

Even dogs need
angels



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Even Dogs Need Angels The child's nightmarish scream startled me as it cut through the veterinarian's waitingroom and echoed around the kennel in the back where I was working. The noise, a daily occurrence, was not what I had expected when I signed up to work as a volunteer at the Pet Clinic to earn extra high school credit in the Career Development program. Three weeks into the summer and I was considering dropping it all together. Nothing I had seen had anything to do with medicine, and even less to do with my planned major which was business. I was doomed to clean up after an endless stream of sick animals and the task offered nothing of the self-improvement I'd hoped for. I had decided that today would be my last. I asked to meet with Dr. Mary Lou Alvarez, the head of the Pet Clinic, and though I was prepared to have her sign my termination paperwork, I would first ask to be allowed to work in the business office.

I explained to Dr. Alvarez that the job wasn't at all as I had expected. The only experience I was getting was in baby-sitting sick pets and learning how not to run a business. I thanked her for offering me the opportunity and, still hoping for an office job, proceeded to offer my "just enough to be dangerous" knowledge of business. I threw in the standard clichés from the latest Donald Trump book that I had just read and advised her that by moving her practice to the suburbs she would have "access to a more lucrative market" where there would be a "wealthier customer base" that wouldn't need the "massive amounts of credit" she was extending. I felt that my speech was having an impact on her as Dr. Alvarez smiled and allowed me to finish without interruption.

Dr. Alvarez then began by telling me that she hadn't always been interested in veterinarian medicine either. When she was twelve years old her pet collie

had gotten hit and sustained a broken leg with internal injuries. After exhausting all the names in the phone book, she accepted the fact that her parents would never be able to afford the hundreds of dollars it would take for an operation and her dear "Lady Harlena" would have to put to "sleep". She said the tears stayed in her eyes for three weeks before deciding that no pet should be put to death simply because the owner didn't have enough money to treat it properly. She decided to become a veterinarian.

She told me that the little girl I heard screaming that morning was not just crying for an animal. To her, that animal was a family member. For the elderly that were sitting in the waiting room, their pet may be their sole companionship and only friend. She explained that animals are a lot more than just pets to these people, and she extended them so much credit because they were just too proud to accept charity. She said that most of the people I saw working there were volunteers that had a sick animal treated in the past. She then asked me, "If I left the neighborhood, who would take care of these pets? Who would take care of these people?" Those were her reasons for being in business and she hoped that one day I would find mine.

I sat there with my tail between my legs and apologized for my impetuous attitude. I went back to cleaning out the kennel, finished out the term, and have returned as a volunteer when time permits. I still have an avid interest in business, but Dr. Alvarez taught me that you have to have a reason why you are in business. Today, as her words echo in my head, I know that my success will not be measured in terms of cash or credit, but by the gratitude of my customers. Without that, the Pet Clinic would have been just one more suburban animal hospital.