

# They Deserve Better.

**By: Kiersten Setting**

Have you ever gone into a pet store and seen an animal that you thought you couldn't leave without? This cute little animal that looks at you with these helpless eyes. You end up taking this little hamster home that now relies on you to give it a good life. You have no idea how to even feed it or what size cage it needs. Pet store employees usually don't have a lot of knowledge about all the animals they sell. So you are stuck with the irritation of figuring out the proper care and this stresses you and the hamster out.

I have a lot of experience with this situation at my job because I work at a pet store and my co-workers also deal with this. I have had to deal with people relying on me to teach them everything they need to know about the animal right there and then and some animals I don't really know about. Nate Bailey, a manager at the pet store *Pet Supplies Plus* says, "I have had a personal experience with impulse buying an animal because my parents bought a macaw that they had no clue how to take care of when I was 15 years old. I had to do research and figure out what it needed in order to have a good life. I now own the bird and it is my best friend. I was happy that I stepped up to take on the task but I couldn't imagine what would happen if I didn't." This shows that it can be kind of a scary experience for the owner and the animal. Bailey had to read articles online and also said YouTube was a big help to him as well. It sometimes has a good outcome, but that doesn't always happen. People will let the animals go out in the wild and they can either die or they will become invasive to the area. When people let pets go and they don't have the correct temperature they will die, but if you release an animal in the right condition they will thrive. This situation happened in Florida with iguanas, they are sold as these little babies,

but then they grow up to 6 feet or more and get super aggressive. People let them go and it ruined their ecosystem and they are considered an invasive species now in Florida.

One state that has taken action on this issue is Hawaii, this state has the perfect climate for a lot of animals to thrive so basic animals like hamsters and bearded dragons are illegal to own. Animals like bearded dragons could easily become invasive to that state.

From what me and my co-workers have seen, there are a lot of people that go straight for the high level experience pets such as ferrets and chameleons. Almost all the staff knows some stuff about them, but we don't know everything you need to know about them. This is super worrying because there are pet stores that don't give the customer advice or tell them all the work that needs to be done before they even get the pet. We even have people that will come in and have the wrong information, such as that they can house hamsters together when hamsters are cannibals once they mature. The customer then thinks we are lying to them and they want to buy two anyway. One of my other managers Audena Richards said, "It is difficult to see people that want the best for the kids rather than what is best for the animal." Richards claims that she has dealt with more parents just getting a small pet for their children that aren't old enough for the responsibility of it and seeing them reject advice because they want it to be as cheap as possible.

A very big misunderstanding is that when people get animals from our store, they think they are adopting the animal, but they are really just buying it. This is why a lot of animal lovers have decided to take a stand against buying animals. When an animal is bought at a pet store, they will just replace them in a larger quantity because they know they are getting sold. People will buy the sick animals at places such as *Pet Smart* and believe they are saving the animal when in fact they just made a spot available for that new hamster coming from the mass breeder.

An easy solution to getting an animal you can find at a pet store is looking on Facebook or Craigslist to see if anyone needs to have an animal adopted from them. Then you aren't buying and supporting these animal mills that torture their animals. My good friend at work Sierra Nichole recently adopted a bunny on Craigslist from a family that was moving and didn't have room for their bunny. Nichole told me, "It was nice because the bunny was already familiar with people and the owners had a dog the bunny got along with, so I didn't have to worry about the bunny not being comfortable." There are so many perks to adopting animals and also being familiar with the animal you are looking to get.

More people need to realize that it isn't the sales associate's responsibility to know every single thing about the animal you are buying or adopting. It takes time to do all the research and all the decision making, so the animal will fit in your life comfortably. An animal can be a lot more of a responsibility than most people think and just because it's tiny doesn't mean they don't need a lot of space or care. Any animal is a learning experience and even something as small as a betta fish deserves to be homed with a person that knows everything about the care for them. People have to remember just because something is sold at a pet store does not mean that it is safe for your pet. Just do the research and don't rely on other people for the responsibility you are about to take on.