



Rachel Hirschfeld with her beloved dog, "Soupbone," circa 2005.

## White Plains Times

### **Pet Trusts: Securing Your Pet's Future** By: Debbie Rotolo Published: March 14, 2008

If your pets are an important part of your life, some of the following thoughts might have occurred to you. "Who will take care of my beloved pets if I am no longer able to provide for them, even if I am still alive? What if I am no longer here...who will keep them safe and healthy?"

Most of us legally protect and provide for our human family in the event of our death by creating a will. In recent years, the realization that we need to include our family pets in our legal plans has led to the development of pet trusts and pet protection agreements as a method by which we can ensure the continued loving care of these important members of our family.

Contrary to what many people believe, a will is not enough when making these provisions for your pets. A will is effective only after the owner dies. Additionally, detailed instructions left in the will for the care of your pet are not enforceable in court. A valid pet trust ensures that your instructions must be carried out and that any funds left for the care of the pet are used as you direct.

Prominent local attorney Rachel Hirschfeld, who has dedicated a large part of her estate practice to helping individuals and families protect their pets and provide the ongoing care they need and deserve, spoke about pet trusts in a recent interview. Hirschfeld, a lawyer and a lover of animals, concentrates in estates and trusts for humans, but through her practice, and through the unfortunate illness and passing of her beloved rescue dog, Soupbone, she became aware of the terrible situation in which orphaned pets can be left.

Every year, five to 10 million pets are put to death or used for research because their owners did not make legal plans to protect their pet's future. In order to provide individuals and families with a simple, cost-effective way to provide for their pets, Hirschfeld created the Hirschfeld Pet Protection Agreement, a copyrighted, trademarked and patent-pending process to help ensure that all pet owners, regardless of wealth or lifestyle, can make legally enforceable plans for the long-term protection and care of their pets.

"Sadly, pet owners often do not address the crucial issue of who will care for their pets when they are no longer able to do so," Hirschfeld said. "The consequences of failing to provide for a pet's transitioning and continuing care can be harsh. Too often, the pet will end up with neither a home nor a family. While in some instances family or friends consider the pet a dear member of the household, and will continue to care for the pet, in many cases there is no one left who is able or willing to do so. Generally, the pets end up in shelters, where in 2007, almost four million dogs and cats were euthanized—nearly 9,600 per day," explained Hirschfeld.

When considering what might become of your pets in these situations, you will want to consider the security of an enforceable document, such as a pet trust or a pet protection agreement, rather than a pledge or a friendly handshake as the foundation for your pet's continued care.

A full and detailed description of these documents, as well as the ability to easily create your own binding agreement, can be found by going to Hirschfeld's websites, [mypetprotection.com](http://mypetprotection.com) and [pettrustlawyer.com](http://pettrustlawyer.com). All the information you need when considering forming a pet trust, including helpful FAQs and many wonderful local sheltering resources, can also be found at both sites.

Excellent information about pet estate planning can also be found at the Bideawee site ([bideawee.org](http://bideawee.org) ). Click on the “How We Help” tab and then on “Pet Estate Planning” for details on how to provide for your pet’s future through Bideawee’s “New Leash on Life Program,” which gives animal lovers the reassurance that their companion animals left behind will spend their quiet years being cared for in loving homes.

You can find many local resources by doing a quick Internet search. The peace of mind you will gain will be worth the effort, and the unconditional love you receive from your pet will be all the thanks you need.