

Questioning Our Actions Towards Animals:
Animal-Related Ethical Dilemmas for Young People



Opt to Adopt: Considering Your Local Pet Adoption Center

It had been almost a month since June had heard anything from her grandmother—exactly the same amount of time since Finn, her grandmother’s beloved, old Siamese cat, had died.

But, on the fourth Sunday without Finn, June was awoken early in the morning by footsteps heading past her door and down the stairs. Curious as to who was awake at such an hour, she tiptoed downstairs and into the kitchen. There, she was surprised to find her father hurriedly downing his breakfast at the table.

“June! Well, you’re up early!” he exclaimed, not doing a very good job of keeping his voice quiet.

“You are, too!” she whispered in reply. “What are you doing?”

“Well, I’ve been thinking,” he began. “Your grandma’s been pretty glum since she lost Finn, and I’ve been talking to your uncles and aunts. The whole family’s agreed to pitch in some money to buy a new Siamese kitten for her! So, I got up early this morning to pick one out at the pet store. I would have told you last night, but you were asleep when I came in. Do you think she’ll like it?”

June knew how much her grandmother would love another cat, but she was unsure if buying one at a pet store would be the best choice. She had seen all the cats and dogs looking for homes at the animal adoption center when her class took a field trip there. But how can she convince her family to choose a needy cat from the adoption center over a purebred from the pet store?



It’s exciting that everyone wants to pitch in and help June’s grandmother recover from her loss, and June has a great opportunity to help both her grandmother and a homeless pet. So, she needs to think quickly and clearly if she is going to have any chance at convincing her dad to slow down and consider another option.

The MSPCA believes that the decision to acquire a pet is one that should be reached only after careful consideration is given to the required commitment; pets shouldn’t be given as gifts unless the potential guardian is present and is willing to commit to the life-long care of the pet. Because pet shops encourage impulse purchases of animals, the MSPCA suggests seeking out professionally run sources of companion animals, such as local animal adoption centers, humane societies, breed-specific rescue organizations, or reputable breeders.

June doesn’t want to spoil the mood, but she might suggest that her father make doubly-sure her grandmother actually wants another pet to care for; after all, pet guardianship of a cat is huge responsibility that will likely last 15 to 20 years; it shouldn’t be taken lightly. So, if June’s grandmother is convinced that she is ready to care for another cat, then June’s next step is to convince her dad to consider visiting an animal adoption center versus a pet shop. Many animals in pet shops have been

poorly bred in mass breeding facilities that are factory-like and inhumane. The animals are kept in very small quarters, with little human interaction or veterinary care, and are used as breeding machines to make money for owners. Pet shops buy these animals, often in poor health and with questionable genetics, and sell them to an unknowing public.

Homeless animals at an animal adoption center are good, needy animals looking for a second-chance home. Many are pets that have been given up for a variety of reasons, with no fault of their own. Some have been surrendered because a family is moving, going through a divorce, dealing with a death, or suffering with allergies or illness. Others are brought to the adoption center because their guardians no longer have the time to care for them, or the animals may have been abandoned. Cats looking for homes make up the largest number of homeless pets in adoption centers. Many people don't think of animal adoption centers as having purebred animals, but actually over 25% are just that! And breed-specific rescue organizations, like Siamese cat rescue groups, have a wide-variety of animals of varying ages and histories.

Since it is going to be her companion, June's grandmother might like to visit the animal adoption center with the family and see just which cat she connects with the best—there is bound to be at least one! A kitten just might be a bit too rowdy for her grandmother to chase around the house. June could suggest that a more appropriate choice might be a spayed or neutered adult pet who is just looking for love and companionship and is already used to a quieter existence complimenting her grandmother's lifestyle. But if everyone is set on a surprise, the best decision might be to visit the animal adoption center to buy all of the needed supplies for a new cat and purchase a gift certificate for June's grandmother to choose her own cat companion. Then, they can all go as a family to help her with her big decision.