
Birmingham Humane Society – Birmingham, MI
Vallie M. Szymanski – Northwoods Humane Society Board Member

I moved to Troy, Michigan from Washington DC right after my husband Joe and I got married in May of 1977. I was a Pan Am employee at the time and was able to transfer from the Pan Am ticket counter in downtown Washington DC to the Pan Am Cargo Facility at Detroit International Airport. That was a quite a change but I loved the challenge. My job responsibilities varied from monitoring Custom Inspections in the Freight Warehouse to inspecting live exotic zoo animal shipments from all over the world bound for the Cincinnati Zoo. At that time, Pan Am followed very high standards for the safe shipment of live animals and conducted quarterly employee training regarding “Restricted Articles” to ensure that all staff was educated on any items that might endanger live animals – one such substance was “Dry Ice” that was used to keep perishable food shipments cold. We learned that dry ice vapor rises and looks like steam when it meets the air. Inhaling the vapor can cause suffocation or extreme breathing issues. So it was critical that no live animals be shipped on the same aircraft with perishable food shipments using “Dry Ice”.

I worked there for 5 months and then I was laid off. I was disappointed but it allowed me to do something I had always wanted to do...volunteer for a humane society. Troy was right next to Birmingham, Michigan and was the home of the Birmingham Humane Society. The shelter was run by the *ever courageous* 69-year-old Edith Buck and the shelter was in her home. At any given time she would have 15 cats and 8 large dogs housed in her large home with a fenced backyard. That was where I met my first Afghan hound whose name was Shiloh. He was 8 years old and absolutely magnificent but as is typical with people who don't understand a particular breed, he ended up in the shelter. His owners did not understand the “sight hound” and the importance of always leashing them unless they are in a fenced backyard or field. And potential owners must be prepared to meticulously groom these dogs as is the case with many long-haired dogs. My husband and I wanted to adopt Shiloh but we lived in a small 2 bedroom apartment at the time so that was not an option for us.

And then there was the *ever defiant* Edith Buck...she was out to save the critters from homelessness and abuse PERIOD. In the short time I volunteered with her I accompanied her in her pickup truck as she would scour the neighborhoods for dogs tied up and left out in the cold Michigan winter. And yes, she would “case” these neighborhoods regularly and if there were repeated sightings of the same dog(s) freezing in the cold, she would hop out of her truck, untie the dog and rescue them. She would take them “home” to shelter them with warm bedding and food. She would report each rescue to the Birmingham Police Department and they would repeatedly remind her that she did not have the right to steal the dogs. But by doing that she received a lot of media attention regarding the plight of these dogs and it made a difference. However, that was when my husband suggested that perhaps I should continue to collaborate with Edith by helping her explore ideas that would positively benefit the entire community. Just as we were making positive inroads with that endeavor my husband was transferred to Chicago. I learned that Edith passed away in 2002 at age 94 survived by a very large family including 15 great grandchildren. It was such an incredible experience to know and work with Edith Buck; I will never forget her passion to “save the animals”.

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Dates to Save:

November 1-30, 2020 Dog is Good Promotion - 15% of proceeds will be donated to NHS. To Shop, please visit www.lesliesharon.com, to purchase your items.

Cookies for a Cause – **December Bake Sale**, please visit: <https://www.northwoodshumanesociety.org/events--fundraisers.html>