

# Free to a Good Home: An Abuser's Invitation

Many people who run “free to a good home” ads think that they are doing the best thing for the animals they have rescued and/or can no longer keep. If, after exploring all your other options, you decide to advertise your animal in the newspaper, *never* say, “free to a good home,” a buncher’s (animal dealer’s) five favorite words. Many unscrupulous individuals obtain animals through ads and sell them to laboratories, use them in dogfights or rituals, or subject them to other torture. These people often pretend to seek animals as family companions and bring children or senior citizens along with them to gain your confidence. (Please see the enclosed factsheet, “Animal Dealers: Licensed to Kill” for more information.)

## “Free to a Cruel Person”

Studies show that only one in five animals obtained through “free to a good home” ads actually go to permanent, loving homes, which makes it so important to write down a potential adopter’s full name, driver’s license number, address, and telephone number. Explain that you will visit his or her home (to ensure that he or she actually lives there), and ask for (and check) references from veterinarians, neighbors, and employers.<sup>1</sup> Failing to take these precautions can result in tragedy.

In 1998, Wisconsin resident Barry Herbeck was sentenced to 10 years in prison for torturing and killing five cats he obtained through “free to a good home” ads. Herbeck almost always took his children along when “adopting” his victims. William Peoples, of Pennsylvania, was charged with aggravated cruelty to animals in 2000 after police traced a puppy found *alive*, buried in a shallow grave with a noose around his neck, back to him. Peoples had obtained the puppy from a coworker’s “free to good home” poster.<sup>2</sup> The Progressive Animal Welfare Society (PAWS) in Washington state discovered that a woman named “Diane” had obtained animals—sometimes entire litters of puppies or kittens—from more than 16 “free to a good home” ads placed in the area. Posing as someone

interested in adopting companion animals for herself and her two sisters, Diane sold the animals to pet stores. In one case, a pet store manager reported that Diane threatened to sell the animals to an animal dealer if the store would not purchase them.<sup>3</sup>

## Stop “Free to a Good Home” Ads

Are there “free to a good home” ads in your local newspaper? At PETA, we routinely contact people in our area who place these ads and provide them with detailed information about the dangers that the ads pose as well as information about proper procedures for placing animals. Check out classified ads online and scan the “pets” section for giveaway offers, then call the advertisers to speak with them personally. Or if you’re on the shy side, write a letter or send them a leaflet.

Contact the classified advertising manager of your local newspaper about printing a warning about “free to a good home” ads, or better yet, ask him or her to agree not to run such ads, preventing the possible suffering of countless animals. Many newspapers across the country have already done so! Here’s a sample letter for you to use:

(over)

Dear [Classifieds Manager/Editor]:

I am writing with regard to the "free to a good home" advertisements that appear in the classifieds section of [name of newspaper].

As you may be aware, animals given away for free can, and unfortunately often do, meet gruesome fates. They can end up in the hands of animal abusers like Barry Herbeck, a Wisconsin man who was convicted of torturing and killing animals he obtained through "free to a good home" ads. He confessed to taking his kids with him when responding to the ads so that people would be comfortable turning animals over to him. People known as "bunchers," who obtain animals illegally from random sources to sell to research facilities for profit, often acquire animals by answering "free to a good home" ads. Small animals advertised as "free to a good home" are sometimes acquired by individuals who intend to use them as bait in training other animals to fight. Gerbils, hamsters, and young kittens are often acquired to be used as snake food. I have enclosed more detailed materials about the tragedies that can befall animals given away.

Animal protection organizations all over the United States work diligently to educate people about the proper procedure for placing animals and frequently assist people in finding good homes for their animals. I and other concerned citizens routinely contact individuals who place "free to a good home" advertisements to alert them to the potential perils for their animals and continuously receive appreciative calls from people who say they never knew that these dangers existed.

[Name of newspaper] could do its readers and the animals a great service, while setting a very progressive example, by printing a brief warning at the top of the pets section about giving animals away for free.

## References

<sup>1</sup> Edward M. Shore, "Caution Advised on Ad Approach," *Patriot-News*.

<sup>2</sup> Barbara A. Wood, "Police Nab Puppy Cruelty Suspect," *Times Herald-Record*, 4 May 2000.

<sup>3</sup> PAWS News, "The Pets for Profit Scam," Sep. 1989, p.