



## President's Message...

### I Have a Dream speech

by Lynn Hoover –delivered at the first annual IAABC conference,  
“Animals & Other Nations,” in Columbia, Maryland, June 3 – 5, 2005

I am happy to join with you today in what will go down in our history, as the greatest gathering on behalf of companion animals with behavior problems in the history of our profession.

Five score years ago, the great natural historian Henry Beston, in whose symbolic shadow we stand today, wrote his moving discourse on the relationship animals bear to us:

*We patronize them for their incompleteness, for their tragic fate of having taken form so far below ourselves. And therein we err, and greatly err. For the animal shall not be measured by man. In a world older and more complete than ours they move finished and complete, gifted with extensions of the senses we have lost or never attained, living by voices we shall never hear. They are not brethren, they are not underlings; they are other nations, caught with ourselves in the net of life and time, fellow prisoners of the splendor and travail of the earth.*

These now-famous words have been oft-repeated as a great beacon of hope for millions of companion animals. The animals had been measured by humans and found wanting, and were being seared by the withering flames of abuse and exploitation.

It came as a joyous daybreak for animal caregivers to envision an end to the long night of suffering. But one hundred years later, we must face the tragic fact that animals are still not living in a right relationship with humans. And one hundred years later, the lives of animals who live as companions to humans are still sadly crippled by the manacles of distorted perceptions and the chains of unrealistic expectations.

One hundred years later, companion animals with behavior problems are an endangered species. Why? Because animals are unable to communicate with humans in a language that most humans understand. Humans draw the wrong conclusions, and that leads to the wrong interventions that get animals into even deeper trouble with *our* species. Thus, companion animals who are unable to make things right with us find themselves living on the loneliest of islands. *“I was hungry and you **did** give me to eat; I was frightened and you **did** comfort me. But with all your food and comfort, you nourished me not. For you failed to notice: I am not like you. I am another nation.”*

So, one hundred years later, companion animals with “issues” can be found living in exile, languishing in the corners of shelters or dying simply because there is no place to keep them after being abandoned AS-IF: as if the love relationship they had with their families is irrelevant; as if there is no human-animal bond worth fighting for. These animals have been deprived of their families, and all too often are made to die when there is still hope. So we have come here today, in part to do something about a shameful situation.

In a sense, we have come here today to cash a check. When the architects of our association wrote the visionary words of the Mission Statement, we were signing a promissory note to which every IAABC animal behavior consultant falls heir. We wrote in our note: *Our Mission is to assist companion animals and their humans by interrupting the cycle of inappropriate punishment, rejection, and euthanasia of animals due to behavior problems that are resolvable.*

This note was a promise that all animals living in relationship with humans—cats and dogs, parrots, and horses—will be guaranteed the right to love, understanding, and appropriate support in their time of need.

It is obvious today that families and whole communities have not acknowledged this debt insofar as animals with behavior problems are concerned. Instead of honoring their obligations, animal owners are allowing healthcare providers, insurance companies, extended family, neighbors, breeders, groomers, trainers, to give their pets a bad check. And especially with aggression, the check is coming back marked "insufficient funds."

But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt. We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of possibility among those who define social norms, or with families who bring animals into their hearts and homes. So we have come together today to cash this check, a check that will give companion animals with issues, PRN – per need - the riches of understanding and the security of acceptance and optimal care.

We have also come to this spot to remind ourselves of the fierce urgency of NOW. Now is the time to make real the promise of the IAABC Mission.

Now is the time to raise animals living in relationship with humans from the dark and desolate desert of neglect to the sunlit path of enlightened behavioral intervention. Now is the time to think “rehabilitation first” for animals with issues.

We will not overlook the urgency of the moment or underestimate the capacity of family pets to adapt and heal.

We in the IAABC embrace a collaborative model of healthcare and urge our colleagues in allied professions to recognize the wisdom of this approach. A Collaborative Healthcare Model promotes seamless cooperation and *an exchange of usable information* between animal behavior consultant, client, veterinarian, and veterinary behaviorist. Groomers, breeders, neighbors, and extended family, may also be included in the loop.

The veterinary community must become aware of the *determination* of our members. Animal behavior consultants do not practice veterinary medicine without a license. We do not diagnose medical conditions or prescribe medical treatments. But we are *committed* to providing maximum support for animals in our care. As such, we do research and make information from known reliable sources available to clients, colleagues, and veterinarians.

Paolo Friere, one of the most influential thinkers regarding education during the late twentieth century, emphasized the need for dialogue in his concern for the oppressed. His book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is currently one of the most quoted of educational texts. In it, Friere teaches us that dialogue should not involve one person acting *on* another, but rather people interacting *with* each other. He observes that withholding information is a tactic of an oppressor.

IAABC animal behavior consultants are not oppressors. We are liberators. As such, we embrace an obligation to make known, reliable information available to those who are in the best position to act on it.

We will not rest until a majority of pets with behavior problems are given appropriate opportunities to achieve behavioral health. The whirlwinds of our movement will continue to shake the foundations of our communities until a bright day of opportunity for companion animals emerges.

We cannot be satisfied as long as families cannot solve their problems with pets because everywhere they turn, the information they get is the wrong information. We cannot be satisfied as long as animals are robbed of their dignity by assumptions such as “we know he’s trying to dominate us” and “she’s doing that to spite us” and “he’s just a dog.” We cannot be satisfied as long as the human response to animals in trouble is almost *always* the wrong response.

We can never be satisfied as long as animals are punished for being afraid.

And we can never be satisfied as long as animals who are presumably loved by their humans are summarily euthanized after being provoked by their humans to bite.

We are not unmindful that some of you have come to this profession out of your own trials and tribulations. Some of you have come from communities where your quest for help for your pets left you and your pets battered by supposed experts and staggered by bad advice.

As Winnie the Pooh observed in the The Tao of Pooh:

"Lots of people talk to animals," said Pooh.

"Maybe but..."

"Not very many listen, though," he said.

"That's the problem"

As we well know, pets with issues in our communities are veterans of unearned suffering, as are their families.

Go back to your communities, knowing that somehow this situation can and will be changed.

It is something I dream about. It is a dream deeply rooted in the IAABC dream.

I have a dream that one day animal owners will rise up and live out the true meaning of their commitment to care for family, in sickness and in health, and that commitment will extend to other species living in loving relationships with them.

I have a dream that our members will continue to deeply respect the family's right to self-determination. Families must decide if they will go the distance for a pet, and it must be understandable to us if they say "No." And for certain sad situations we must recognize that "No" *is* the optimal response.

But I have a dream that we will encounter increasing numbers of families who are willing to sit down with qualified animal behavior experts and map out strategies to manage and modify their animal's problems. To achieve this end, however, we will need thousands more qualified practitioners than are currently available.

I have a dream that we will never hear again from another owner: "I loved this dog, she was my best friend for seven years. She saw me through a painful divorce. We were inseparable. Then she bit me! Twice! I knew what I had to do. I held her while our veterinarian euthanized her."

I have a dream today.

I have a dream that one day the majority of owners of pets with issues will say "what can we do to help?", not "how do we rid ourselves of this problem?"

I have a dream that one day in pet owners homes', families who have been educated to show their animals "who is boss" to end unwanted behavior, will understand that "showing their animals what *to do instead*" yields better results.

I have a dream that pet owners who don't believe in giving "cookie rewards" because animals should be "above bribery" and should "work to please" their humans – that these owners will comprehend as we do, that the only alternative to the effective use of rewards, is punishment.

I have a dream that one day soon, animal owners and caretakers will commit to working along with us, without a fight, to "minimize the use of aversive stimuli and maximize the effective use of reinforcers to modify animal behavior." The LIMA-first principle ( that is, the least intrusive and minimally aversive) will become *their* general rule as it is our general rule.

I have a dream today.

I have a dream that families will free themselves of antiquated rules about pets, such as "a dog must never growl at humans" and "a parrot must never become irate"...and will tune in to their pets' real needs and nourish their friends instead.

The rough places will be made plains and the crooked places will be made straight and the glory of animals living in relationship with humans will be revealed and we all will see it together.

I have a dream because right now, right here in our International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants, our members are serving as models of cooperation and respect. We understand what is good and are inspired to fight for the good for animals, owners and societies. We extend *welcoming* hands to colleagues from allied professions who also have the wisdom to fight for what is right and good.

This is our hope. This is the faith we will bring back to our communities. With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair, sparkling crystals of hope and everlasting affection and devotion to the Other Nations that inhabit our homes and our hearts.

And if, in the end, we are to be measured not by how much we acquired but by how much we loved...not by how much we controlled but by what we gave to nourish others ...and if it takes love to beget love, and love to accept the idea of animals as sentient beings, then what the great Henry Beston wrote must become true: *"We need another and wiser and perhaps a more mystical concept of animals"...*

And that wisdom will finally set the animals free.

So let freedom ring.

When we let freedom ring, we will be able to speed up that day when animals living in relationships with humans, if they could sing in our language, just might be inspired by the words of the old Negro spiritual to sing, "Thank God Almighty, *you finally understand us* and we are free at last."

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*Thanks to Martin Luther King for his incomparable "I Have a Dream" speech that gave inspiration for this speech, and in some ways the inspiration for this movement, the IAABC.*

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