

A Volunteer Adventure

by Gayle Haarr

My boyfriend, Doug, and I decided to be good samaritans and volunteer at the local Humane Society. We figured we both own dogs, big dogs, so we can walk some dogs that are down on their luck dogs and play with them for a few hours a month.

We went through the whole orientation process, paperwork, meetings, tours and all. We were finally ready to volunteer. We ended up signing up to start on a Saturday morning because this was a busy time at the shelter, volunteers are always needed to make everything look nice and clean before the doors open and all the perspective dog owners show up.

So, we walk in the door at 8am on a Saturday morning ready to work. Right away, a guy escorts Doug off to who knows where, not to be seen again for hours. Another guy sees me standing their looking clueless and lets me know he has a job for me. He and I walk together through a set of kennels. The dogs are already outside and they are cleaning out the cages. We go into all these empty cages and grab the food and water bowls out of them all. I get about 16 bowls that need a good cleaning. He shows me to a little room with an enormous bath tub at sink level where they do everything; wash dogs, bowls, toys, cat, cat boxes and anything else. This was going to be my space for the next few hours.

He shows me how to fill the tub properly: hot water, dish soap, and some chemical stuff that kills diseases. Now I'm all set. I start washing the bowls I have. I wash all 16 of them, set them all out to dry, let them dry, stack them, and put them away. I assume I'm done, so I empty the tub. I figure I'll leave it nice and clean so I scrub it and then go to see what else needs to be done, feeling good about myself about a job well done. Just as I am about to find someone to see what next, an experienced volunteer comes around the corner. I'm all gung-ho, ready to get busy. I ask her what I should do next. After she finds out I was washing dog bowls, she tells me that there will be plenty more coming to me as they put other dogs out and more kennels are cleaned.

So, I refill the tub up with the hot water, soap, and chemical stuff. I wait a few more minutes and still no bowls. Being the little overachiever, I go looking in the kennel area where we had gone to earlier to see if any other dogs were brought outside. Sure enough another four dogs are outside so I go into the kennels and grab the 8 more bowls. I'm thinking this is a pretty easy job washing bowls. At this point I'm starting to wonder what has happened to Doug, because I haven't seen him since we arrived.

I wander back to my little tub in my own little world, just thinking aimlessly. Just as I turn the corner, I see someone has placed three huge stacks of bowls in the little scrub room. These bowls are of all different shapes and sizes and the stacks are about the same height as me. I was only

gone a few seconds, how could they have possibly brought in that many bowls in the short time that I was gone? I had hundreds of dirty bowls in front of me, how could this be? Do they have this many dogs here? What do they all need two bowls for anyway? Can't we conserve, one bowl for food and water?

At this point, I'm totally overwhelmed. I just stared at the stacks for a minute before I got to work, wondering where they hide the real automatic dish washer. They can't seriously want one person to clean all these bowls. I kept waiting, expecting that maybe someone else will be showing up to help me with all these bowls. After about 15 minutes, I realized that is simply wishful thinking. I am the only person to wash all these dirty, slimy, smelly, half full food and water bowls.

I spent hours scrubbing, emptying, washing, stacking and putting away dog bowls. I must have filled that tub ten times in a couple of hours. That little room I was in got so hot, sticky, and stinky by the time I was finished. I was so excited to be done. I had put the last bowl away in its home, squeaky clean. I even cleaned the tub again. That's when they started to bring me dirty cat boxes. Yes, cat boxes. I won't go into the details of this, but I will say that the dog bowls we have at the park in the park when compared.

After all my cleaning was finally done, I bumped into Doug. He was covered head to toe in grass. I asked him what he has been doing, showing just how blonde I can be at times. He informed me that since he was over 18 years of age, they had him mowing the lawn. I guess you have to be 18 or older to operate machinery as a volunteer, so he was outside mowing the grass.

The funny part about it is that this is not like a house lawn. This is a full blown farm! This place is huge. So, he was out there mowing away, with a push mower I might add. No John Deere lawn tractor at his disposal. He was going around the fenced in area, with farm animals staring at him like he was the entertainment for the day. Some of these animals were following him around the fence. After a while, a Peacock from the farm starts to chasing him around the fence. So, every time he would get to a corner, this giant mad Peacock would begin to charge the fence and go after him. I wish I had been out there to see it, The Peacock who terrorizes the volunteers. It's better than washing dog bowls any day.