

Dogs on the New York 'cat walk'

By Stephen Evans
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The weather is very (1)_____ for the homeless of New York City. For the dog population though, it is an opportunity to get all (2)_____.

At the top end of Union Square in Manhattan, there are often two competing charity stalls.

On one side of the Barnes and Noble bookstore on 18th street, is a (3)_____ table with pamphlets (4)_____ the needs of dogs in this hard city. On the other, is a stall seeking support for humans.

Sad to say, it is the human cause that (5)_____.

Sympathisers (6)_____ to show interest in orphaned dogs seeking homes, while New Yorkers rush past the stall seeking cash for the homeless - homeless humans that is.

Volunteers for the United Homeless Organisation sit behind the upturned plastic, water-cooler urn and chant: "One penny, one dime, one dollar; one penny, one dime, one dollar; help make a difference."

But, it has to be said, the (7)_____ of coins in the bottle is not deafening. The begging chant is a vain cry to the wind.

And it is a bitter wind in New York, these days, with temperatures of 20 and 30 degrees below (8)_____, and a wind rushing in from the Arctic via the Hudson and East rivers.

These are not good times to be homeless in New York.

They sit like zombies round midnight on the benches in the subway station below Penn Station, or bundles of rags in (9)_____ of the A trains, one of the longest routes on the network so it offers the longest period of warmth without disturbance.

The Police Department has what it calls a Homeless Outreach Unit whose officers (10)_____ the city looking for people who need shelter.

But in this coldest of times, most people get off the freezing streets under their own (11)_____, if that is the right word. They either get to the shelters in (12)_____ thousands, or find the nooks, crannies and (13)_____ of free heat on the subway system.

Dressed to impress

For the (14)_____ parts, like the East Village where I live, cold weather is an opportunity to (15)_____ your pet.

It is your walking fashion accessory, dressed in exotic winter clothes.

I have seen a tiny puppy carried in a papoose, a sling for babies, on the chest of one young, male fashionista.

Puppies wear knitted coats, coats made of special insulated, wet-suit material. They even wear hats and booties.

New York is without doubt the dog capital of the world.

It is pooch city.

No doubt, they like dogs in Paris, but there they seem to belong to ladies of a certain age who need elegant, if canine, companionship at dinner. In Britain, a dog is for walking in the country.

But in New York, it is as much a part of the young fashion scene as a (16)_____ on your shoulder blade.

Only in New York, it seems to me, are dogs owned by young, single people with very small apartments indeed.

The city's department of health keeps records of the dog population - 530,000 (17)_____ at the latest count - and finds that 20% of New Yorkers aged 18-24 are registered as dog-owners.

(18) _____, the city authorities can tell you who owns what kind of dog and where. There are few surprises.

Chihuahuas are favourite in zip-code 10029, a Spanish Harlem. Rottweilers are the (19) _____ choice in 10473, the South Bronx, where the people are tough. And in zip code 10021, the rich and chi-chi Upper East Side, it is the shitzu - those tiny, fluffy, (20) _____ dogs that are paraded in pink ribbons and bows on the side-walks outside the Metropolitan Museum.

Matchmaking

One thing the cold weather has (21) _____ is the habit of humans using their dogs as means of meeting members of the opposite sex.

The parks of New York have what are called (22) _____, enclosed areas where dogs are allowed to run free and do what dogs do.

It is also where single New Yorkers can go and do what single New Yorkers do: meet other single New Yorkers.

The ritual is (23) _____: dog meets dog, with a bit of sniffing. Human pulls leash back apologetically. Humans compare their respective dogs and conversation (24) _____. Love blossoms.

The New York Times quotes one vet, and I swear this is true, who advises that the best way of striking up a conversation with a (25) _____ partner is to get a three-legged animal, a real talking point on the dog run.

But canine-assisted-courtship will have to wait until the winds (26) _____ and the air warms up.

In the meantime, the dogs are either paraded (27) _____ in their garb or cooped up in the average apartment in which there is not enough room to swing, well, a cat.

It is (28) _____ how animal lovers can care so little about the object of their love that they confine them in the tiniest spaces.

Every weekend in my block, I could hear a dog (29) _____ upstairs with the owners away.

Not that it is much better for humans.

This winter, many have had to live in the usual **(30)**_____ conditions, but also without heating.

The city authorities have logged nearly 4,000 complaints from people saying their landlords are not providing heating or hot water.

In New York, then, it can be a dog's life - at least if you are human and poor or homeless.

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Questions

What does the journalist see as ironic about dogs in New York?

How do many New Yorkers seem to view their dogs?

How do you tell what area of town a dog owner is from?

Why do homeless prefer the A train?

What is the general tone of the article?