
Havana: Love Between Snouts and Whiskers

By: Vladia Rubio / CubaSi
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Valentine's Day was just 48 hours away when the little community park was flooded with unusual barking and meowing at such early hours.

An Animal Welfare Cuba (BAC for its acronym in Spanish) fair had arrived, flooding the morning of the Havana neighborhood with a different kind of love.

Almost a dozen puppies played in a nearby pen, several youngsters, sitting on the grass, waited, cradling dogs and cats of different sizes and ages in their arms.

Many neighbors, and also people from different parts of the city, some from very far away, watched, exchanged, and many waited for their turn for the adoption procedures.

Stroking furs, calling the pets's names, and exclamations of astonishment at how funny they looked or how still the others remained, as if posing for a photo.

Although the little pets didn't know it, they were really waiting for an adoption that would finally put them into a family, giving them the love and care that they lacked so much while they were strays in the streets.

Fortunately, rescued by the boys from BAC, young people whose sensitivity and sense of civic responsibility, who assume this mission completely voluntarily and without getting paid, are one more proof to refute that "today's youth is lost" and that "every past time was better".

Very much of her time, Melisa Pineda, a sixth-year medical student, keeps a sad-faced dog

tucked up against her chest, who seemed to have found paradise next to the girl's heart.

It was one of the many pets that waited for a family to adopt them and accompanied Melisa in her constant actions, who answered questions, helped... as a member of BAC, of ??which she is clearly proud of.

Confident and simple in her speech, which is born from conviction, she explains to CubaSi that "we are a self-financed, non-profit organization, based in several provinces, and we are dedicated to the rescue, adoption, and rehabilitation of animals, especially strays". We see each other every 15 days in different municipalities of Havana to organize these fairs, but we had never been here and we have been surprised by the welcoming, we feel the sensitivity in the people towards this practice.

Although there`s still much to walk in terms of animal protection in practical terms, even though there are already laws in force, Melisa comments that many people go to fairs to adopt.

Several enterprises marketed their products, especially naturopaths, for dogs and humans. They donate a percent of sales to BAC.

The dogs and cats that they brought this time "have been with us for about two months, recovering from the streets, and now they are here to see if they find a family to take them in. We brought mostly adult dogs, but also puppies, which belong to a similarly rescued dog. And here we are, waiting."

She elaborates on the benefits of free sterilization that is an obligation to comply with adopted pets, as part of the adoption commitment supported by a legal document.

"We do not give away any pets outside those terms, and whoever does not agree with those terms cannot adopt."

The document she speaks about contains the most important articles of the Animal Welfare Law, and establishes that whoever does not assume the obligatory commitment to sterilize the animal when it's of the appropriate age and does not comply with the other requirements of good care, BAC may take it back.

The future doctor says that the requirement of sterilization is very important to prevent them from continuing to reproduce and, since it's usually mongrel dogs and cats, that are given up for adoption, then, when they multiply, there are those who release the offspring into the streets thus repeating an unfortunate cycle that threatens the welfare of animals and also against the hygiene and sanitation of the city.

Richard Fernando must have caught the attention of more than one. Lean and tall, it was touching to watch him cradling his newly adopted kitten so tenderly that it almost lost in his arms.

Computer engineering student, he came from Río Verde "because I really like animals, I had a cat and recently a relative of mine took it away, so a friend told me that they were going to have a fair here, and I came. Now this one goes with me."

Luna, the warrior

Dailys Ruth held by a leash a very sociable specimen that did not stop wagging its tail, and was like that throughout the dialogue with the girl, also an active member of BAC in its capital

branch.

The happy dog ??did not seem to get jealous even when the first-year medical student focused a good part of the conversation on Luna, a dog she adopted.

She will have to trust that the affection of her new owners will make her forget her sad story.

Dailys tells that this dog was rescued by them as a puppy, as part of those litters that are painfully leave on the street. She had a first failed adoption, and then a second «in which they mistreated her so much, that they had her abandoned on a terrace under the rain, sun, and cold. She caught ticks and had the lyme disease.

“She is a warrior because when we rescued her again and the vet treated her, her platelets were almost at zero and it seemed that everything could end badly, but it pulled through. They brought her super skinny to my house, as a transitory home. It was malnourished, with anemia, but little by little it began to improve and got the love she needed, that everyone needs, and she recovered very well».

Asking her why she hadn't kept the dog, she left the door open to another love story.

Flora, the veteran

Dailys explained that her house, in Marianao, is not very big and under construction, “but there's always room for the little ones who need to be rescued.

«I could not stay with Luna because I didn't have enough room for “the temporary” to another rescued puppy. In addition, I already had Flora, who is also adopted.

She says that the dog was run over and had a fractured spine, leg and hip, and she had to go through a full rehab.

"She is the oldest pet in BAC. She is now four years old, I adopted her in September last year, and it's one of her most emblematic cases because she spent almost a year in rehab».

Dailys is in the Follow-up subgroup and she is in charge of supervising the care of the adopted pets. «First I ask them through messages, I ask them for photos. If they do not reply, then I go to the house, and if the animal is not in the necessary conditions, the owner is filed a complaint.

She comments that now, with the new Law, they can make the complaint and the pertinent authorities proceed. They have proceeded several times, among them, with drivers who run over animals on the road and do not help them. "Because they had to do it, that's a life, but many just hit and run, they don't care."

-You are very young. What do your friends say about what you do?

-Some do make fun of me, they ask me: what do you have to go chasing stray dogs full of fleas, ticks...? But in general, there's an acceptance for what I do. I have had many talks, at least in my classroom, and they ask me when there's a fair because they want to go, they are interested in adoptions, and I explain to them, and above all, teach them about sterilization, which is an awareness to be raised in the population.

All for Ginebra

Dinora Valdés Jaime is 81 years old and lives with her husband. For some time now, in her house, already too empty due to the departure of the children, there has been one more drop of loneliness: her beloved kitten, Ginebra, has disappeared.

She shows me a tabby kitten and she assures with satisfaction that "this one is just like the one that was stolen from me, because I know that it was stolen from me, from the balcony where she loved to be.

"I called her Ginebra, Ginebra!, but she never came back."

—And what is she going to call her?

"And you ask?!" Ginebra, of course.

«Look at her, she is going to be my company and my husband's. When he sees me enter the house, he surely says: Ginebra appeared! We spoiled her, she jumped onto my lap when watching television and there she would stay, asleep.

«I am going to take care of this Ginebra as I take care of my husband».

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