

The Joy of Fostering

 By Carole Raphaele Davis

Are you missing a dog in your life? Would you love to have a dog but are reluctant to take on the full responsibility? Maybe you live in a small apartment or are worried about the burden of unexpected veterinary bills. Or perhaps you recently lost your dog and aren't ready for another full-time dog. Well, there is a way to enjoy doggie companionship and help a dog in need on a temporary basis: it's called fostering. Fostering a dog is one of the most rewarding ways to get that sublime dog love without having the full responsibility of life-long guardianship.

Here's how it works:

You give: a temporary crash pad, some food, water, a little exercise and love.

You get: lots of tail wags, wet nose kisses, dog hugs and that emotionally satisfying feeling of having saved a life.

Sadly, every year, close to 5 million companion animals are killed in our nation's shelter system. The lucky ones who survive are saved by a network of rescue organizations that bail dogs out of the pound.

Until those dogs are placed in their forever homes, they need a safe and emotionally-supportive place to recover from their ordeal of anguish, abandonment and sometimes, injuries. That haven, where a lonely dog can heal his broken heart and learn to trust humans again could be your home and could take as little as a few days. Sometimes it takes a couple months for harder-to-place dogs like pit-bull mixes or senior dogs.

To find a rescue organization near you, ask your local shelter or go to www.PetFinder.com and search for dogs in your zip code. You'll find the contact number and e-mail of the rescue organization near you.

Rescue organizations usually have a Web site and a location where they show the dogs and conduct interviews with potential guardians. A foster dog is usually picked up by volunteers on weekends for appointments and returned to you in the evening, until a loving home is secured. Rescue organizations could not function without foster guardians – fosters are special people who are an integral part of the rescue system. It's simple, if there were more reliable foster guardians, more dogs could be saved from the pound.

An advantage of fostering is that you can choose the kind of doggie experience that suits you best. A good rescue organization will tailor your foster experience to your (and the dog's) particular needs. For example, if you are a high-energy person who wants to jog or likes to



Photo by Kevin Rooney

take long walks, you can arrange to foster an active, athletic dog. If you are the type of person who likes to stay home in the evenings and watch TV, you can arrange to foster a senior dog or an injured dog that will be happy to sit with you by the fire. If you have more free time and love puppies, you can arrange for that, too. There is a perfect dog for every foster mom or dad.

Yet another advantage of fostering is that if you are looking for your dog of a lifetime, this is a smart way to meet different dogs, helping them along into their new homes until that magic moment happens. One night, you'll be lying next to each other in bed and your foster dog will look deep into your eyes and sigh sweetly. You'll return his gaze and reach out to him. You'll feel a surge in your heart. You'll know. You'll tell yourself, no one else is good enough for this dog. You'll hold him close and you'll tell him the magic words: "You're mine forever. I love you."

At that moment, you will join an exclusive club, the elite corps of failed foster parents. I'll tell you a secret: failure never felt so good.

about the author

Carole Raphaele Davis is the author of *The Diary of Jinky, Dog of a Hollywood Wife*. Please visit her Web site at www.HollywoodJinky.com.