

The Second Time Around...



The dog that you adopt from the shelter may be a rescued stray or a dog that someone has voluntarily surrendered for adoption.

Whether he was born in the bushes behind the laundromat or an adolescent abandoned on the streets by his once-upon-a-time owner, the streetwise stray can be a real challenge to incorporate into your life. The famous "he followed me home, can I keep him, Mom?" canine is a special animal that needs time and space, patience and understanding.



This is a dog that has had to compete to stay alive; he's fought for food, scrambled for shelter. His reliance on his inborn canine savvy kept him alive on the streets long enough to be rescued and adopted by you. Now you've committed yourself to him, it becomes a crash course in Canine Socialization and Human Interaction 101.

If he's street-born, chances are he's never heard a toilet flush or seen a vacuum cleaner in action. He'll gobble up his food, throwing furtive glances left and right. The acoustics of the indoor environment may make him anxious. Edgy, he'll whine and pace. A sudden sound and he'll either bolt upright ready for action or slither along behind you.

Be reasonable in your expectations. Be sensitive. It's culture shock, pure and simple. Put yourself in his shoes. Just imagine that you've been snatched away from home and suddenly find yourself in an aboriginal outback community. No language or gestures in common. Communication is by trial and error. Be patient and supportive. You'll succeed.

The stray that was "previously owned" enters your home with a completely different set of baggage. Leashes, hands, rolled up newspapers and magazines, feet, chairs and sticks are just some of the pieces of "training equipment" that may have been used on this dog. Words like "come here" and "lie down" may bring forth a reaction other than the one you expected. Or maybe he led a sheltered life and was never socialized to children or sidewalk activity. This dog may be the product of a never-ending series of scrambled communications and unreal expectations.

As an adolescent or adult dog, he's already formed his opinion regarding humans. Be prepared to meet with confusion, reluctance and resistance as you retrain this fellow. He may flinch when you reach to pet him, make a sudden move or raise your voice. But don't let yourself be held hostage by thoughts of past cruelties and abuse. Don't treat him like a victim. The key here is confidence. Build his with consistent training and you'll turn him around.

The dog that has been voluntarily surrendered for adoption may have somehow let someone down. Not housebroken, too active, too noisy, destructive when left alone, too friendly. Or maybe he's a victim of circumstance. Divorce, an owner who died, is ill or was arrested. A newborn who is allergic. Whatever the

reason, he's separated from those he loves and trusts. In despair, he waits for them to return, sniffing for the familiar smells that make him feel good all over. He misses them, he mourns them. His pack, his family ... where are they?

When you get him home, he's confused and disoriented. Sights and sounds are simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar; things are jumbled up. He jumps on the couch and bed, he drinks from the toilet bowl, barks at the phone and makes wild lunges at strangers. In another life, these behaviors may have been encouraged or maybe just not discouraged. Don't worry; he'll catch on. He'll get past it all. He'll become your dog.

Taking on the responsibility of a dog with a past is hard work. At first, it may seem overwhelming. Most of the problem behavior you'll encounter is an expression of the dog's inability to cope with the demands of your personality and lifestyle. Make sure you and he are indeed suited for each other; that you can meet his needs for activity and companionship according to his breed type. Things may proceed slowly; you'll hit frustrating learning plateaus. But if you're committed you'll get there. Remember that the basic period of adjustment can be anywhere from six to twelve weeks. Go into this with your eyes open... and then stand back and marvel at the transformation. . . it will knock your socks off!

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