

Chapter 1

Exploring the Pet Adoption Option

In This Chapter

- ▶ Deciding whether you really want a pet
 - ▶ Analyzing your lifestyle and personality to determine the perfect kind of pet for you
 - ▶ Examining the specific commitments, legal implications, and first-year costs of owning a pet
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Adopting a pet is good for everyone. You get that soul mate you've been pining for, and a pet without a family gets you. But taking on the responsibility of an adopted pet isn't merely a matter of slapping down the check card for sundry adoption-related expenses and taking home the pet that strikes your fancy at the moment. You're bringing home a living, breathing, conscious being . . . and not just any conscious being. This animal already has lost a home and needs what animal shelters sometimes call a forever home — a full commitment.

This chapter helps you to decide whether you're definite about wanting to adopt a pet, whether you're ready for the responsibilities, expenses, and time that adopting a pet requires, and what pet you really want — as opposed to what pet you may think you want — before you think too seriously about it. This chapter also introduces you to the basic differences between shelters and rescue groups so you can begin to consider which adoption option you want to pursue.

Making Sure You're Ready to Be a Good Pet Parent

Who wouldn't want a pet? They're cute, they're companionable, they don't talk back. Then again, you need to feed them, clean up after them, take care of them every single day . . . hey, wait a minute. Are you sure you want a pet?

If the people who work and volunteer for animal shelters could change one thing about the world, many of them would make people think much longer and harder about whether they really want a pet in the first place. All too often, people adopt pets only to find they don't have the time, money, or patience to take care of them properly, and they end up returning the pet to the animal shelter.

Playing the name game

People enjoy naming their pets, but your pet's name may matter more than you think. Just ask the woman who named her Siamese cat *Killer*, or the person who dubbed a Jack Russell Terrier with the middle initial *T.* for *Trouble*. Sure, sometimes such names are ironic (like the 15-foot Burmese python named *Tiny*), but names can make a difference. Everybody expects a cat named *Jack the Ripper* to leave a wake of destruction, and meeting their (pet owner) human's expectations is one thing pets are good at. In ways you don't even realize, people subtly encourage behaviors

that suit a pet's name and subtly discourage the opposite behaviors. So, think carefully about your pet's name and choose one that embodies the pet you really want. *Butch* might be a better name for your Bulldog than *Mr. Slobber*.

And what about the adopted pet that already has a name? Some people like to keep the name familiar to the pet, but others don't like the previous name or feel it is unsuited to the pet's personality. If your pet seems to like your new and improved name, I say go for it.



Pets have many great qualities, but they're also plenty of work and responsibility. Living with a pet isn't the same as living with, say, a blender. Sure, you have to wash a blender, and it can be the source of good things, but you can also stick it in the cabinet for weeks at a time, and it won't mind at all. Being a good pet parent means providing a pet with all the things it needs to stay healthy. Pets need mental as well as physical exercise, a clean environment, healthy food, and clean water. Being a pet parent means being responsible, keeping a schedule, and making arrangements for your pet's care whenever you have to be away. Are you ready for that kind of responsibility? The following sections can help you decide.

Considering the time commitment

Adopted pets in particular often need extra time to adjust to a new situation, especially when you first bring them home. They look to their owners for help with the transition. From there, new pets need guidance and companionship to lead happy, healthy, safe lives. And those lives can last for quite some time. Check out Table 1-1 for the average life spans of popular pets.

<i>Pet</i>	<i>Approximate Weight or Type</i>	<i>Average Life Span with Proper Care</i>
Giant dog	80–150 pounds	5–8 years
Large dog	50–80 pounds	9–12 years
Medium dog	20–50 pounds	12–14 years

<i>Pet</i>	<i>Approximate Weight or Type</i>	<i>Average Life Span with Proper Care</i>
Small dog	10–20 pounds	12–15 years
Toy dog	5–10 pounds	14–18 years
Teacup dog	Less than 5 pounds	12–15 years (often with health problems)
Indoor cats	Most breeds	14–16 years
Outdoor cats	Most breeds	3–5 years (due to accidents or disease)
Indoor rabbits	Most breeds	9–12 years
Outdoor rabbits	Most breeds	4–6 years
Ferrets	All	5–8
Guinea pigs	Most breeds	5–8
Hamsters	Most breeds	2–3 years
Gerbils	All	3–5 years
Small birds	Finches, canaries, parakeets	5–10 years
Medium birds	Cockatiels, conures, lorries	15–20 years
Large birds	Cockatoos, Amazons, Macaws	30–50 years or more
Small snakes	Garter snakes, corn snakes	7–20 years
Large snakes	Pythons, boa constrictors	20–30 years
Small lizards	Anoles	3–5 years
Medium lizards	Geckos, bearded dragons	10–15 years
Large lizards	Iguanas, monitors	15–30 years
Tarantulas	Males	1–5 years
Tarantulas	Female	15–20 years, some 30+

**All values are approximate, individual pets may vary significantly.*

If you lead a busy life, work most of the day out of the home, or come home late and leave again early in the morning, think long and hard about the commitment before you adopt a pet. Some pets take more time than others — a hamster, for example, takes less time than a dog. But most adopted pets take a significant amount of time and financial commitment, and it isn't fair if you aren't willing to give your pet what it needs. Adopted pets already have endured stressful transitions. Be sure that you have time before putting your new pet through any more unnecessary changes.

Being mindful of housing restrictions

Pets aren't welcome everywhere. If you rent your home, be sure that your landlord allows pets. Many adopted pets are returned to the shelter or even abandoned when they're sneaked into a home environment that doesn't allow them and are then discovered.



As part of the adoption process, many animal shelters and rescue groups require proof of home ownership or an official letter from the landlord stating that he or she will allow a pet to live on the premises. Don't expect to be able to adopt a pet without first getting this paperwork in order.

Landlords and neighbors

Even when a pet is officially allowed in a rented home, adopted pets still can cause problems. Barking dogs, roaming cats, squawking parrots, and the presence of, say, a large python, are enough to make neighbors nervous, annoyed, or downright furious. Complaints and even calls to the police can be cause for a landlord to threaten or even move forward with an eviction. Other things that bother neighbors include failure to clean up waste, odor from pet litter boxes or cages, and failure to keep pets under control while off the leash. These concerns all are serious, and after you start a war with your neighbors or your landlord, life can get pretty stressful for everyone.



Making sure that you manage your adopted pet in a way that won't infringe upon the rights of your neighbors or break any terms, explicit or implied, in your lease is best for you, your neighborhood, and certainly your pet.

Lease laws and leash laws

If you get into a tangle with your landlord or neighbors, you need to know your rights. Sometimes other people who simply don't like pets will unfairly persecute you. This situation is completely different than perfectly justified complaints that you aren't managing your animal.

Every state and local region has its unique set of laws and ordinances regarding pets, what constitutes a pet, and where and when you are liable for your pet's behavior. For instance, in some states, killing any dog that harasses a domestic animal is perfectly legal, if the dog isn't wearing a rabies tag. Pet owners typically are liable for any damages their pets inflict on anybody or anything. That means if your Golden Retriever isn't wearing his tag and he escapes from your yard and chases your neighbor's cat, your neighbor is legally allowed to take action.

Find out the exact laws in your area by contacting your city or state government office. Ask about:

- ✓ Leash laws
- ✓ Noise ordinances

- ✓ Liability issues related to pets
- ✓ Tenant and landlord rights regarding pets

If you find that laws exist that you aren't willing to follow, then please don't adopt a pet.

Affording a pet

Maybe you're perfectly willing to take on the responsibilities associated with owning a pet. You have the time, the space, and the capacity for affection, but do you have the cold hard cash? Pets are pricey, especially during the first year. Even if you're adopting a pet for a meager adoption fee, that pet still needs the care, food, and supplies necessary for a healthy, safe life. Consider the costs involved during the first year of life for various pets before making a commitment to adopt one.

Table 1-2 gives you estimates on first-year costs of various pets. Because different shelters and rescue groups vary in costs according to services and by region of the country, because veterinarians charge different amounts depending on where they're located, and because supplies vary dramatically according to what you buy and how much you choose to spend, these expenses are merely rough but approximate estimates.

Table 1-2 First-Year Costs of Adopted Pets					
<i>Expense</i>	<i>Dogs</i>	<i>Cats</i>	<i>Small Animals</i>	<i>Birds</i>	<i>Exotics</i>
Adoption fees	\$50–\$200	\$25–\$150	\$5–\$50	\$10–\$200+	\$10–\$200
Spay/neuter costs	\$0–\$100	\$0–\$100	\$0–\$100	—	—
Vaccinations	\$100–\$200	\$100–\$200	\$0–\$100	—	—
Other vet care	\$0–\$200	\$0–\$200	\$0–\$200	\$0–\$200	\$0–\$200
Food	\$400–\$600	\$300–\$400	\$50–\$300	\$50–\$200	\$100–\$400
Supplies	\$100–\$500+	\$100–\$500+	\$100–\$300+	\$200–\$400+	\$100–\$300+
Housing, including bedding, heating, and lighting	—	—	\$50–\$100	\$50–\$500	\$50–\$200

(continued)

<i>Expense</i>	<i>Dogs</i>	<i>Cats</i>	<i>Small Animals</i>	<i>Birds</i>	<i>Exotics</i>
Training classes	\$50–\$200	—	—	—	—
Grooming fees	\$0–\$200	\$0–\$200	—	—	—
TOTAL:	\$700–\$2,500+	\$525–\$1,500+	\$205–\$1,100+	\$310–\$1,500+	\$260–\$1,300+

Be sure to take into account that pet expenses continue throughout their lives, and as they age, they may cost more money as their need for more veterinary care increases. Adopting a pet with special medical or emotional needs may tack on additional costs for extra veterinary care or help from a specialized trainer or animal behavior consultant. When considering costs, looking at the big picture and considering the animal's entire probable life span are good ideas.

The Good Part: Adopted Pets = Love

With all this nay-saying, it may sound like the message in this chapter is that you shouldn't get a pet. *Au contraire!* Pets are wonderful, and adopting a pet that needs a home truly is a noble deed. The message in this chapter is really more akin to the message delivered to Boy Scouts: Be prepared. Hundreds of thousands of people successfully keep and enjoy pets, and you can be one of them. If you know what you're getting into, living with an adopted pet can bring many good things into your life. Here are a few:

- ✔ **Pets make you healthier:** The rumor is true: Pets really do make people healthier. Studies show that pet owners have lower blood pressure and reduced stress, get more exercise, and visit the doctor less often than people who don't own pets. Consider adopting a pet to be an investment in your good health and longevity. (You will, of course, return the favor by keeping your pet in good health!)
- ✔ **Pets make you happier:** Studies show that people who have pets suffer less often from depression and have greater psychological stability than people who don't have pets. Less depression means more happiness . . . and how can you fail to be happy when your dog, cat, or even your sociable rat gazes at you with so much interest and adoration?
- ✔ **Pets teach you how to love better:** When you take on the responsibility of caring for and nurturing something or someone, you discover a little bit more about love. This affection goes far beyond the extra credibility you get with the opposite gender when they see you walking your dog through

the park. Pets impact your life, your personality, and your entire being. They pull you out of yourself and into a relationship with them, and their dependence on you helps you to see beyond yourself. You find out about sacrifice, about how to be less selfish, and about how to give. Maybe that's why so many people get pets, then graduate to having children. Pets help you understand what it means to love something other than yourself.

Perfect Pet Profile Quiz: Find Out What Kind of Pet You Really Want

You're serious about adopting a pet, but maybe you're still not sure what kind of pet works best for your lifestyle and personality. Try this ten-question quiz. You may be surprised to find out that you really *are* a cat person or a snake person or that you're really more suited for a guinea pig. Pick the answers you think are best for each of the questions and circle the answer(s) (you may have to do it more than once) that correspond to the number and pet types for each question in Table 1-3. (I help you add up your answers when you're finished.)

- 1. When you think of a pet, you're most cheered by the thought of something:**
 - A. Warm, fuzzy, and snuggly.
 - B. Wiggly and energetic.
 - C. Aesthetically pleasing, beautiful, and breathtaking.
 - D. Cool and shocking.
- 2. When it comes to interacting with a pet, your basic philosophy is:**
 - A. Pets should be seen and not heard.
 - B. Pets should add to the décor of the home.
 - C. Pets should be with their people all the time and participate in their lives as much as possible.
 - D. Pets should be affectionate but also independent. Too much neediness is irritating.
- 3. During the week, you:**
 - A. Work most of the day, approximately 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., and never come home for lunch.
 - B. Work most of the day, but can easily come home for lunch and stay there for at least 30 minutes.
 - C. Work part time and are away from home no more than four to six hours each day.
 - D. Work at home and are almost always there.

4. In your opinion, pet care should involve:

- A. Providing daily food and water, and an annual vet check.
- B. Providing the best food, purified water, the appropriate holistic supplements, pet massage, daily grooming, interactive games that stimulate mind and body, vigorous but appropriate exercise, and plenty of time for bonding, not to mention the best available veterinary care.
- C. The construction of an elaborate habitat kept scrupulously clean, with interesting and stimulating toys and things to do, and a high-tech feeding and water system that minimizes mess.
- D. Feeding once in awhile. Oh, and water.

5. You describe yourself as:

- A. Marathon man/woman. If you're going to run, hike, bike, or swim, you may as well do it big.
- B. Outdoorsy. Nothing like a hike in the woods, a nice campfire, and hanging your backpack from a tree to discourage the bears.
- C. Moderate. A nice walk, a gentle meal, eight hours of sleep, and a regular schedule. Life is much nicer that way.
- D. Deskbound. The whole world is available on your computer. Why exert any more energy than necessary? So what if you sometimes forget to eat . . .

6. When it comes to grooming:

- A. You'd love to spend some nice relaxing time brushing and combing a long beautiful coat every day.
- B. You'd rather keep grooming chores to a minimum. Short coats are best! And don't they make hairless dogs and cats?
- C. You have better things to do with your time, and you aren't much interested in a pet that can't even groom itself.
- D. You can hardly groom *yourself!*

7. How do you feel about pet hair and/or feather fluff?

- A. A big furry dog, a fluffy cat, or a big exotic bird with fantastic plumage is well worth a little extra time with the vacuum cleaner.
- B. You don't mind as long as it matches your clothes and furniture.
- C. Hate it, hate it, hate it. No animal would dare shed a single hair or stray feather in your house!
- D. Ah . . . ahhh . . . ahhhh . . . CHOOO!

8. You are allergic to:

- A. Pet dander, pet hair, and feathers.

- B. Shellfish, peanuts, or strawberries.
- C. Small children and loud noises.
- D. Conformity.

9. Training classes are:

- A. For responsible pet owners.
- B. For those strange people who actually want to own dogs.
- C. A waste of time and money — dogs don't need them.
- D. Prejudiced against cats.

10. The best reason to have a pet is:

- A. To form a mutually beneficial bond with another living being.
- B. To add life and fun to your existence.
- C. To help a creature in need.
- D. To win friends and influence people.

Just answering some of these questions may have helped you to get a clearer picture of the kind of pet you really want in your life, but score your answers and see, more specifically, what they reveal. In the chart below, circle the answer you chose for each question, and then see which column has the most circles. You may have a lot of circles in more than one column, which means that several different types of pets are right for you.

<i>Question</i>	<i>Dog Person</i>	<i>Cat Person</i>	<i>Critter Person</i>	<i>Bird Person</i>	<i>Exotic Person</i>
1	A, B	A, B, C	A, B	C, D	C, D
2	C, D	C, D	A, D	B	A, B
3	B, C, D	A, B, C, D	A, B, C, D	A, B, C, D	A, B, C, D
4	A, B	A, B	A, B, C	A, B, C	A, B, C
5	A, B, C, D	C, D	C, D	C, D	C, D
6	A, B	A, B, C	B, C, D	B, C, D	B, C, D
7	A, B	A, B	A, B, D	A, B	A, B, C, D
8	B	B, C, D	B, C, D	B, C, D	A, B, C, D
9	A	A, B, D	B	B	B
10	A, B, C	A, B, C	A, B, C	A, B, C	A, B, C

Some of the answers in this quiz are in fun, but consider whether you really are opposed to pet hair and remembering to feed and water your pets. If so, you need to consider a pet rock, instead, at least for now. Otherwise, you may have noticed that many of the columns in this chart encompassed a variety of answers. That's because within each pet category, you have a variety of choices. Short-haired dogs and cats don't need much grooming, but long-haired cats and dogs do. Some small animals and large birds produce pet dander, hair, and feathers. Others are small enough that shedding is negligible. Some animals need a lot of attention, and others are more independent.

Throughout this book, you have a chance to discover in more depth exactly what needs different types of animals have within each pet category, but to give you an overview of what to expect with each kind of pet, consider the pet-specific parameters in the sections that follow.

Beyond the Glamour: What It Means to Adopt . . .

Adopting a pet in general involves many considerations, but adopting a particular kind of pet involves a whole slew of new things to think about. Merely realizing that you're a dog person or a bird person or an exotic-animal person isn't enough to justify adopting a pet. You must also consider some creature-specific factors that can help you determine whether you're ready and whether you're at a point in your life when adopting a pet of the type you think you want really is practical.

A dog

More households have dogs than any other pet in America — 43.5 million households, according to the American Pet Product Manufacturer's Association. But dogs also are the pets that take the most work, time, care, and expense. Dogs need plenty of attention, regular vet care, good food, chew toys, training and socialization, and exercise. Being pack animals, dogs must feel like they're a part of the family, or they won't thrive. Even if they know they're the lowest family member on the totem pole, dogs want to know their place so they can feel secure. Dogs also need basic daily maintenance.

Many dogs, especially as puppies, can't be left alone for more than a few hours without needing a bathroom, and they should never be left alone outside. They can chew up your house, bark and howl, learn how to open cabinets, jump over baby gates, and generally cause a ruckus. Dogs need exercise in the form of walks and/or active games. But dogs also are incredibly rewarding companions, and a well-trained, well-socialized, and well-behaved dog is one

of life's great joys. Getting your dog to that place isn't always easy, however. It takes work and a lot of attention!

Adopted dogs in particular can be needy and require extra work, patience, and a big effort to train and socialize in the beginning. Some fear being abandoned again, some may have health problems, and some may be distrustful of people. On the other hand, your adopted dog may be the picture of good manners, having already enjoyed good training and socialization by previous owners. Even so, all dogs want to be with people. They are social animals and won't enjoy being left alone in the backyard. Getting a dog means deciding that you want to hang out with a dog. It may sound obvious, but many people overlook this basic fact. If you want to hang out with a dog, great. If you think that may get tiresome, keep reading.

A cat

More households may have dogs than cats, but pet cats outnumber dogs in America — 90.5 million pet cats far exceed the paltry 73.5 million pet dogs! Cats are notorious for being more independent, less needy, and more self-sufficient than dogs, making them many pet owners' pet of choice. However, not all cats are independent. Some breeds and some individuals of any type can be demanding, meowing and butting at your hand for a targeted stroking session when you really need to be typing at the computer. In fact, cats may want to help you type at your computer. Don't rely on their accuracy, however.

Some cats are maddeningly allusive, denying your requests for affection when you're finally done typing and ready to pet them. Agile and playful, curious and clever, cats can get into trouble if they don't have enough to do. Some cats really want a playmate, and having one can be a great way to fulfill a cat's social needs, although be prepared for mad dashes around the house, with each cat a mere streak of fur in your peripheral vision. Other cats want nothing to do with a second feline, needing and desiring only you. With cats, you have to be open, flexible, and ready to accept the unique and often eccentric personality you get. If you don't have the patience for such indulgence, keep reading.

A small mammal

If you like to look at cute fuzzy critters but you don't want them demanding your attention all the time, perhaps a small animal is for you. Rabbits, guinea pigs, hamsters, gerbils, and mice endure, occasionally even enjoy being handled, and benefit from supervised exploration outside of their cages. Ferrets and rats, on the other hand, can be more demanding and want more intensive interaction. Even though small animals may not require a bunch of handling, they nevertheless require plenty of maintenance in the form of habitat cleaning.

All small animals need a cage or other safe enclosure that is spacious enough for them to move around in and explore and equipped with stimulating toys and other interactive exercise equipment. However, even the classiest of critter condos isn't going to be healthy when it's full of animal waste. Most critter cages need to be scrupulously and safely cleaned at least once a week, refilled with clean litter, and always supplied with fresh clean water and good food. If you're not willing to do that kind of weekly chore, keep reading.

A birdie

Pet birds are gorgeous, exotic, tropical creatures with stunning plumage, but their downy feathers are likely to accumulate in every nook and cranny within 50 feet of their cages, and many birds sing, squawk, whistle, twitter, and even scream when they're bored, hungry, or just because they feel like it. To stay healthy, birds need more than a bowl of seed every day supplemented with fresh fruits and vegetables — which require preparation. Birds must always have fresh water, and most birds require attention.

Birds that come out of their cages need to have their wings clipped for safety reasons (see Chapter 17). Larger parrots need time out of their enclosures and probably want to interact with you. And birds can live for several decades! Birds also need training, if you don't want to be nipped, that is, and regular vet care from a vet who's experienced with birds to stay healthy.

Some people think avian interaction is just great, but many others find that they don't have the time and, most of all, simply cannot stand the noise! Squawking from a large parrot or even a relatively diminutive conure (a kind of large parakeet) can be extremely loud. Even tiny budgies (small parakeets) are likely to spend much of the day twittering and singing. If you like these sounds, and if they add an exotic flare to your day, that's great. If such noise drives you crazy, or if you can't stand the idea of feather fluff and seed shells on the floor, keep reading.

An exotic

So you want to amaze your friends and intimidate your enemies with a giant snake or a prehistoric-looking iguana or a big hairy tarantula. That's probably not the best reason for adopting an exotic pet. Snakes, lizards, and arachnids don't require the constant care and attention that some pets do, but they need clean cages and careful handling. Some species shouldn't be handled at all, while others tolerate but don't require it. They do, however, require a proper and complete diet and clean, fresh water. Many exotic pets also have specific care needs, such as heated surfaces or certain types of lighting. Without them, the animals can quickly die. Before deciding on adopting one of these types of pets, you need to do some research so you know exactly what your adopted exotic pet needs.

Adopting an exotic pet means accepting a certain degree of responsibility. Many people are afraid of snakes, lizards, and spiders, and some of these animals can actually pose a risk to humans. Making sure your exotic pet never escapes or harms anyone is your primary responsibility, but you also must be aware of local laws and ordinances that govern exotic pets. In some areas, you're simply not allowed to own them. If you try to duck the law and keep one as a pet anyway, you risk getting caught and having the animal taken away or possibly even destroyed, if it harms someone. Are you ready for that kind of responsibility? If not . . . perhaps you really don't need any pet at all.

Finding Your New Best Friend through Shelters, Humane Societies, and Rescues

If you decide that you really do still want a pet and that you're practically born to be a pet owner, then it's time to examine your adoption options. The three types of adoption resources essentially are animal shelters, rescue groups, and humane societies. In spirit, all these organizations are the same, comprised of people who devote their spare time, or in some cases almost all their time, to rescuing animals. Each has pets available for adoption, but each differs in its approach to adoption, its requirements, and its procedures.

In the next two chapters, you find out in much greater detail exactly what animal shelters and rescue groups do. In general, however, the differences are described in the sections that follow.

Uncovering the basics of animal shelters

Animal shelters usually operate as city or county agencies, taking in animals that are abandoned, found wandering, or are without apparent owners and causing a nuisance. Animal shelters adopt animals, and some euthanize animals that are not adopted or adoptable. Some animal shelters are considered *no-kill shelters* that don't routinely euthanize animals (unless, in some cases, the animals are ill or dangerous), but that also means they turn away many animals. Animal shelters usually are located in dedicated facilities where potential adopters can go to look at the animals and where people who have lost their pets can go to find out whether their animal has been picked up by animal control. Animal shelters usually have dogs and cats, but many also have small animals, birds, and exotic animals that people abandoned because they no longer can care for them. Animal shelters usually are listed in the phone book.

Animal shelters often include the term "Humane Society" in their names, but human societies are not officially affiliated with each other under any national umbrella. The Humane Society of the United States is a separate group generally advocating and lobbying for animal welfare issues.

Being a Good Samaritan: Adopting a special-needs pet

If you've decided you have the resources to adopt a pet, consider taking the extra step to save an animal with special needs. Cute kittens and puppies are relatively easy to place; harder to place, and much more frequently euthanized, are pets with special needs — older pets or pets with medical problems or disabilities. Of course, special-needs pets may need serious medical care and can cost a pet owner much more in vet bills, special food, and heartache. Yet, some people feel that they're the ones to give these needy animals a loving, caring home.

Taking on a special needs animal definitely is a commitment above and beyond the sizeable commitment pet ownership alone entails. Yet, it also has special rewards. People who adopt

special-needs pets often claim to have learned valuable life lessons from their disabled pets. Blind cats, deaf dogs, small animals missing a limb, birds that have been abused, each of these animals often show remarkable ability to rally, survive, thrive, and develop meaningful relationships with their caretakers.

Research carefully the care needs of any special-needs pet you're thinking about adopting, but if you can handle those needs and afford the necessary care, by all means, be the one to step forward and give a disabled pet a home. You can change a special-needs pet's last days into years, or at least fill those last days with loving human contact.

Demystifying the rescue group

Rescue groups aren't so different from the humane societies and shelters discussed in Chapter 2, except that they usually shelter a specific breed or type of animal and develop an interest in that type of animal that, in turn, increases the chances of appropriately placing their pets. Some groups, for example, are devoted specifically to a particular breed of dog, small animals, large parrots, or exotic pets such as reptiles. However, the one common denominator among shelters, humane societies, and rescue groups is their devotion to helping animals that need them.

Rescue groups usually are started by one or two people, or perhaps a club, with a sincere commitment to pets. These rescuers often get involved because they develop a reputation for knowing a lot about a breed or particular type of animal and are willing to take on animals that are abandoned or that people can't keep. Rescuers are impossible to categorize beyond their devotion to their chosen animals. Some are dog breeders, exotic pet hobbyists, and animal welfare activists. Others work in veterinary clinics or pet stores or have other unrelated jobs and do pet rescue work in their spare time.

Nevertheless, the affinity that rescue groups have for specific animals develops into a more or less structured network of rescuers and foster homes that puts interested adopters through a rigorous screening process to assure good matches between pet and owner.