

PATT MORRISON

It's a Dog's Life, and Death

So where are these fearsome attack-dog Republicans when you need them? If Bill Clinton so much as mixes glass and paper in the recycling bin, the GOP is slaving to swear in a federal prosecutor. Yet the president goes and commits the offense of adopting an evidently expensive Lab puppy, and there's not so much as a yip out of the pack of them.

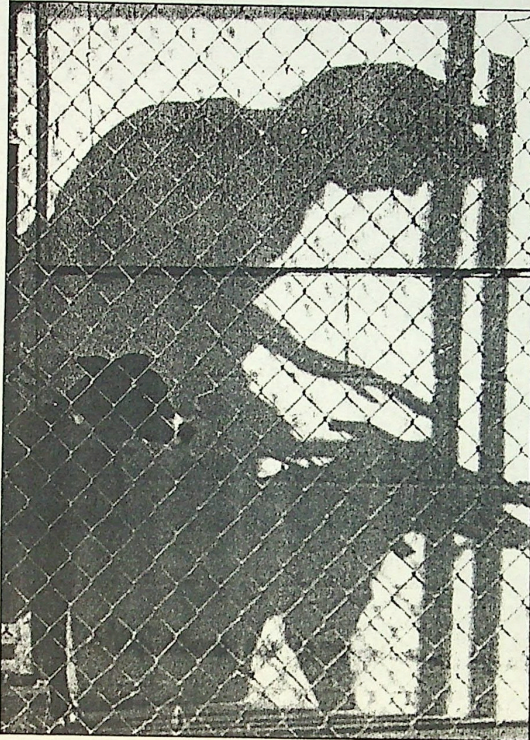
In my book, buying a dog is about the same as murdering a dog. Paying \$500 for a purebred or \$20 to a backyard breeder condemns another unwanted dog to a needless death in an animal shelter—where, for you trivia-obsessed, well over 200,000 dogs and cats are killed across Los Angeles County per annum. That works out to about a hundred every hour of every workday, which is, hmmm, about three dead by the time you finish reading this column.

And here is Bill Clinton, spouse to Hillary, Mr. and Mrs. "Let's Double the Adoption Rate for Unwanted Children, and Maybe We'll Adopt One, Too"—accepting the gift of a presumably pricey purebred from a friend (we'll find out how pricey when Clinton by law reports all his gifts worth more than \$100)—when they could have had the pick of the litter from the nation's animal shelters, and Set a Good Example thereby. Think of the political capital: "Anybody can love a puppy. It takes a bold New Democrat to love an older, homeless dog."

Well, that's all dog doo under the bridge now.

Still, Gini Barrett, a city animal regulation commissioner and western regional director of the American Humane Assn., says her group would "certainly hope that, having missed one opportunity to set a good example, we will take the next opportunity to set a good example and have his pet neutered."

Let's say Clinton decides to move here at the end of his residency. If the Ex-First Dog till isn't fixed, the license could cost \$500, and that's not soft



GLENN KOENIG / Los Angeles Times

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money.

Remember the animal regulation department's October Surprise, the recommendation that L.A.—with rare exceptions—require a \$500 fee to license non-sterilized dogs? It costs L.A. about \$4 million a year to take in and kill those 55,000 dogs and cats. The staggering proposed \$500 fee is not intended as a cash racket; it is intended to price people into doing the right thing. "We're hoping," says Barrett,

"to make it equally outrageous" across almost all the income spectrum. "The goal is not to have anybody pay it. The goal is to have people spay and neuter."

The matter is still in that tinkering-and-hearing stage. In tandem with the proposal, the city opens next Monday its first permanent low-cost spay and neuter clinic, this one at the North Central shelter.

It is people who—no, not people. It is you. You, who treat animals like Kleenex—blow and throw. You, who prattle about

your children seeing the miracle of a pet's birth but don't give a hang about the death at the other end of those "miraculous" lives. You, who would rather have your dog maimed and eviscerated in the street than be so un-macho as to get him neutered.

If I had Barrett's job, I'd make another offer: a two-for-one spay and neuter program for you and your dog. But that's why she is a public policymaker, and I am not.

So it's a fair week for dogs: a new one in the White House, a new spay and neuter clinic, and word from the LAPD that the Rottweiler who supposedly bounded through a dog door and chewed the foot of a comatose San Fernando Valley woman probably didn't exist, leading officials to consider the possibility of a two-legged offender.

Now we are coming up fast on bonanza season at animal shelters and pet shops, the phenom of the Holiday Pet, taken up with enthusiasm for Christmas, dumped at a shelter or out on the freeway by spring, when the puppy becomes a dog and the kids realize there's no "off" switch.

But if you must, put this in the pet starter kit, a poem, unsigned, "The Complaint of an Abandoned Dog," which made its way to me years ago, and which goes in part: "For two years I have paid For having believed in you. . . .

Certain that you will come
Every night I go to sleep
And you are not there. . . .
I have no taste for anything
And I become so ugly

That no one ever
Would want to adopt me. . . .
I see the caretaker
Then the nurse

And the vet in the distance
They are coming . . .
Their faces show to what they
will lead us.

In a few seconds
I am going to forget
everything. . . .

To all you humans
I address a prayer
Kill me when I am little
Take me from my mother
It would be much better
For then you would not
Have to do it today."