and trust.

To communicate most effectively with the pet owner, the counselor should meet the owner in a private, confidential setting. Face-to-face is more supportive than phone-to-phone. The counselor should be available for one or more repeat visits and should have a panel of other appropriate counselors and therapists available for longer-term assistance. The counselor should also understand that the pet owner's crisis may in part be the result of adding not a straw but an anvil to the back of a camel already weak from the pressures of life. The counselor should help the owner determine how to reduce even those pressures having nothing to do with the pets.

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## Pet Loss & Human Emotion

The American Veterinary Medical Association has produced a brochure, entitled *Pet Loss & Human Emotion*, for veterinarians to distribute to clients facing impending pet loss. A thoughtfully composed pamphlet, it provides sections in a question/answer form.

Topics covered include:

- What should I do?
- How will I know when?
- What if the animal is healthy?
- How can I say goodbye?
- Will it be painless?
- How can I face the loss?
- I cannot forget

In addition to answers to other commonly asked questions, it provides a list of four helpful books for further assistance. Veterinarians wishing more information should contact:

The American Veterinary Medical Association  
930 North Meacham Road  
Schaumburg, IL 60196

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1978) because stressful life events are intertwined with psychological distress and because persons undergoing stress pay greater attention to bodily symptoms as well as find them more disturbing (Mechanic, 1972). One of the most distressing life events, death of a spouse, occurs with greater frequency in older populations. Major events, such as spousal loss, are frequently identified as precipitating factors in loneliness (Perlman & Peplau, 1984), another potential determinant of physician utilization. In light of these notions, it is reasonable to hypothesize that circumstances that promote well-being or alleviate distress or both could reduce the need for physician contact. One such circumstance is pet ownership, as pets have been reported to provide companionship, an aid to health and relaxation, protection, and nonjudgmental acceptance and love (Soares, 1985).

A rich anecdotal lore exists in support of pets as companions to the elderly, although methodologically strong empirical studies are few. Observational studies suggest that introducing pets into the lives of terminal cancer patients (Muschel, 1984) or the lives of patients in a geriatric ward (Brickel, 1986) brings about significant positive social and psychological consequences. Bird placement among British pensioners led to positive psychosocial effects in comparison with pensioners who received a plant (Mugford & M'Comisky, 1975). However, at least one evaluation of a companion animal program failed to show positive gains for those who acquired pets relative to a comparison group (Lago, Connell, & Knight, 1983); among pet owners, though affection for pets was positively related to morale.

With regard to naturally occurring pet ownership, one study (Robb & Stegman, 1983) found no physical benefit and three studies found no psychological benefit (Lawton, Moss, & Moles, 1984; Ory & Goldberg, 1983; Robb & Stegman, 1983) of pet ownership among the elderly. This is in contrast to dramatic findings that identified pet ownership as a strong social predictor of 1-year survival in a group of postcoronary patients (Friedmann, Katcher, Lynch & Thomas, 1980). Also supportive of the value of pets are data from a national probability sample of respondents 65 year or older that showed pet attachment was inversely related to depression as measured by a symptom scale (Garrity, Stallones,

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Marx & Johnson, 1989). Furthermore, Garrity et al. found that pet attachment was associated with better physical health, as assessed by retrospective reports of recent illness experiences, among respondents with low levels of human support but not among those with adequate human support. These data suggest that pet ownership or attachment or both might play a beneficial role in times of stress. Similarly, data on human social relationships indicate that these relationships can buffer the impact of a variety of stresses and strains such that individuals experiencing high stress and high social support will not evidence compromised physical or psychological health (Broadhead, et al., 1983).

This study prospectively examined the direct and indirect effects of pet ownership on utilization behavior of the elderly. Specifically, I hypothesized that with demographic and health characteristics controlled for, pet owners would report fewer doctor contacts than nonowners. I also hypothesized that in periods of high stress, pet owners would report fewer doctor contacts than nonowners. I did not anticipate a relationship between pet ownership and doctor contacts among respondents in low-stress circumstances. In this study, stress was operationalized in two ways: depressive symptomatology and accumulation of stressful life events.

## Method

### Sample

The data for the present investigation were collected as part of a 1-year panel study concerned with health behavior of the elderly. All respondents were enrolled through Medicare in a federally qualified network model health maintenance organization (HMO) located in southern California. At study outset, approximately 2,900 members of the HMO were enrolled through Medicare. After eliminating one member of spouse pairs from the sampling frame, study solicitations and consent forms were mailed to approximately 2,300 potential participants. Signed consent forms were returned by 1,145 enrollees. Data collected earlier by the HMO permitted a comparison of enrollees who returned the consent forms and those who did not. The two groups were comparable in age, gender compositions, marital status, and self reports of depressed

mood. However, the respondent group differed from the nonrespondents in terms of greater representation of non-Hispanic Whites, high school graduates or above, and good or excellent health status.

Interviews were conducted by telephone unless poor hearing or other impairment on the part of the respondent interfered. In these instances, interviews were conducted face to face. In total, 1,034 respondents 65 years of age and older were interviewed at baseline (58 interviews were conducted face to face). Among the 1,145 potential respondents, attrition was due primarily to death, severe illness, relocation, refusal by another family member, or reported age of less than 65 years. The baseline questionnaire assessed health status, health beliefs, psychological distress, social network and support, pet ownership, and demographic characteristics.

Every 2 months for the 12-month period following the baseline interview, respondents were reinterviewed concerning doctor contacts that had occurred since the prior interview. The measures of psychological distress were repeated at Wave 4 (6 months) and at Wave 7 (12 months). For pet owners, information on the nature of their relationship with their pets was collected at Wave 2.

### Measures

At baseline, respondents reported whether they had "any chronic, that is, recurring or continuing health problems," provided data on their demographic characteristics, and answered questions concerning the extensiveness of their social network. Demographic characteristics assessed were gender, age, racial-ethnic group, income, education, marital status, employment status, and current living arrangement. Included among the questions on living arrangement was one asking whether there were any pets in the household and, if so, what type(s). Social network involvement was assessed by the 10-item Lubben Social Network Scale (LSNS; Lubben, 1988), developed for gerontological research. This scale has three components: family networks (items are "number seen monthly," "frequency of social contact," "number respondent feels 'close to,'" friendship networks ("number seen monthly," "frequency of social contact," "number feels 'close to'") and interdependent social supports ("has a confidant," "is a confidant," "relies upon and helps

others," "living arrangement"). A total LSNS score is achieved by summing the 10 items, each of which ranges in value from 0 (*least connected*) to 5 (*most connected*). Criterion-based validity and internal consistency are adequate (Lubben, 1988).

At baseline, at 6 months, and at the final interview (12 months), depressed mood was measured by the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D; Radloff, 1977). The CES-D uses 4-point scales (scored 0 to 3) to assess the frequency with which each of the 20 symptoms was experienced during the previous week. Several epidemiologic studies (Comstock & Helsing, 1976; Frerichs, Aneshensel, & Clark, 1981; Husaini, Neff, Harrington, Hughes, & Stone, 1980) found the scale sensitive to differences in level of depressed mood. The CES-D has adequate validity (content, criterion-based, and construct) and reliability (test-retest and internal consistency; Radloff, 1977; Weissman, Sholomskas, Pottenger, Prusoff, & Locke, 1977) and has been used previously with aged populations (Berkman et al., 1986; Garrity et al., 1989; Murrell, Himmelfarb, & Wright, 1983).

The measure of life events, administered at baseline 6 months, and 12 months, was a combination of checklists developed for gerontological populations (Amster & Krauss, 1974; Kahana & Kahana, 1983; Lubben, 1984). Respondents indicated whether any of the following 10 events had occurred to them in the previous 6 months: separation or divorce, death of a close family member, major illness of spouse, job retirement, death of a close friend, move, being a victim of crime, relative being a victim of crime, being denied a driver's license, and money problems.

Use of physician services was assessed every 2 months (at Waves 2 through 7) and aggregated across the waves. The respondents were asked how many times they had contacted the doctor since the last interview. Respondents reporting at least one contact were asked how many times they specifically requested to see the doctor and how many times the doctor specifically requested to see them.

Respondents identifying themselves at Wave 1 as pet owners were asked a series of questions at Wave 2 about their pets. Respondents having more than one pet were asked, "Which one of your pets is your

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## Stressful Life Events

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favorite one? That is, the one to whom you are the closest or give the most attention?" All subsequent questions referred to the respondents' favorite pet (or only pet).

Four aspects of the human/pet relationship were assessed: responsibility, time with pet, affective/attachment to pet, and benefit minus cost difference. Two questions assessed responsibility: Whose decision was it to get the pet? and Who is most responsible for the care and feeding, including trips to the veterinarian? Responses were categorized as respondent alone, respondent and another person, or someone else alone.

Questions relevant to the time spent with the pet asked for the following information: how much of the time the respondent and pet were in the same room when the respondent was at home (categories of *almost never or a little, some, and most or all of the time*); hours per day spent outdoors with pet; hours per day petting pet; hours per day talking to pet; and amount of time spent with pet compared to other people respondent knew with pets (categories of *much less or a little less, about the same, and a little more or much more*).

Affective attachment was measured by a single question with five response alternatives: "And, would you say your pet is: extremely important to you; very important to you; fairly important; not too important to you; or not at all important to you?" Last, respondents were asked about the benefits of owning a pet and the negative aspects of owning a pet. These were open-ended questions that were subsequently coded into categories by the investigators. The benefit minus cost difference was determined by subtracting the number of negative categories mentioned from the number of positive categories.

### Results

Of the 1,036 respondents assessed at baseline, 938 (91%) remained in the final sample. Respondents were excluded if they missed more than one interview in Waves 2 through 4 or in Waves 5 through 7. Stated differently, respondents could miss a maximum of one interview in the first 6 months of the study and one in the second 6 months of the study and still be included in the final sample. An examination of the baseline characteristics showed that respondents in the final

samples were younger and more likely to be employed than those who dropped out of the study. The two groups were comparable in presence of chronic health problems, gender composition, income, racial-ethnic composition, education, living arrangement, presence of pets in the household, social network involvement, depressive symptomatology, and the experience of recent life events.

The demographic characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table 1. For purposes of analyses, all demographic variables were collapsed and treated as dichotomous. As can be seen, two thirds of the sample was between ages 65 and 74 years, with one third of the respondents being 75 years and older. A greater proportion of the sample was female (60%) than male (40%), and the majority classified themselves as non-Hispanic White (89%). Half had incomes below \$15,000, and two thirds had a high school education or less. Most (84%) were presently not working. Although more than half (56%) of the respondents currently were not married, the majority (58%) shared their households with someone. One third (37%) of the respondents had household pets, a proportion comparable to that in two other studies of the elderly (Garrity et al., 1989; Ory & Goldberg, 1983), and more than half (57%) had one or more chronic health problems.

To examine the prospective relationship of baseline characteristics with utilization of services, the data on doctor contacts were aggregated across the six waves (Waves 2 through 7). Each respondent received a total doctor contact score for the study year and subscores of respondent-initiated contacts and physician-initiated contacts. Respondents who missed one interview in either Waves 2 through 4 (Months 2, 4, 6) or Waves 5 through 7 (Months 8, 10, 12) or both were assigned for the wave they missed the average value of contacts in the other two waves in the 6-month period.

The three measures of doctor contacts were each regressed on the baseline measures. A hierarchical procedure was followed, with demographic variable (sex, age, race, education, income, employment status, social network score, and chronic health problems) entered on the first step and pet ownership entered on the second step. This

analysis tested whether pet ownership accounted for a significant proportion of the variance in doctor contacts once the variance attributable to other demographic characteristics had been removed. After demographics and health status were controlled for, respondents with pets had fewer total doctor contacts ( $\beta = -.07, p .05$ ) and respondent-initiated contacts ( $\beta = -.07, p .05$ ) than those without pets. The two groups were comparable with regard to doctor-initiated contacts over the 1-year period. Not surprisingly, the presence of chronic health problems was related to higher scores on all three contact measures, as was lower income. Men reported more respondent-initiated contacts than women. In sum, health status, income, and pet ownership were the major predictors of doctor contacts over a 1-year period.

The second step in the analyses was to determine whether pet ownership might moderate the impact of psychological distress on doctor contacts. The previous regressions were repeated with the following revisions. Life events and depression at baseline were included as predictor variables, and both the Life Event X Pet Ownership interaction term were entered on a third step in the regression analysis. With regard to total doctor contacts, poor health ( $\beta = .19, p .0001$ ), lower income ( $\beta = -.11, p .01$ ), the experience of greater number of life events in the previous 6 months ( $\beta = .15, p .001$ ), and the Pet Ownership X Life Events interaction term ( $\beta = -.11, p .05$ ) each made a significant independent contribution to the regression equation. The full model is presented in Table 2. To clarify the direction of the interaction effect, the mean doctor contacts were calculated within the four cells of the pet ownership by life events (split at the median) cross-classification. The pattern of means and tests of simple main effects support the hypothesis that pet ownership moderates the impact of life events on doctor contacts. Specifically, for respondents without a pet, the experience of many compared to few life events in the 6 months prior to baseline resulted in significantly more total doctor contacts during the study year (10.37 vs. 8.38,  $p .005$ ). Life events were unrelated to doctor visits among respondents with a pet (8.91 contacts for those with many life events and 7.90 for those with few life events, *ns*).

Parallel findings emerged for the two subscores of doctor contacts. For respondent-initiated contacts, being male ( $\beta = -.11, p .01$ ) being in poor health ( $\beta = .17, p .001$ ), and having more life events ( $\beta = .13, p .01$ ) each independently predicted contacts. Poorer health ( $\beta = .14, p .001$ ) and many life events ( $\beta = .09, p .05$ ) predicted doctor-initiated contacts. Although Pet Ownership X Life Events interaction was not statistically significant ( $\beta = -.08, p = .13$  for respondent-initiated contacts;  $\beta = .09, p .07$  for doctor-initiated contacts), the pattern of means supported the finding that doctor contacts increased as life events accumulated for nonowners, but not for pet owners.

The final set of regressions classified pet owners by type of pet. Thus, the pet ownership variable in the first set of analyses was cat owners ( $n = 141$ ) compared with nonowners, then dog owners ( $n = 202$ ) compared with nonowners, and then bird owners ( $n = 45$ ) compared to nonowners. There were too few fish owners or owners of other pets to be analyzed separately. (It should be noted that the sum of these subgroups totals more than the number of respondents with pets because some respondents had more than one type of pet.) These analyses showed that the Life Events X Pet Ownership interaction term was a significant predictor of doctor contacts (total,  $p .05$ , and respondent-initiated,  $p .05$ ) for dog owners, but not for either cat or bird owners. Specifically, for respondents not owning a dog, doctor contacts increased as life events increased (10.39 compared to 8.37,  $p .01$ , for high and low life events, respectively). Total doctor contacts for the study year were 8.62 and 7.75 ( $ns$ ) for dog owners reporting high and low life events, respectively. With regard to respondent-initiated contacts, respondents not owning a dog and reporting many life events had more contacts than those with fewer life events (5.14 compared to 3.96,  $p .001$ ). Among dog owners, life events were unrelated to respondent-initiated doctor contacts (3.73 and 3.77  $ns$ ).

To explore the stress reduction aspects of dog ownership, dog owners ( $n = 201$ ) were compared with pet owners who did not have a dog ( $n = 110$ ) concerning their reported relationship with their pet. (Note that these analyses were for 201 rather than 202 dog owners because 1 dog owner answered the questions with regard to another type of

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Table 1  
*Demographic and Health Characteristics of Medicare Enrollees in an HMO*

Variable	%	<i>n</i>
Sex		
Male	40	379
Female	60	559
Age		
65 to 74	69	650
75 and older	31	288
Racial-ethnic group		
Non-Hispanic White	89	836
Other	11	102
Income before taxes		
Less than \$15,000	50	466
Greater than \$15,000	39	368
Missing data	11	104
Education		
12 years or less	62	578
13 years or more	38	360
Marital Status		
Not married	56	522
Married	44	416
Employment status		
Not employed	84	786
Employed	16	152
Living arrangement		
Lives alone	41	383
Lives with others	58	545
Missing data	1	10
Pet ownership		
No pet in household	63	593
Pet in household	37	345
Chronic health conditions		
None	43	402
One or more	57	536

Note: HMO = health maintenance organization. *N* = 938

"favorite" pet.) First, concerning time spent with their pets, dog owners relative to owners of other pets spent more time outdoors with their pets (1.43 hr per day vs. 0.59 hr per day),  $t(282) = 4.96, p .001$ ; spent more time talking to their pets (1.48 hr per day vs. 1.14 hr per day)  $t(288) = 1.93, p .05$ ; and felt that, overall, they spent more time with their pets than other people they knew with pets,  $t(297) = 3.26, p .001$ . Dog owners felt more attached to their pets,  $t(309) = 3.30, p .001$ , and showed a larger difference score for the positive minus negative aspects of pet ownership,  $t(303) = 2.47, p .01$ , than did owners of other pets. Furthermore, analyses of the specific positive and negative aspects of pet ownership indicated that dog owners were more likely than owners of pets other than dogs to mention that their pets make them feel secure,  $\chi^2(1, N = 307) = 51.67, p .0001$ , and slightly more likely

to mention that their pets provide love,  $\chi^2(1, N = 307) = 3.13, p .08$ . Owners of pets other than dogs were more likely than dog owners to mention that their pets provide cheer or entertainment,  $\chi^2(1, N = 307) = 4.97, p .05$ . No differences as a function of type of pet emerged in the frequency of citing specific negative aspects of pet ownership.

### Discussion

This 1-year prospective study suggests that pet ownership influenced the physician utilization behavior of the elderly. When sex, age, race, education, income, employment status, social network involvement, and chronic health problems were controlled for, respondents with pets reported fewer doctor contacts during the year than those without pets. This effect was particularly pronounced for

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respondent-initiated doctor contacts, suggesting that discretionary contacts were influenced more than physician-initiated contacts. Furthermore, pets seemed to help their owners in times of stress. The accumulation of stressful life events was associated with increased doctor contacts for respondents without pets; however, this relationship did not emerge for pet owners. Again, these analyses controlled for respondents health status, depressed mood, and other demographic characteristics. Depressed mood was not itself a predictor of doctor contacts, nor did it interact with pet ownership. Additional analyses indicated that the physician utilization behavior of dog owners alone was unaffected by the accumulation of stressful life events.

An examination of the specific stressful events that were endorsed by this elderly population showed that those occurring most frequently were loss events. About one quarter of the sample (26%) had experienced the death of a close friend in the 6 months preceding the baseline interviews. The death of a close family member and major illness of respondent's spouse were each reported by 13% of the sample, and the remaining seven events were endorsed by less than 10% of the respondents. Thus, a recent loss of companionship was common.

Respondent-generated benefits of pet ownership (open-ended question) indicated that fully three quarters of the pet owners mentioned that their pet provided them with companionship or company. Feelings of security (25%) and feeling loved (21%) were the next most frequently cited benefits. Taken together, these data suggest that life events may be arousing needs for companionship that in turn may result in doctor contacts. This may occur because either doctor contacts satisfy the desire for companionship or the companionship loss is exacerbating other health concerns. For pet owners, however, it seems that their companionship needs are met partially by their pets. Therefore, pet owners do not show an increase in physician utilization with increasing life events.

Regarding type of pet, the data showed that owning a dog provided a stress buffer, whereas owning other types of pets did not. Apparently, dog owners have a qualitatively different relationship with their pets than do owners of other pets. Dog owners reported spending more time outdoors and talking with their pets than other pet owners in this sample and felt that, in comparison to others they knew with pets, they spent more time with their pets overall. Both talking and time outdoors have clear companionship functions. In addition, spending

time outdoors might be either a contributor to or a consequence of increased physical or mental vigor, which could in turn be related to physician contacts. The analyses controlled for chronic health problems and depressed mood, however, which suggests that the benefits of dog ownership are not mediated solely via the greater activity level of the owners. Although the presence of chronic health problems is a crude measure of health status, these findings were replicated when another measure of health (self-rated health status) was substituted for chronic health problems.

Probably of greater importance than the data on time spent with the pet are the data indicating that dog owners felt more attached to their pets than did other owners. Two studies of the elderly found that greater attachment to one's pet was associated with better mental health (Garrity et al., 1989; Ory & Goldberg, 1983), and attachment was associated with better health when human companionship was inadequate (Garrity et al., 1989). Moreover, a survey of elderly persons yielded reports of greater pet involvement if the pet was a dog than a cat (Lago, Knight, & Connell, 1983). Also, 50% of the dog owners said they spent 24 hr a day with their dogs, compared to 7% of the cat owners (Lago et al., 1983). Finally, dog owners in the current study felt that the benefits of owning a pet outweighed the cost to a greater degree than did owners of other pets. Particularly salient among the benefits was security—provided much more by dogs than other pets. A sense of security may be especially important to the urban elderly who constituted our sample.

Altogether, these data indicate that owning a pet, particularly a dog, may reduce the demand for physician services among the elderly. As all analyses controlled for health status, it appears that pet ownership is primarily influencing social and psychological processes rather than physical health. Indeed, records of physician utilization behavior are thought to reflect the individual's social as well as medical history. Further support for this notion comes from data indicating that pet ownership reduces demand for care in time of stress. This latter finding is consistent with the growing literature on the role of social support in buffering the potentially negative consequences of

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Table 2  
*Demographic Variables, Stressful Life Events, and Pet Ownership as Predictors of Utilization of Physician Services*

Variable	$\beta$	SE	p
Sex (1 = female)	-.07	.58	—
Age (1 = 75 years or more)	.02	.62	—
Ethnic group (1 = non-Hispanic White)	.00	.87	—
Chronic health problems (1 = 1 or more)	.19	.57	.0001
Employment status (1 = employed)	-.04	.75	—
Education (1 = high school graduate/beyond)	-.03	.57	—
Social network involvement (possible range from 0 to 49)	.07	.03	—
Income (1 = \$15,000 or greater)	-.11	.59	.01
Life events (possible range from 0 to 10)	.15	.37	.001
Pet ownership (1 = pet)	-.03	.84	—
Depression (possible range from 0 to 60)	.08	.05	—
Life events X Pet ownership	-.11	.63	.05
Depression X Pet Ownership	.05	.07	—

stressful life events (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Kessler & McLeod, 1985). It has been observed that only those social relationships that provide appropriate forms of support can act as effective buffers (Cohen & McKay, 1984). Accordingly, dogs more than other pets provided their owners with companionship and with an object of attachment.

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# Population Control and the Environment

*continued from page 1*

often called "water mining," involves both localized groundwater declines at particular sites scattered across the country, as well as regionally significant groundwater declines in three major areas: southern Arizona, the High Plains (a wide swath extending across several states and running from Montana to Texas), and California. The groundwater overdraft is occurring because agricultural, industrial and residential demand is outstripping the renewable surface and groundwater supply.

Our national supply of renewable freshwater is approximately 1,400 billion gallons per day, about three times our daily national withdrawal rate. In view of this overall abundance, it may seem strange that parts of the country are experiencing water shortages. But many areas are experiencing such shortages because of the uneven distribution of water supply and water demand. The eastern part of the country (roughly, the area to the east of the Mississippi River) has 37 percent of the nation's renewable water supply, but only accounts for 8 percent of the nation's demand. In contrast, the southwestern area of the country has only 6 percent of the nation's renewable water supply, but its large irrigated farms and sprawling urban areas account for fully 31 percent of the nation's demands.

As human population continues to grow, particularly in the dry southwest, state and federal governments are being pressured to implement large-scale water projects to import the water needed to meet the increasing demand. The cost of imported water is usually much greater than the price that the people who use the water actually pay for it. Not only do artificially low water prices encourage wasteful use by current users, but low water prices can encourage new users to move into the area. Once more people have migrated to arid regions than local water resources can support, governments come under political pressure to continue to provide adequate supplies of cheap water, even if it means taking water away from other regions and charging people who do not use the water for the costs of importing it.

## Population Growth and Farmland Loss

A recent study of the top 20 percent of agricultural counties in each state—the High Market Value Farming Counties—found that over half of them (58

percent) were either inside or adjacent to metropolitan areas. Thirty percent of the value of America's total agricultural production comes from the High Market Value Farming Counties located on the rapidly urbanizing fringe of America's metropolitan areas. The population of these counties grew by 20 percent during the 1970s, and metropolitan growth is accelerating. Unless measures are taken to slow population growth and control urban expansion through public direction of land use, much of this irreplaceable farmland will be lost forever.

As urban areas expand, farmland is consumed by houses, office buildings, shopping malls and parking lots. Prime farmland is usually level, stable and well-drained—characteristics that make the land well-suited for development.

Internal migration and immigration from other countries are sources of the rapid growth in America's South and West. California, Texas and Florida—three extremely important agricultural states—each grew by over a million people between 1980 and 1984. This population growth is threatening the nation's most valuable farmland. California is losing 44,000 acres of cropland a year to urban uses. Texas lost over 600,000 acres of prime farmland to permanent non-agricultural uses between 1977 and 1982. The National Agricultural Lands Study projects that at the current rate of conversion, Florida will lose all its prime agricultural land by the year 2000.

## Excess Immigration and the Environment

The United States population is increasing by nearly 3 million per year. Since immigration from foreign countries causes over 40% of U.S. population growth (and nearly 60% of the population growth of some states such as California and Florida), and since the U.S., too, has a limit on its carrying capacity (the number of people who can be sustainably supported in a given area without degrading the natural, social, cultural and economic environment for present and future generations), excess immigration creates a significant environmental threat.

Worldwide, a common response to carrying capacity problems is to migrate to areas where the carrying capacity has not yet been pushed beyond the limit or is perceived to still provide opportunities. But the problem is that such migration not only

threatens the carrying capacity of the destination countries, but also creates the harmful illusion that continued population growth is an acceptable option.

Populations try to move out of countries where they have overwhelmed the carrying capacity. Today, the pressures from every continent continue to increase—world population is growing by 97 million per year! Many have already come to the United States, but no region, including the United States, has the capacity to absorb all those desiring to immigrate. It is doubly unfortunate, therefore, that the perception of opportunity in the U.S. acts as a disincentive for overcrowded countries to face and begin to correct overpopulation problems at home.

Allowing too much immigration both creates an environmental threat and sends a misleading signal. Perhaps all countries should consider limiting immigration to levels within their carrying capacities in order to more effectively protect the environment. Allowing immigration in excess of carrying capacity ignores the limits in both the sending and receiving countries. Such a disregard represents a serious threat to the environments of all countries involved.

## The Ultimate Environmental Threat: Overpopulation

One result of overpopulation is that resources are depleted and the environment is degraded to the point that an area loses part of its capacity to support population in the future. When the carrying capacity is exceeded, the environmental damage is usually so severe that the population carrying capacity for future generations is greatly reduced.

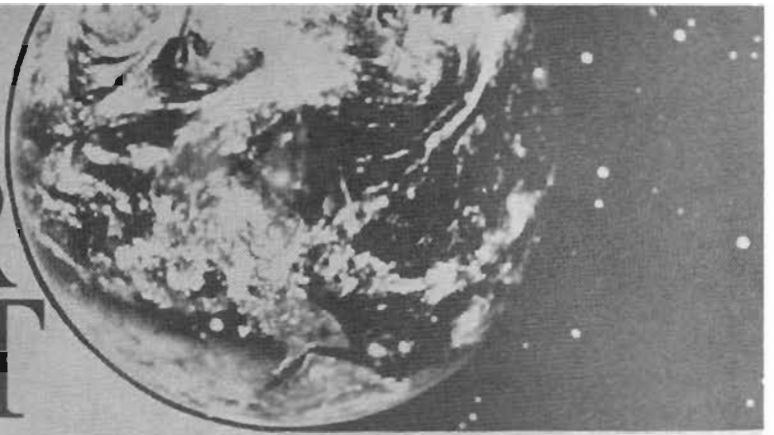
The point is simple enough: more people demand more of the shrinking resources and, using them, create more pollution. Global warming, species extinction, acid rain, deforestation of the Tongass and other national forests are among the signals that the United States' and the world's population increase is pushing the environment beyond its ability to sustain a desirable quality of life.

*The above information was provided by Population-Environment Balance. For further information, write: Population-Environment Balance, 1325 G Street, N.W., Suite 1003, Washington, DC 20005; or call (202) 879-3000.*



*The Latham Letter, Spring 1991*

# SAVE OUR PLANET



**I** will eat lower on the food chain. This means more food available for more people, less water and topsoil wasted, more trees and rain forests preserved and more natural habitat in which animals can live. I will eat more grains, fruits and vegetables, thereby healing the earth and my own body. My health, the well-being of animals and the environment, and the planet's health, are my well-being.

**I** will work to encourage a lower birth rate. Human population is now at 5.2 billion and growing by over 93 million people a year. The U.S., with 5% of this population, uses 30% of the earth's non-renewable resources. I will help educate people that with each 1 child family, the earth will have more chance to heal from the damage we humans inflict on it.



**I** will stop using harmful products such as dangerous pesticides and herbicides that pollute the environment. Instead I will investigate ways to cope that do not damage our fragile ecosystem. I will plant at least one tree a year.



**I** will recycle my newspapers, computer paper, my glass and cans, and compost scraps of fruits, vegetables and other organic matter. This will save trees, add new topsoil and save land now used for garbage landfills. This land can be used for better things — like trees, flowers and grass.

**I** will stop using products that are made from animals or tested on animals. There are many products on the market that do not cause suffering and these are always safer and more natural than poisonous and

dangerous products. I will not wear furs or other products that rob wild animals of their lives and cause pain.

**I** will drive a smaller, more fuel-efficient car and find new ways to save energy at home. I will work to preserve open space in my community, county and state. I will work to preserve the wild animals that make this space their home and stop sport hunting that makes them living targets.



**I** will meditate for a few moments each day about all these things. As I meditate I will find new ways to help heal the planet and reach out to others so they too can help. If we begin now, our fragile planet may regain its health — and all of us in its living mantle may also regain health and well-being.

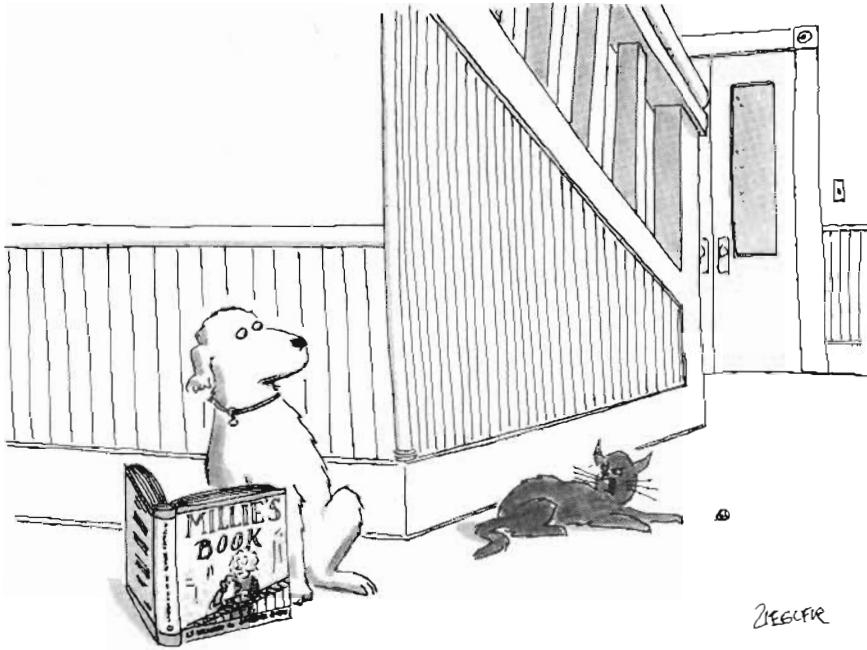
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*"No, I do not want to borrow it when you're finished!"*

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