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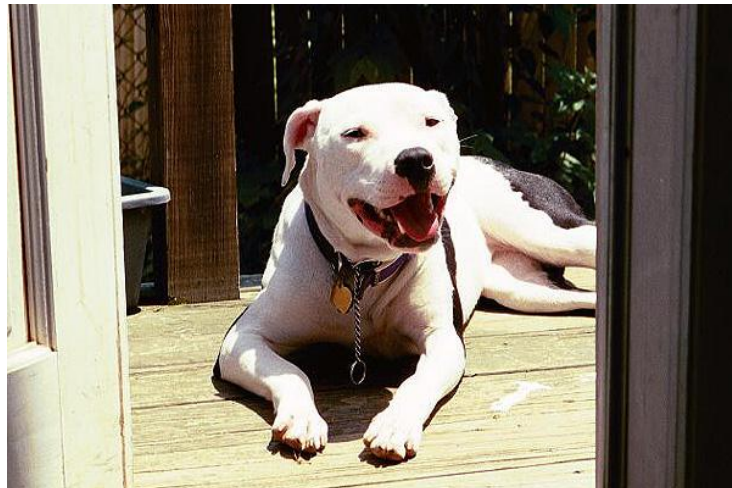
Why I Foster

Having fostered since she was in high school, the author has never owned a dog

By Marie Acosta

I do not love you because you are mine; I love you because you are you.

I have never owned a dog – never, despite a lifetime of loving them. When I was young, I wanted one desperately – I had a leash that I’d found abandoned in a park, and I carried it around the neighborhood in hopes of finding some stray who would be mine. Never did happen, but thankfully, when I was in high school and my mom realized I just wasn’t getting any better, she agreed to let



me foster for a local rescue organization. I had exactly three fosters my senior year, each of whom taught me a very important lesson. Daisy, a foxy little Labrador mix who was good natured and easily adopted out, taught me that fostering was rewarding; Oscar, a silky soft nightmare of a 7-month-old hound puppy taught me that sometimes, you were really ready for your fosters to get adopted; and Bella, a little black and white pit bull who never found her happy ending, taught me that sometimes fostering can break your heart.

That year of fostering shaped irrevocably how I understood sharing a life with dogs – they came, they made you laugh, they drove you crazy, they stole your heart, and then they went on to the next chapter of their life (sometimes with a backward glance, sometimes not ...), and you went on with yours, a little bit richer for having shared your life with that silly/shy/mad/noble creature. I carried that with me when, years later, I got back into fostering.

"Isn't it hard to let them go?" The eternal question. The short answer is, yes ... yes it is hard. Within days of a new foster arriving, I've plotted our course as dog and owner – in my mind I can see our lives together so clearly: there I am, running Gambit through an agility course ... accepting Molly's Canine Good Citizen certificate with pride ... snuggled up on the couch on a lazy Sunday with Dexter ... receiving compliments on my massive lug, Percy. The thing is, though, the ease with which I can imagine these beautiful



futures is a huge part of the reason that the real answer to that oft asked question is, "Yes, it's hard. But it's not as hard as remembering Gambit's sweet face in the 'To Be Euthanized Tomorrow' album on Facebook, thinking of joyful Molly languishing in a concrete cell with four puppies and without a kind word, imagining gentle Percy cast off in the woods to fend for himself, knowing where clownish Dexter would have ended up when his first owners gave up on him if a rescue hadn't stepped in." No! It terrifies me to think how close each of those beautiful dogs came to dying. It doesn't even bear thinking of, how nearly they each passed out of this world, unremarked and unloved, those sweet beings that shine so brightly.

And that is why I keep fostering and why I've never yet "foster failed." Because what my foster dogs have all taught me, one by one, is to look at a picture of a broken dog in a shelter and see past that image ... to see them instead strong and true, hope restored, chasing squirrels in the back yard with joyful abandon, or riding in the passenger seat of a car, ears flapping in the wind, or sleeping in a sunbeam, quiet and calm.



I am able to foster because I know that it gave each of those dogs that I loved so well the chance to find the exact life that I dreamed of for them, and I'll continue because every dog should have that life. It doesn't have to be with me. I will count myself lucky to have known them a short while and then send them on knowing that they are out there somewhere, safe and loved, and shining as brightly as they did for that short time that they were almost mine.