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Rescuing with compassion and understanding

## Adopting or Fostering a Rescue Dog

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It seems that everywhere these days you can see the slogan 'Adopt Don't Shop'. Rescues are full to the brim with unwanted dogs, especially it seems, around peak holiday time! There appears to be a vast number of people in this world who view their pets as disposable items that can be tossed away along with the old toaster and the broken Hoover, with no thought given to the fact that they are discarding a living breathing animal which has feelings and emotions similar to our own. Well, when that sentient being, their dog, has no voice that they can ever understand, what is there to stop them handing them on to someone else to take responsibility for.

Many of the dogs finding their way into rescue have problems of varying degrees, it may be that they lack social skills around other dogs or people, lack of house training or perhaps don't like being handled. None of these are the dogs own fault, they weren't born like that, they were made like that by people who didn't treat them in the correct way and so they end up in rescue, someone else's responsibility.

So rescue dogs come with baggage, some of which is obvious from the start but other things may appear as the dog settles into a new environment and tries to make a new life for itself. If you adopt a dog then this is the reality of what you are taking on.

Very rarely there is the perfect dog, which goes into its new home, settles well and never does anything but be the perfect companion but this is rare, very rare. When a rescue dog comes into your home it will be confused and stressed, perhaps the dog has had the same home for years and then one day everything changes, it loses all it has ever known except perhaps an old familiar bed. How would you feel if this happened to you, how would you cope?

A rescue dog needs time to adjust to its new surroundings, to take in the new sights and smells, to understand that you mean it no harm. Sometimes rescue dogs arrive and sit in the corner shaking, head down, shut down, unable and unwilling to interact with you. If you rush in to offer comfort and affection, the likely outcome is you are going to at best be warned off at worst snapped at or bitten to make you go away. It doesn't mean that the dog you have adopted won't ever love you, it simply means that at the moment they can't, they don't know how, they are lost. Given space and time, they will slowly come out of the corner and seek attention from you, be patient, be understanding and most of all be happy when you finally feel that touch of a cold nose on your hand.

Then of course as always there is the other extreme, a dog arrives bouncy, barky and way 'over the top'. No, the probability is you haven't been lucky, the chances are the dog is just as stressed and confused as the first dog but has a different way of showing it! These dogs are probably harder to deal with because you will need to remain calm and handle them gently so that they themselves can relax enough to take in their new surroundings.

Whether your rescue dog appears to love you or not, the bottom line is that they need you, probably more than you will ever realise. Leaving them alone to sleep at night just might not be possible, you may have to weigh up the cost of broken sleep, barking and upset neighbours versus the cost of taking the dog into your room so that they don't have to worry where you have gone. The dog is not barking because its being naughty, it's barking because it has a need and that need is companionship and a feeling of safety, be glad you dog feels that you can provide it, not angry because you had different sleeping arrangements in mind.

So, you've got a rescue dog, so let's all go out for a walk then. Think about this from your dogs perspective, in the first few days with you, the dog will likely be convinced that they will find their old home and owner outside. You can bet they will know where the front door is, to them it's the way back to everything they have always known. Don't expect your dog to walk serenely at your side, it will likely motor off searching for familiar sights and smells and then of course suffer the feelings of confusion and loss when they don't find what they are so avidly looking for; and yes it doesn't matter if they were well treated or not in their previous home it is still all that they know and remember. It will take time for you and your home to take away those memories.

Then of course comes grooming. This requires close personal contact between an owner and their dog and requires trust on both sides, not something therefore to be rushed into on day one! Rescue dogs often have an adverse reaction to being groomed, likely caused by having learnt by experience that grooming is not a pleasant experience. If you overstep the mark with grooming then your new dog will have very little choice on how to react and conflict will result. Take your time; heed your dog's warning when they have had enough, there is always another day. Feet, nails, ears and rear ends are often the source of disagreement. It's a matter of building trust slowly. If the coat or nail conditions dictate that action is necessary in the short term, then nails can be clipped by a vet and coats by an understanding groomer. The last thing you want to do at this early stage is to destroy any confidence the dog has built with you.

So 'Adopt Don't Shop' but do so having thought about the reality of adoption. You rescue dog will, in time, pay you back a hundred fold for giving them a new life and a new home but you will have to wait. The joys of seeing your rescue dog blossom and change will be yours in time, but you will have to wait. There is nothing worse than someone from rescue having to go and take an adopted dog back into rescue because the adopter never really considered the reality of what is involved. We don't have a crystal ball that will tell us the future when we place a dog, we can only take a judgement on what we are told by the applicant. At the end of the day, it is the poor dog that suffers once again and rescue are left with the guilt of not having placed a dog successfully.

Please, if you want to adopt or foster, think about the realities and if you still feel able to adopt, then we will be more than pleased to hear from you.

## **Baggage**

*Now that I'm home, bathed, settled, and fed,  
All nicely tucked into my warm new bed.  
I would like to open my baggage Lest I forget,  
There is so much to carry - So much to regret.*

*Hmm... Yes there it is, right on the top -  
Let's unpack Loneliness, Heartache and Loss,  
And there by my leash hides Fear and Shame.*

*As I look on these things I tried so hard to leave -  
I still have to unpack my baggage called Pain.  
I loved them, the others, the ones who left me,  
But I wasn't good enough - for they didn't want me.  
Will you add to my baggage? Will you help me unpack?  
Or will you just look at my things and take me right back?*

*Do you have the time to help me unpack?  
To put away my baggage, To never re-pack?  
I pray that you do - I'm so tired you see,  
But I do come with baggage - Will you still want me?*

*By Evelyn Colbath*