

I became involved with rescue dogs long before “shelter” dogs per se. My husband and I have been rescuing dogs, cats and other animals for as long as I can remember. We would find strays or injured animals, have them vetted and find homes for them wherever we lived and even when we were on vacation. Sometimes, if we were able, we adopted a dog or cat in need. I became directly involved with adopting shelter dogs after my Alaskan Malamute/Lab mix, Caesar died in 1998. Caesar’s life and death transformed me – I grieved his loss and mourned his death so deeply, I was inspired to become a Grief Recovery Specialist, created the Pet Grief Counseling Program for the SPCA of Texas to help those who were mourning the loss of a beloved animal companion, and to write WHEN YOUR PET DIES. As a volunteer for the SPCA of Texas, I was in constant contact with abandoned, neglected and abused animals and, of course, adopted quite a few who were in need.

There are so many advantages to adopting a dog rather than buying one. First and foremost, adopting a dog affords us the opportunity to save the life of one in need. Secondly, to provide a loving home and care for an animal that has suffered (in so many cases) is a privilege. Their gratitude is reward enough, but these dogs also give us unconditional love, loyalty friendship and companionship.

There are some problems the potential adopter of a shelter or rescue animal may encounter. These issues will depend on the amount of suffering, torture, abuse and trauma they have experienced and the extent of the hardships they have endured. Some are puppy mills and have never experienced life outside a cage or crate. Others are the inadvertent victims of irreputable and greedy backyard breeders. Others have been someone’s beloved family members and have been surrendered to an animal shelter or welfare organization because of reasons (i.e. divorce, death, relocation, and so on) that we may never know or understand. Others may have “escaped” from a home or yard. Shyness around people, fear, insecurity and lack of trust are issues for many shelter dogs. These can be overcome with TLC on the part of the adopter.

People need to find out as much about the pet they are thinking of purchasing as they can – including ancestry, breed standards, health status and the origin of the particular animal. From where/who did the pet shop acquire it? The animal may have been purchased from a puppy mill and may have potential health and behavioral issues.

Before bringing home a shelter or rescue animal, I generally find out as much about the animal as possibly can. I talk to the shelter staff and volunteers to determine the animal’s overall health and personality. One of the wonderful aspects of adopting an animal from a “Rescue” organization is that the animals they take in are adoptable. They are examined by veterinarians and vaccinated and very often spayed or neutered. These organizations rarely adopt out an animal that cannot find a “forever” home because of health or behavioral issues. Those animals that are not regarded as adoptable are euthanized.

My husband and I have adopted over forty “rescue” dogs in recent years. Love, respect and appreciation of them are the vital ingredients we provide in order to make them feel welcome, safe and comfortable. I introduce each new one to the other members of his or

her pack one by one on neutral ground – each dog is on a leash. I allow them to familiarize them with one another. After they have been introduced, I bring the new dog in our backyard – again on a leash, and have him/her re-meet each of our other dogs (also on a leash). I speak to each of them in soft, comforting tones and. I walk them together in our yard –then gradually (still with a leash on) allow them to play or interact. My husband or close friends in Rescue often accompany me during the initial introduction. I can usually quickly detect if there is any aggressive behavior. Generally, however, if one behaves fairly and respectfully of each animal, he senses that he is safe and protected. I often crate a new dog for a while as he sleeps or eats and may walk him on a leash for several weeks when we go out with the others, so that I can keep a close eye on any potential problems.

As an adoption counselor, I look for as much of personal history and background of the potential adopter as possible. I ask if he has owned other pets, for how long, and if they are deceased, how they died. Is the pet going to be indoors or kept outdoors. Are their young children in the family, etc. Does the adopter have space, time, attention and budget (for food, regular veterinary care, leash, collar, bowls, toys i.d., tags, etc.)? to take proper care of a dog or other pet? If it is possible, a home check is conducted to ensure How many hours a day is the potential adopter away from home. Does he/she travel frequently? Is the potential adopter able to accommodate the needs of a pet and does he have an adequately fenced in yard so that the animal cannot escape? Is he willing to spend time walking the dog at least several times each day? References are required and checked, as are the contact numbers of previous veterinarians, if applicable.

“Our Rescue Dog Family Album” is my most recent book. I have written six others about our animal companions called “The Animal Companions Series.” The new book features descriptions as well as color photos and the uplifting and heartwarming stories of the forty-two dogs my husband and I have rescued and personally adopted thro the past decades and who have become members of our seemingly ever-expanding family. The gifts they have brought us are immeasurable; the life lessons they have taught us are invaluable. “Our Rescue Dog Family Album” is my “homage” to the wonderful dogs with whom I have shared my life.

Maximus was almost eleven years old when we adopted him. He had been the product of a bitter divorce custody battle. Max was an Anatolian Shepherd who, prior to the divorce, had been the congenial family pet and “couch potato.” Seeking revenge on his family, Max’s human father took custody of him to “hurt” his wife and children. He kept the one hundred plus pound dog locked in a gardening shed for four years with minimal food, water, human contact or exercise. Dad told his family that the dog had died, but when he broke up with his girlfriend, she informed po the family that Max was still alive. The family’s daughter recovered Max from heartbreaking circumstances and rehabilitated him as much as she could. As a student living in an apartment, she could not keep the old boy. We adopted him, and he became not only a wonderful and beloved family member but also an extraordinary Therapy dog who visited and brought joy to patients in hospitals, people in retirement homes and assisted living centers, and worked with special needs children and adults until his death at almost fourteen years old. No one who knew

Max would ever forget him. There is no one who met him who did not immediately fall in love with him.