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WEEKEND BREAK

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LILO A NORTH COAST SHELTER DOG

Adopting a dog may be one of your very best life decisions



Dan Haag/For The Daily Astorian

Lilo has been a great addition to the family. She was an older, overweight dog, which led her to be largely overlooked by potential adopters.



Photos by Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

ABOVE: Natalie Hannam takes a dog for a walk at the Clatsop County Animal Shelter. LEFT: Sue Stein plays with Penny in the pool at the Clatsop County Animal Shelter.



Dan Haag — For The Daily Astorian

After spending the first half of her life indoors, shelter dog Lilo took a quick liking to the beach, which helped her to lose some of her weight, too.

By DAN HAAG
For The Daily Astorian

It was Monday afternoon, Sept. 17, 2012. I was perched on a stool at the Wet Dog Cafe in Astoria, nursing a beer and mulling over a big decision.

Four years after the passing of Kirby — our very shaggy, often smelly and always loveable mutt — we had decided to adopt another dog.

I was apprehensive. How could I hope to replicate Kirby?

Lilo, aka Duchess

After careful consideration — and more than one visit to the Clatsop County Animal Control and Shelter in Warrenton — I met Duchess, a 5-year old black Labrador with a personality a mile long.

Duchess had been a distinguished guest at the shelter: her affable nature and sunny disposition made her a staff favorite. She was a frequent guest at the shelter’s Astoria Sunday Market booth, serving as an adoption “spokesdog.”

Despite her stardom, Duchess was caught in that odd limbo of some shelter dogs: not quite a senior, but far beyond her puppy years. She was also a big dog, in need of space to run and play.

She had nearly been loved to death. Her first family had been an elderly couple who kept her indoors and fed her junk food. She was nearly 125 pounds.

These factors had led her to be largely overlooked to that point.

Frankly, her age worried me. After having my heart broken by Kirby’s passing, I wasn’t ready to have another dog that already had so many miles on her.

“You won’t regret it, shelter dogs have the most love to give,” the shelter volunteer told me.

So we made the leap, renamed her “Lilo” and got her down to 99 pounds with a regimen of exercise, quality beach time and love.

Finding forever homes

A lot of love goes into making the shelter succeed at its mission to find “forever homes” for its tenants.

“The one thing that really improves their situation is a committed cadre of volunteers to walk the dogs and visit with them, take them out to the play area and throw the ball,” shelter volunteer Rodney Merrill said. “That makes a huge difference in maintaining their spirits and sociability.”

Staff also screen each animal to make sure it doesn’t have any obvious health or behavior problems before making it available for adoption.

Adopters must provide indoor homes as the shelter will not place pets into homes where they will live outdoors.

Finally, you must be 18 to adopt a pet and fill out an application that includes an adoption fee.

Light in my life

All of my dogs have been shelter dogs, including Kirby, whom I found at the Warrenton shelter in 1996. He lived to the ripe old age of 15, despite my threats to return him if he ever rolled in elk droppings again.

Lilo, now pushing 12, has been another light in my life. She’s lost a step or two and needs a boost getting in the car. But her eyes are still bright, her heart still full as the Pacific. I can feel her gratefulness.

“At a lot of shelters, a good number of adoptions is half,” said Merrill. “One thing our local animal shelter can say that many others cannot, most of our animals get adopted. In fact, I don’t think it’s an exaggeration to say nearly all of them do.”

I will never doubt the power of saving a shelter pet because the saving goes both ways.

To learn about adopting a pet from the Clatsop County Animal Shelter, visit bit.ly/adoptaclatsopdog. Business hours are noon to 4 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday.