

The Fate of Senior Dogs in Shelter Facilities

~Christa Grunzinger



“Blessed is the person who has earned the love of an old dog.”

~Sydney Jeanne Seward

Just one voice, with high spirits, can bring astronomical, sensible revelation to people everywhere.

As people strolled down the aisles, stopping at nearly every cage, they gleamed at the puppies and the dogs of mid-age one dog wondered what they thought, “Am I too tattered, moreover shattered or just that I neared ten?”

Perhaps people assumed he couldn’t scamper about in joy and play. Maybe they thought he wouldn’t mend, as they bowed their heads with pity, eagerly moving along their way; how swell. They haven’t a need for an aching dog in their home to dwell.

There was once a period of time when he was loved in his very own settee. But since his fur has speckled in grey and his senses, ever so slowly, began to fail. Who wants a dog exceptionally mature and quite stale anyway?

Some time ago, his family unquestionably deemed him as nothing but explicit damage; he must have caused them burdens or acquired an attitude, which was simply too difficult to manage. No matter their predicament, it couldn’t justify their explanation. There’s no rationalization for why he was left in this shelter for extinction.

Day after day, he stared through the bars and envied the young dogs who were adopted each day; causing him to grow shyer. He appeared to have lost all his spirit and love for life.

Pet owners can still help dogs such as these by adoring their inner beauty and by bringing back their long lost desires; to be loved as much as they will love you. You can see past flaws and uneven gaits and share your own pillow to keep them cozy and warm. Share giggles and grins, whimpers and tears and cuddle-up during every rainstorm. Provide love for as long as they are granted life, but in a life without strife.

As the devastation overpowers the reality of adoptability, it’s more difficult to place senior pets into forever homes than any other homeless pet within shelter facilities. Even animals with disabilities, or other types of deformations such as a missing limb, have higher hopes for adoptability than senior animals. A pet considered a senior can vary from each type of animal. For instance, Yorkshire Terriers are not considered seniors until the age 12 or older because their life span is much longer than that of a larger dog, such as a Labrador whose average life span is 10 to 12 years.

Although many seniors are the first on the list for euthanasia due to lack of space over exceeding their allowable time within the shelter, most shelter workers desperately strive for placement of their senior animals. Phillip Snyder, the Director of the **Suncoast Humane Society (www.humane.org)** in Englewood, Florida says, “We serve a human population that can appreciate the serene companionship senior pets have to offer.”

Private, No-Kill, animal rescue organizations often face the same issues as shelter facilities. These rescues foster their adoptable animals within foster homes, treating the animals as a member of their own family until an adoption can be made. In doing so, they are able to truly get to know the true personalities and flaws of each animal. Shell Brodnax, the Director of **Seniors Saving Seniors Animal Rescue** in Northern California explains, “We encourage all adopters



to consider a senior pet. They are well established, better trained and more likely to fit into a family permanently, as they need less training and discipline.”

Brodnax further explains, “Due to the mortgage crisis currently happening in the entire United States, we find family pets are tremendously affected by this. Many families in crisis lose their homes and leave their beloved pets behind, as they are no longer able to accommodate them.

Shelters and rescues are constantly flooded with animals of all ages, sizes and breeds, but new adopters, unfortunately tend to choose younger pets and purebreds while ignoring amazingly precious seniors.”

As many dogs of any age, senior pets have a higher tendency to act more fearful and shy within a shelter facility and understandably so. They behave unnaturally from their usual state, one that they’ve always known, making them appear as unfriendly within their cramped cage spaces. Jeannie Fisher, President of **Milagro Senior Pet Refuge (www.milagropets.org)** in Phoenix, Arizona, feels these awkward



behaviors have a negative impact on adoption possibilities because their true self is often not seen. She states, “This liberal use of euthanasia by shelters effectively sabotages the ability of rescue organizations, as well as adopters, to help save precious lives that the shelters readily extinguish.” If more animals are given the chance to strut their true selves by further efforts from shelters, such as more out of cage dog handling, using special larger cage spaces for freedom play or special adoption events outside of the facility, these options can considerably increase the adoptability of all pets.

Fisher also informs us of the reality of exceeding veterinary costs for seniors in reviving their health, which was once previously ignored. These costs can often become too expensive for owners, especially senior owners to accompany, therefore Fisher works on a program to subsidize veterinary costs for senior pets due to their special circumstances and to increase their adoptability. Practicing veterinarians are able to write off these expenses as donations during tax season, and shelters inevitably save money by placing pets in homes instead of putting them to an early rest. Fisher says, “We truly hope this program will have a rippling effect for shelters and rescues and veterinary offices around the country. This will also help to free more space within shelter facilities, as fewer seniors will remain there quite as long.”

THE TRAGIC TRUTH

The tragic truth is that every day, dogs in good health with wonderful personalities are euthanized. Why? They're older. And because they're older, they're not considered adoptable by many.

Shelter workers see it everyday: a dog is brought in because he can't jog with his guardian anymore. Or he needs a little extra time to get up the stairs. Or he's simply not a puppy, or he isn't accepted at the new place of residence, or there was a divorce and no one wants him, or allergies have become an issue, or this, or that, etc.

Well, we've found a group that caters to the old guys!

MUTTVILLE IS THE NAME & OLD DOGS ARE THEIR GAME!

Muttville is a San Francisco-based senior dog rescue organization that was founded two and a half years ago by Sherri Franklin, a long-time dog advocate who served six years as vice chair of the Commission of Animal Control and Welfare for the city of San Francisco, CA.

"I saw so many older dogs languishing in shelters," says Sherri. "Even when they are in good health, senior dogs are often considered unadoptable." So, one by one, she started bringing them home to clean them up and find them new families.

Muttville has a mission to change the way the world thinks about and treats older dogs. They plan to create better lives for these old babies through rescue, foster, adoption and hospice programs.

They reach out to senior and special needs rescue dogs; find suitable homes for those that are adoptable; and offer end of life care for those that are not. These are not

just shelter dogs; every day, dogs are moved from loving homes to concrete cages because their guardians have died or moved or simply can't care for them anymore.

"If we had our way, no dog would spend his last days in a cold, dark shelter. There is so much love and joy in these old dogs! Bringing these special creatures into a home is not only good for them, but they transform the quality of life for the people who adopt or foster them, too." says, Sherri.

Find out more about this wonderful organization by visiting their website at www.muttville.org

RECAP: WHERE DO MUTTVILLE DOGS COME FROM?

Many senior dogs end up at shelters. Some come from loving homes where someone has died or has become incapable of caring for an animal. Other dogs have been dumped at shelters with little or no explanation. When this happens the majority do not make it into an adoption program. This is where Muttville comes in! They are routinely called on to rescue dogs from euthanasia. They check the dogs health and test their temperaments so they can properly match them with potential adopters.

HOW DOES MUTTVILLE DECIDE WHICH DOGS TO RESCUE?

Muttville rescues senior dogs, but there's no strict rule about when a dog becomes a senior. At conventional shelters, some larger dogs are considered too old for adoption at 8 years old, while smaller dogs may be considered too old at 10 or 12 years old. Muttville

believes that each dog should be assessed individually. Important factors in their rescue decision are temperament and whether the dog is slated for euthanasia. If a dog will benefit from even a month or a week in a loving home, then they will do their best to provide it for them.

"There's something special about old, sweet mutts - it's something in their eyes. It's like you can see their soul."

Sherri Franklin, Founder of Muttville Senior Dog Rescue



MUTTVILLE
senior dog rescue



OUR MISSION
To rescue wonderful, loving older dogs from shelters and euthanasia and find them homes with people who love seniors as much as we do.

I LOVED AN OLD, WEATHERED BORDER COLLIE.

What **MUTTVILLE** Means To Me: The Story of Collette

~Written by Marie - Photo: Collette and Marie

I truly miss the joy my "hospice" girl brought me. In honor of Collette, I want to share my great experience of fostering and hospicing for Muttville. What I've gained because of her is immeasurable.

January last year, she was delivered to my door, having traveled all night via transport from Los Angeles. After receiving heartfelt emails from shelter volunteers who gave her the name Collette and pleaded with Muttville to save her life, Sherri Franklin knew she belonged with us.

A scared and unhappy dog, Collette chose to keep to herself and curl up in a bed in a corner of my house for 7 days. Sherri nicknamed her "the saddest face in the world," and we lovingly described her this way on her profile. Her eyes reflected a lost, displaced dog who could not make sense of why she was here or where she belonged. Collette did not do well at adoption events, always looking around like she was waiting to see someone or something familiar. I later learned that this was an inherent part of her personality.

Our first hike together at Land's End I will never forget. She smiled for the first time, and she began to carry herself with purpose. We didn't know each other well yet, but she stayed right next to me. If I fell behind, she would slow down and look back at me as if to say, "hey, i'm waiting for you!" In over 20 dogs that I've fostered, this was the first time I felt a serious bond. We were yin and yang. And it seemed that she had decided I was her "someone."

Her initial vet check included a biopsy of a large growth on her front paw. I knew it could be a tumor, but I certainly wasn't prepared to hear our vet say she would only have 3-6 months to live. She had surgery to remove the mass but it tumor appeared again just a few days later. Having mass-cell cancer and possibly a short time to live, Collette joined **Muttville's hospice program**.

I committed to learn all I could about caring for a dog with cancer and researched holistic treatments. She started chemo and steroids as well. I shared her story with Pet Nutrisystems (Natural health solutions and remedies), and as a result a majority of her holistic cancer supplements were donated by customers who lost their pets to cancer.

Although the term "hospice care" means caring for someone



facing an end of life situation, I decided that I would look at this as an opportunity to beat the odds. Collette's diagnosis motivated me to take her for special hikes every Saturday. As we were enjoying beautiful views or peaceful spots together, I'd realize how much I needed these moments for my health as much as hers. I knew that I wouldn't be there if not for Collette and it was interesting, because she never acted as though she was following me. She carried herself like she was "just doing her job".

After a year, it felt inappropriate to call her my "hospice" dog. She was healthy, her coat was shiny, and she had no signs of cancer. I thought she would be with me for years to come, and it was easy to believe looking at her smiling face.

I wasn't prepared for the sudden turn of events that came to pass. It wasn't even cancer that took her in the end. During the final moments we shared together, she was cradled in my arms. I wasn't ready for her to go, and I begged her to stay. I stayed beside her and held her paw as she looked up at me steadily, eyes wide open. It was almost 3:00AM and I couldn't keep my eyes open any longer. I fell asleep as she watched over me. Collette passed away on March 22, 2011.

Our short life together lasted just 15 months. Missing her is unbearable still. I think about that January when she entered my world and how I thought I was going to give her more life, but what is truly amazing is how much more life she ended up giving to me. During my time with Collette, I received a lifetime worth of love, loyalty, and memories I will never forget.

When my time comes, Collette just might be at the end of my life's road, looking back at me, as if to say, "hey, i've been waiting for you..."

More Evidence of the Love and Wonder that a Senior Rescue Dog Can Bring!

Our readers are happy to share their wonderful stories of selflessness and how adopting a senior dog is the best thing since sliced bread!



"Dickens" We adopted him at age 11 from Vicky's Pet Connection (VPC) in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He is now 15, and is the most gentle and loving creature in the world! We don't think he had ever been in a house before, as he was not housebroken and was afraid of everything, dishwasher, floors, doorways... HOWEVER, he is very comfortable on the furniture these days. Through the course of some veterinary treatment and x-rays, we also discovered many small bb's embedded under his skin. It appears he had been used for target practice at one point in his previous life.

Dicken's was the inspiration for me to start a program within VPC called "Golden Paws". We rescue senior dogs who have had the misfortune of finding themselves in animal shelters. We place them in foster care and tend to their physical and emotional needs while we wait for an old dog lover to open their home to them. We have rescued, rehabilitated and placed 18 seniors in new homes since the program began. Visit our Facebook Page "Golden Paws".

~Shannon Reincke, Grand Rapids, Michigan



"Champ" and "Girl"

Girl is a 12 year old English Bulldog. Girl was found tied up in a driveway with no food or water or shade from the Florida sun. After a knock on the door and some convincing, the owner surrendered the dog a few days later to a local English Bulldog Rescue group. She was adopted a few months later when I found her picture on petfinder.org

Champ is an 8 year old English Bulldog. Champ was severely abused and neglected while being used for dog fighting. He was taken to a local high kill shelter where he was later pulled by rescue and I fostered him. He soon became a foster failure and has been with us for over a year now.

Average Life Span for an English Bulldog is about 8-12 years, but we're still going strong! Champ does agility and is active in Dog Scouts of America. He's also a therapy dog. And Girl...well Girl does sleep a lot, but when she's awake she's as feisty as ever! She runs around and is constantly wagging her lil nubby tail. Her favorite thing is to go with her Grandma to get coffee every afternoon.

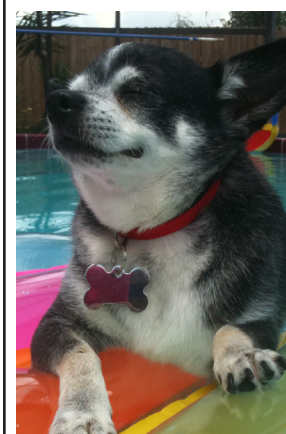
~Neely Waring, Coral Springs Florida



"Ava" (Above left) was adopted from Downtown Dog Rescue in Los Angeles in 2004. She was a puppy mill mom and physically, mentally, and emotionally shut down when the rescue group took her in. She looked like she was 11 at that time, but with good food and lots of love, she gets younger each year. :-)

"I adopted 'Scooter', (Above right) a 16 year old, blind and deaf Miniature Poodle after his person died in 2007."

~Robin Skov, Canoga Park California



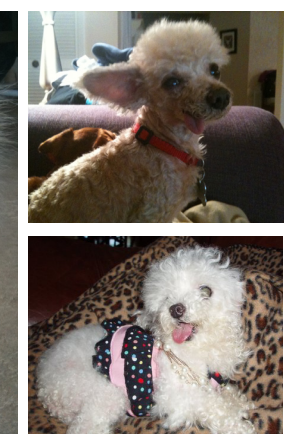
"Emo" Adopted at 10 years old. He was an owner surrender due to his age. Aside from a large cataract and being heartworm positive, he is a happy, healthy and loving little man!



"Jazper" Adopted at 12 years old after 2 years of life at a shelter. He is blind, deaf, has no sense of smell, "doggy dementia" and a host of other conditions, but he'll be our boy till the end of his days.



"Gigi LaRue" Adopted at 16 years old after being dumped at the shelter as an owner surrender due to "allergies from the new wife"; She is now free to be the fancy girl that she is!

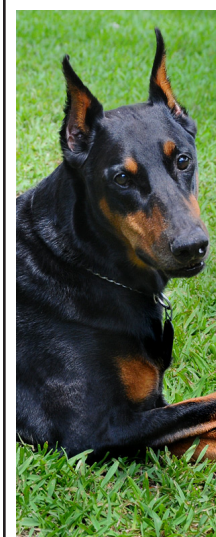


"Nico Suave" Adopted at 14 years old and now living in his 16th year of life. "After seeing what spirit he had, though he was covered in matted & stinking hair, I knew that he didn't deserve to die alone at a shelter."

"Maggie" Adopted at 10 years old. Maggie was the beloved dog of her owner until their death. Due to family circumstances, she needed a new home. "She is completely

toothless, has no bottom jaw, and a few other health issues. Aside from that, she is a little SPITFIRE!! I have oved her from the first time I saw her and I couldn't be happier that she has joined our brood!"

~Christine Scalici, Brandon, Florida



"Doughbee" was adopted at about 8 years old from a shelter. He was found on the street with a baseball sized tumor on one of his rear legs. No one claimed him.



"Tookie" Adopted at age 10 from the 9th Ward in New Orleans. She was turned over to animal control by her owners just before Hurricane Katrina. hit.

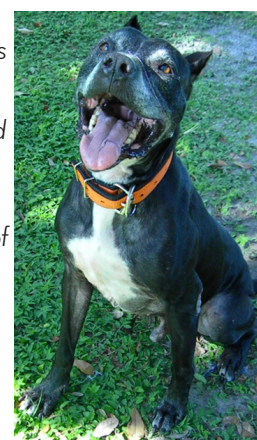


"Blaze" Blaze was adopted at the age of 14 from a man in South Carolina who no longer had time for her and his family didn't want to take care of her.

~Gary & Kathy Borland
Bryson City, North Carolina

"Onyx" Adopted at 8 yrs old - now 12. His family moved to an apartment where his breed was not allowed so, he ended up at animal services likely to be a resident on death row. Because of his intimidating looks, most folks wouldn't even consider him for adoption. But, this old guy is a pussycat and a complete gem. He was diagnosed with cancer 2 years ago and was given 6 months to live but he's beat the odds and is still enjoying life!

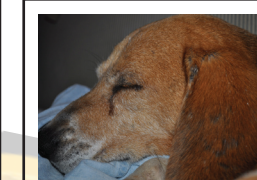
~Ashlie Burke, Tampa, Florida



"Sami", "George" and "Goldie"

Sami, on the left is 12 1/2 years old, George, in the middle is 10 1/2 years old and Goldie, on the right is 8 years old. George and Goldie were adopted as seniors from Delaware Valley Golden Retriever Rescue In Reinholds, Pennsylvania.

~Heidi Shore,
West Windsor, New Jersey



"Redford"

"Adopted at 8 years old from a shelter. Redford is the biggest Beagle sweetheart and the most loving dog I've ever had."

~Diana Slater,
Los Angeles, California

Did you know that dogs become seniors around age six for larger breeds and eight for smaller breeds? Being aware of the changes that may take place in your dog's body as she ages, including her changing nutritional and care needs, and understanding how to approach them are key to helping her live a long, healthy life. Visit Natura's New Website About Caring For Senior Dogs! www.aseniordogslife.com