

Second-Chance DOGS

True Stories *of the* Dogs We Rescue
and the Dogs Who Rescue Us

Callie Smith Grant, ed.



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To rescue organizations everywhere,
the exceptional people who keep them going,
and the kind, smart individuals who take abandoned animals
into their homes and their hearts.

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Introduction

Callie Smith Grant

Rescue. It's a good word, isn't it? Who would have thought the day would come when it could be trendy to say about your dog, "He's a rescue." Or "She was found wandering on Main Street . . ." We've always known a dog doesn't need a pedigree to be a wonder. He or she simply needs a chance—often a second chance.

In *Second-Chance Dogs: True Stories of the Dogs We Rescue and the Dogs Who Rescue Us*, you'll meet dogs either getting a most-needed second chance or giving that second chance to someone else. These dogs come from shelters and pounds, breeders and breed rescue groups, homegrown litters and the streets. Their stories take place across the United States plus Canada, Panama, St. Martin, Germany, France, and Greece—showing how universal and unique rescues can be.

Many of these stories demonstrate how dogs have ways of paying forward any grace extended to them. It's as if they say, "Let me move in, and I promise you'll be glad." Then they somehow do

things like save lives for the people who chose them or the animals around them or even strangers who cross their paths. Or they provide much-needed comfort or companionship to the lonely or frightened. Sometimes it's a big bombastic achievement. Sometimes it's subtle.

My husband and I had moved to a new town and were looking for a church. We found one whose members care about each other and the community, and we eventually joined.

But I will confess that what sealed the deal for me was that this church allows dogs. Yes, this handsome, historic church that had been downtown for over 150 years welcomes dogs. We don't happen to have a dog, and few dogs attend. But they are welcome. And I like that.

One young woman used to bring her aging Chihuahua to church. This very mellow dog would take any attention in stride, rolling her round, pretty eyes at people. I always felt privileged when I could have the dog sitting in my pew.

We had a parishioner who suffered a stroke. She came back to church, but she could no longer talk or even smile—and she had been outgoing. When the part of the service came where we all shake hands and hug each other in the aisle, I could see why she seemed so melancholy—people spoke to her and smiled at her, but she simply could not reciprocate in the same way. The stroke had taken that ability.

One Sunday, the Chihuahua and her human sat next to the lady who'd had the stroke. During the service, the woman surprised me by reaching out for the little dog, and the dog was handed to her. Then something unexpected happened. The woman began to verbalize to the dog—loudly, garbled, and with expression. Nobody could understand a word, but clearly she was emoting to the quiet little dog in her arms. It was as if she was releasing all her pent-up personal pain and her lack of ability to communicate to this creature who looked into her eyes and seemed to understand every word.

The entire congregation grew silent, and a few quietly wept. We knew we were watching something extraordinary, because what none of us could do with a hug, a handshake, or a smile, the dog did.

I've always believed this kind of animal is God-sent. The Chihuahua was not the older woman's dog, but to me, they crossed paths for a healing purpose. The connection between human and animal for that moment was strong and obvious, and the Chihuahua helped the woman once again feel understood—and once again feel at home.

Home. That's another beautiful word. It is telling how many of these stories have that word in their titles. So a dog gets a home. A home gets a dog. A home is complete, thanks to the marvelous beasts in *Second-Chance Dogs*.

Bringing Honey Home

Andrea Doering

The day we visited the rescue shelter, it's fair to say there were at least four desired outcomes in our family of five. There was my husband's version, which was predicated on the idea that because he'd stayed at home, no real decision could be made about a dog, and confirmed the premise we were "just looking."

There was our daughter Emily's version, which entailed us breezing through the adult dog section, onward to the puppy room, and at the sight of all that cuddly fluff, Emily's mother's reservations about a puppy would melt.

There was my version, which assumed that just before we arrived at the shelter, someone would drop off a perfectly trained King Charles spaniel that loved children and was very quiet.

Henry and Katherine, our twins, shared their desired outcome. Generally, Henry's plans were what Katherine deemed best for him; it made life easier, and he could get on with the important stuff, like Legos or Pokémon cards. And on this day, Katherine's desired outcome was a dog to love. The winter was over, a brisk, clear spring Saturday was ahead of us, and already Katherine had visions of walking her dog, playing with her dog at the park or

on the beach, and sneaking her dog into her bed. Henry's only demand in this shared plan was a big dog, one with heft.

We piled out of the car and into the shelter, each of us with our vision of how we would exit—Emily with her puppy, me with a King Charles spaniel, the twins with a dog, largeish in size. Spirits were high as we walked through and looked at dogs and their descriptions. We were not good, we realized, at choosing a dog by consensus. The few we chose to spend time with in the common area of the shelter were compromise dogs for all of us, and they seemed to know it. We walked around again. The first time around, Katherine and I had stopped at the cage of a hound who immediately left the far corner and came to take a sniff of this young girl. But no one else was thinking this was our dog, so we moved on.

On our second pass through, Katherine approached the same cage and was distraught to find it empty. One of the volunteers assured her that the dog, Honey, was likely just out on a walk. Being new to the dog rescue world, we really didn't know how long that walk would take, and by now the morning was gone and lunch seemed like a good idea.

On the promise that we would return another day, we made our exit. With so many possible outcomes, somehow we had managed the least likely one—the one championed by the guy not even in the car. As we pulled out of the parking lot, I saw Katherine glance back at the building, at the dogs going on their walks, at people coming and going with dogs. She turned her head away from me, but the disappointment was so thick it was almost visible in the space between us.

I miss a lot as a mom. I know I've missed my children's hurt feelings and glad tidings and dashed hopes. And on this day I can't say I was being particularly intentional. I was likely thinking about what I had at the house to make for lunch. But I will ever be grateful that I didn't miss that look on my young daughter's face.

I slowed the car and moved into the turn lane, saying, “Katherine, we should go back, don’t you think? Maybe that hound is back from her walk now.”

That hound, Honey, was back, and greeted Katherine with a leap up as if they’d been separated too long already.

And though Honey was always, from that day, more Katherine’s dog than anyone else’s, Katherine’s vision of what having a dog would mean had to shift. Honey came home with us, shy and quiet. For weeks she didn’t want to stray far from the house. For four years, she didn’t reciprocate cuddles. And during the time we were graced with her life, she never fetched things that were thrown, and she wouldn’t sleep on anyone’s bed. She was a Treeing Walker Coonhound, and what she loved to do was catch a scent and follow it. But though Wikipedia says this breed is known for their “distinctive bay,” Honey never barked. Ever.

Katherine had another vision for Honey she didn’t share with us at the time but has since told me. She envisioned a leash-less world for her (and every other dog), where Honey could run and run, full tilt with ears flapping and mouth in that wide open smile, catching every scent possible. And when she’d had enough, she would lope back home and sit on the front step, waiting for someone to let her inside to her soft bed and clean water. It turned out Honey was completely on board for that vision! Before we wised up to the need for a harness, she was a master at weaseling out of her collar and taking off at a gallop. After a few escapes, this we did find out—Honey knew her way back home.

We all became smitten with our quiet hound, who loved sun and scent but hardly bothered to lift her head when we came in the door. Though she let the kids lie on her belly, dress her up, or move her around, she was kind of the anti-family dog, allowing affection but reluctant to give her own. Somehow, though, her quiet patience resonated with all sorts of people. The daycare workers in town made it a point to walk their kids down our street

so they could say hello to Honey as she basked in the afternoon sun in the yard. The postman, instead of giving us the “please keep your dog inside” notice, offered her treats. In appreciation, Honey memorized the striped pattern of both postal worker uniforms and their vehicles, and would stop anywhere she saw one, waiting for a morsel.

During all these years, a lot more was taking place in our little quintet—the three children were in the throes of middle school, the parents were navigating job losses and job changes, an uncertain economy, and the failing health of their own parents. There were times none of us wanted to talk to each other. But we all participated in caring for Honey—walking, bathing, feeding, rubbing that pink spotted belly in the sunshine. Even my husband, the one who originally thought “no dog” was an option (Oh, Ron!), made sure she got what she needed and much of what she wanted. On tough days, when I couldn’t find any kind words to share with anyone, I’d put a leash on her and take a walk, talk to her, and things would be all right.

Some days the only being any of us liked in the house was this quiet hound. Some of the best memories I have of those years involve everyone home watching a movie on a Saturday night, Honey right in front of the television with Henry sprawled out on one side and Katherine curled up on the other. Day by day, she knit our family together. It’s not far-fetched to say she saved us from unraveling during those years.

The fifth year Honey lived with us, one thing started to change—she seemed as happy to be with us as we were with her. She began getting up to greet us at the door, and come sit by us in the evening, pushing her side against our knees, turning to get another ear scratched. She would thump her tail when the kids came to find her after school, sniffing for news of their day.

I am not one who understands the way of dogs, so I have no idea what that meant from her point of view. But I know what it

meant for us, the humans in her life. What she'd started five years earlier by capturing Katherine's heart blossomed into a great calm that came over an anxious family. That year, when Honey began to respond to our consistent ministrations on her behalf, it seemed as though she liked us. If this hound could like us, and trust us, well . . . maybe we could trust ourselves and our capabilities. I don't know of a greater gift anyone can offer to another.