

Shifting Focus from a business to personal issue

If you don't mind, I'd like to shift my focus from business issues in this column to one that hit home for me recently.

I love animals. I've always had pets – dogs, cats, or parakeets. And I love Nature. So you can imagine my delight when a little wren built a nest in a fern hanging on my front porch a few weeks ago.

That's never happened to me before. I've rescued a few squirrels and birds, including some baby chimney swifts that fell out of their nest into my fireplace one summer. But I've never been close enough to observe bird eggs waiting to hatch.

I didn't know the nest was there until one day it was threatening rain and I took the fern down to put it out so it could get a good watering. I saw the mother bird fly out of the fern and when I got it down, I saw her nest with four tiny eggs in it. I watered the fern carefully and put it back up.

I kept an eye on her each day from my living room window. One afternoon when I peered out, I saw four fuzzy heads wobbling back and forth over the rim of the nest. I was thrilled and told my mother (who lives with me now) that they had arrived. We were excited at the prospect of watching them grow and learn to fly.

The next morning when I opened the blinds and looked out, I didn't see the mother bird or the babies. I had a sinking feeling. But I thought they were probably sleeping while their mom was out getting breakfast.

I got a step stool and went out to check on them. I got up and looked into the nest. They were all gone. There wasn't a feather or a piece of eggshell left to show they'd ever been there.

My heart finished sinking.

Then I looked down and saw my neighbors' cat sitting in our shrubbery staring at the fern.

I was so sad and so angry. I ran the cat off by screaming at it. Later I told the neighbor boy what happened and told him to tell his parents I never want to see their cat in my yard again.

People say, "Well, that's Nature. That's what cats do." I'm sorry but I don't think it's natural for an innocent newborn wild bird to be killed by someone's housecat.

And that's my point here. Responsible pet owners keep their animals confined to their own house or yard. If people want to let their pets run wild, they should move out to the country. And even then they shouldn't be allowed to annoy neighbors.

People shouldn't have to put up with other people's animals roaming into their yards causing messes and damage or killing other animals.

If your pet is well behaved and I invite it to my home, then it is welcome. Otherwise keep it in your own yard. And if you can't do that, as with cats, then keep them in the house.

I'm not asking for tougher leash laws; we're already way over-regulated in this country. I'm asking people to voluntarily show consideration for their neighbors – and their pets. Wandering animals can be lost, stolen, or killed themselves. Keeping them confined on your own property protects them, too.

I realize those of you who live in the country may think I'm overreacting because you see this all the time. But I felt so honored by Nature. And now I feel so violated. That little bird felt my porch was a safe haven for her to raise her babies. And it would have been if the neighbors hadn't let their cat out.

I feel like I let them down somehow by failing to protect them.

I am so, so sorry.

Annette Estes is a Certified Professional Behavioral and Values Analyst, Coach, and Consultant. She coaches individuals and teams on professional and personal development, communication skills, conflict resolution, and hiring winners. She is a professional speaker and former TV news anchor and radio talk show host. Contact her at coachannette@charter.net or call The Estes Group at 864-244-1156.