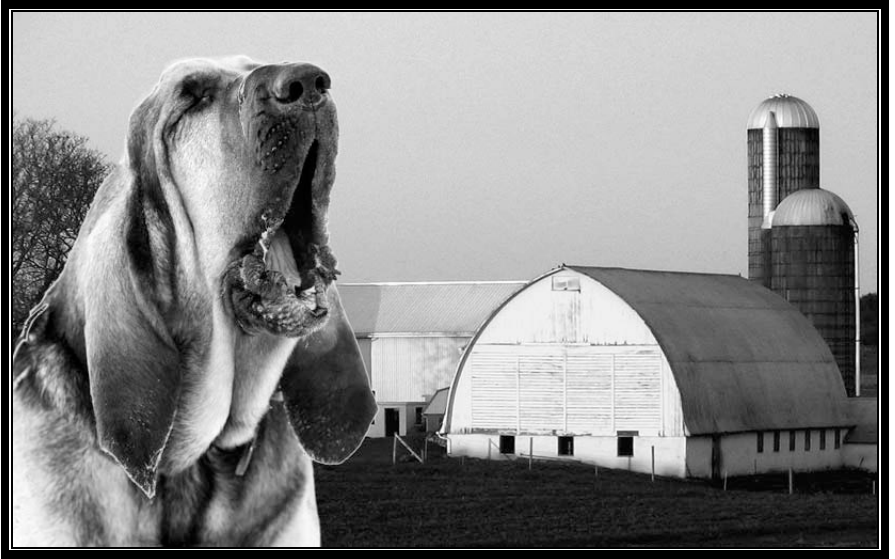


Main Line Animal Rescue's

DOG BLESSED



Puppy Mill Survivor Stories

By Lisa Fischer

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Happy Tails Books™ uses the power of storytelling to affect positive changes in the lives of animals in need. “Reading for Rescue” with Happy Tails Books not only brings further awareness to animal advocacy efforts and breed characteristics, but each sale also results in a financial contribution to dog rescue groups.

DEDICATION



*"In the shade of the of this willow tree,
We weep for the eighty.
Forever in our hearts you shall be,
Alas, now free, from worldly tragedy."*

This tree was planted by the MLAR "Over the Mill" support group for the **Eighty Dogs** senselessly shot by their breeder on August 13, 2008. May they rest in peace.

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INTRODUCTION

This book shares the journeys of over thirty dogs rescued from puppy mills. Although these dogs physically survived the deplorable conditions found in these mills, they did not emerge totally unscathed. They carried with them the results of years of abuse and depravation. These stories have happy endings as all of the dogs have been adopted, rehabilitated, and are living peacefully in homes filled with love and encouragement, but the sad truth is they are exceptions to the norm.

People often ask what the term "puppy mill" means. Puppy mills are large-scale breeding facilities where commercial breeders (aka "millers") keep scores of dogs for the purpose of producing puppies to sell. Today, 99% of the dogs in pet stores are from these commercial breeders. This business is very lucrative, especially because careful attention to the wellbeing of the breeding dogs is replaced by neglectful methods that produce greater puppy inventory at a lower cost. These puppy mills exist on farms across the country, with hundreds of dogs crowded together, living in unsanitary conditions, subjected to extraordinary suffering, and bred season after season.

Most of the first puppy mills were located in the Midwestern states. While often on a single farm, there were also very large mills that were corporations housing unknown numbers of dogs in structures as big as airplane hangars. As business grew, these corporations began serving as managers and consultants for the smaller farmers who bred dogs, helping them set up profitable puppy businesses and sell their puppies to pet stores nationwide. To get their "crop" to "market," the farmers shipped their puppies by truck to stores as far as a week away; many of the puppies did not survive the trip.

Business continued to thrive, and these corporations figured out that they could make more money by opening more puppy mills closer to their markets. They contacted small farmers on the East Coast, including many Amish and Mennonites in Pennsylvania, with an irresistible business plan. Since traditional farming has always been subject to the whim of nature's moods, market instabilities, disease, and other disasters, the farmers were thrilled to begin growing a "crop" that had none of those variables, not to mention that Americans were paying a hefty price for puppies.

As with many good business plans, this plan provided for farmers to make as much money as possible by working frugally and taking their products to market as hastily as possible. Farmers used materials they already had on hand to quickly set up cages for their initial breeding stock, usually in their barns. As breeding proved successful and money began to flow, more cages were needed, so farmers saved on space and materials by building successive cages on top of existing ones, often as high as three or four levels. Sometimes they even used old dishwashers and bird cages to make do. As the puppies were born, the millers selected the best-looking ones to remain on the farm and become breeding dogs; the rest were shipped to pet stores. These businesses quickly became successful, and what may have started as a part-time endeavor for many farmers swiftly became a full-time enterprise approached with gusto.

The puppy mill system makes money, but not without some challenges for the farmers. The noise and odors of the breeding stock is a concern, so successful millers move their dogs deeper onto their property so as not to disturb their family. In these new locations, the caged dogs are often left

without shelter until the operation grows large enough to warrant building new structures. The result is many dogs freezing to death in the winter and baking to death in the summer sun and heat. The millers usually have so many dogs that they just consider the ones who don't make it to be "bad stock," like corn that can't tolerate a drought. And even after farmers build new barns to shelter their growing stock, the dogs suffer because they are now out of sight and out of mind. One farmer's wife was heard saying, "I don't think he's been down there for a couple of days." Her comment does not indicate an isolated incident: Irregular feeding and watering is a universal complaint about puppy mills.

The problem with the dogs' physical environment doesn't end with the heat and cold. Stacked cages lead to filthy conditions that promote disease and infection because their wire floors allow the top dogs' waste material to fall onto the dogs in the cages below causing irritating skin sores, oozing abscesses, and stinging eye infections over time. Left untreated, these infections result in severe scarring, blindness, and at times, life-threatening illnesses. Even so, veterinary treatment is rarely sought. The cost of such care is not part of *this*

business plan. These infections are instead left to fester causing irreparable harm. If a paw or leg gets caught in the wire flooring, rather than cutting the "valuable" flooring, the farmer cuts off the paw or leg with whatever tool is available. After all, at this point the dog is no longer valued for his or her looks; the capacity for breeding is all that counts. Millers are known to perform cesarean sections on dogs *without* anesthesia and to debark bothersome barking dogs by hammering a pipe down their throats, ripping their vocal cords.

When a farmer finds a dog no longer useful (with diminished breeding capabilities and hence, not worth the cost of feed), he will dispose of it, either by putting it out to auction where he or she might be purchased by another breeder or just taking it out back with a gun. A farmer in Pennsylvania shot all eighty of his dogs rather than take them to a veterinarian when an inspector required they be treated for a severe flea and tick infestation. It's painful to imagine how afraid these dogs must have been during the last minutes of their lives as the farmer came closer and closer to their individual cages with his gun.

Breeder dogs are never given exercise or let out of their cages except to be taken to the breeding chambers. Some are

unable to even walk when rescued; others live in buildings with no windows and never see light, which damages their eyesight. There are no temperature controls in these buildings. The dogs are never washed or groomed, so breeds with growing hair quickly become the matted host to all sorts of critters, including mice. Their nails are never trimmed and often get ripped from the dogs' paws after catching on the wire floors.

Many dogs live in these conditions for years, and an unfathomable number of them do not survive to ever experience any sort of love or compassion. The ones that don't die from disease, starvation, or exposure are often shot once they become too weak to produce litters. Those who survive withdraw mentally from their horrible ordeal in order to cope. They comply with whatever they are asked to do—give birth and nurse puppies with their already nutritionally depleted bodies—but they do not react to or interact with people or other animals. Litter after litter these dogs become weaker and weaker until they are finally just tossed away like trash.

The puppy mill problem has been politicized as of late because animal rights organizations and rescue groups are successfully convincing legislators to regulate conditions in

these mills. The farmers have pushed back by inventing reasons to delay compliance. Examples of new rules include no stacking of cages, no wire floors, adequately-sized cages, and routine veterinary care—why should it be so difficult to comply with such basic standards of care?

Some “lucky” dogs eventually escape the mill cruelty one way or another and are saved by rescue organizations, where they arrive broken, sick, and frightened. They need both physical and mental rehabilitation, as they have never before known any human kindness. Rescue volunteers work diligently to help these dogs, but in the end it is the work of those who have opened their hearts and homes by adopting these survivors that heals them.

You’re about to read stories of puppy mill *survivors* who were rescued by Main Line Animal Rescue (MLAR), a Pennsylvania-based organization committed to rescuing dogs from puppy mills. The story contributors are members of MLAR’s rehabilitation group, Over the Mill, where the members work together to make life worth living for these heroic dogs. By sharing these stories and exposing the true conditions from whence these dogs came, we honor all who have suffered and

continue to suffer extensively in the name of the almighty dollar.

Does thinking of puppies as products feel wrong to you? It's probably because you know that dogs have feelings, emotions, and needs that are much more akin to human beings than ears of corn. Puppy mills are *real*, they exist in many communities, sometimes where you'd least expect them, and the only thing that will stop them is **you and me**. At the very least, please share what you learn from these stories with others and support legislation to increase the mandatory standards of care on these farms or abolish them completely. And the next time you hear of someone looking to add a new furry companion to their home, encourage them to think carefully about where they get it. If enough people decide to skip pet stores and only patronize shelters, rescues, and reputable breeders, puppy mills will no longer prove to be a viable business model, and *the suffering will end*.

Lisa Fischer

SECOND CHANCES



*Leya: Yellow English Labrador Retriever
Adopted by: Matt and Lisa Fischer*

Although Leya and I would not meet until three years later, we were sharing similar fates: We were both struggling to survive, and we both would receive second chances.

For Leya, an English Labrador Retriever, being born in a puppy mill and looking perfect for her breed meant she'd be selected to become a breeder dog rather than being sold to the

usual pet store. For this girl, there would be no happy puppyhood, as she would be placed in a cage so small that carefree romps would be impossible; indeed, in the tiny rabbit hutch from which she was later rescued, there was no room to sit up or to lie on her side. From this prison, she was most likely never exercised, released only to be placed with a male in order to mate. But Leya must have been a huge disappointment for the breeder who hoped to capitalize on her good looks because Leya refused to mate.

Season after season she refused, causing absolute ire in the breeder. No longer willing to feed an animal who did not carry her weight, he readied to shoot her. Fortunately, during this time in the history of rescuing dogs from puppy mills, the millers were still willing to give dogs away when they no longer had use for them. "Saves a bullet!" they would say. Fortunately, too, there was a volunteer close by as the breeder gave but a short window of opportunity in which to retrieve her before shooting her.

Once at the rescue, she was given the name Leya. Seems she was regal even then, but there already was a dog named Princess, so the kennel manager named her Leya, changing the

spelling a bit from the Star Wars princess. For the first time in her life, Leya could stand up straight, sleep in any position she chose, and eat and drink to her delight. She hadn't escaped unharmed, however. She'd lost a toe from standing on the wire flooring of the hutch and had a life threatening case of pneumonia. She did not bark, and it was thought she may have been debarked. She was extremely withdrawn and fearful, but she exhibited no aggressive tendencies. She needed emergency veterinary care as the pneumonia was critical and spent the next three weeks in the isolation area of the hospital. The staff spent their breaks and lunch hours giving her human company and support. She was struggling to live, and everyone wanted to help her—Leya was one of those beautiful creatures for whom you can't help but root.

For me it was critical medical news also. My husband and I had been readying ourselves for our approaching retirement life. Having spent our work lives in the city, we chose a simple country life at much slower pace with gardening, painting, and at last a large-breed dog (hopefully a Labrador) as our companion. We had accomplished all of it, except the getting of a dog, waiting only for my husband's final

day of work that December. Once retirement day came and we began to live our new life, it would be only six days later that I would find out that I was in kidney failure. What followed were frantic doctor appointments, interviews to be selected for the kidney transplant waiting list, and tests, many tests. But fortune visited me also, just as it had for Leya when she was rescued. For me it came in the form of a kidney donor, and I successfully received a kidney transplant. Unfortunately, though, and again like Leya, my mental state did not spring back as quickly as my rescued body, and I didn't seem to be able to shake the feeling that I was going to die. I became withdrawn and depressed. One day, almost a year after the transplant, my husband asked me if I thought it would be a good time to begin searching for our big dog. As I mulled it over in my head, I couldn't control the smile that was forming.

At Main Line Animal Rescue (MLAR) we were introduced to Leya. We thought she was a gorgeous dog, but we could see how frightened she was. I noticed that the volunteer handling her must have been extremely strong, as Leya did not walk well on a leash and was pulling the volunteer all over the

field. Truth be told, she looked like too much dog for me, but I was following a dream.

When Leya was delivered to our home, she pushed her way right past us to the other side of the room where we had a dog bed waiting, entered it, and sat with her nose toward the ceiling against the wall as if making us go away in her mind. Clearly Leya had found a mental way of escaping from reality. She could not look you in the eye, and when you looked into her eyes, they were vacant, as if nothing were going on in her head. She did not wag her tail, holding it low between her hind legs. She was very weak, not yet regaining strength from her pneumonia struggle. Her lower eyelids drooped some, completing the picture of sadness and depression.

The most important thing to know when rehabilitation begins is that while puppy mill breeder dogs are learning about living in a house, they are very susceptible to being frightened and then running away. Everything is new to these dogs having lived in fear of humans all their lives, and if startled, their adrenalin sends the fight-or-flight message to their brains. They almost always choose flight, so to protect against this, the adopter is told to only take the dog out of the house through

the door connected to the fenced yard. That way, the dog is protected from loss if he or she slips out the door. This is the primary commandment and mentioned many more times than once.

Leya could not climb or descend stairs, making a trip to go outside into our fenced in yard impossible in our house. There were 15 steps from the deck to the fenced in yard, steps to get out of the garage, steps to the basement from the main floor, and basement steps up to the side yard. The only door without steps was the front door. So here we were, just an hour into our relationship with Leya, about to break the first commandment by taking her out a door into an area not protected by a fence. We'd heard of the two leash trick to protect against losing a dog on a leash and decided to use it. When we hooked her up, both of us having a leash in hand, she became afraid and bolted. 75-pound Leya was using all her weight to overpower us. Getting her near the front door, amidst the sounds of the furniture being slammed and shoved out of the way and dog nails grinding and scraping the hardwood floor, I caught a glimpse of our second-floor landing, where our wide-eyed cat was leaning over with every hair on her body

straight up like a porcupine. She was so afraid that she did not venture to the first floor for the next two weeks.

Once we were out the door, Leya yanked us so hard our feet were hardly touching the ground in some sort of cartoonish fashion. Obviously her adrenalin had kicked in! Our job was not to lose her. Our destination was the fenced in portion of the yard, a feat that takes only a minute or two but felt like a marathon, leaving us checking our arm sockets for intactness. Once in the yard, Leya ran like the wind. We thought she was showing us how happy she was to be free and out of the rabbit hutch, only to figure out later that she was actually looking for an escape route. For the next two days, this double leash ritual was the only way that we could get Leya in and out for housetraining. We were exhausted.

Leya slept in a crate the first night, but the second night, no such luck. She cried all night, resting only for short periods. At about 3am, my husband and I, awake most of the night anyway, shared our doubts that we were going to be able to handle Leya. We decided that we would have to return her as she was just too strong for us. Even though Leya was our first big dog, we were never afraid of her, but she was so frightened

of everything around her that she used all her strength to try to flee or at least to keep us at a distance. I knew that I was no help at all, being still weak from my surgeries. So even though it broke my heart to think of taking her back, it seemed necessary.

In the morning when I lifted the blanket over the crate and kneeled down to look in, I had to catch my breath. Leya was looking right into my eyes. She was incredibly beautiful, but what I really saw was more than her appearance. We were looking deeply into each other. I was aware that she was communicating with me and letting me see her true nature: very sweet, soft, and gentle. I felt that she was saying she was tired and was ready to stop running and be cared for. Out loud I said, "Oh, Leya, please help us. If you try just a little harder to help us, I will get stronger too!" And that was the deal we made that day.

With renewed determination, we began again. First on the list: stairs. That very day was spent on the deck learning the ups and the downs with me in the front, husband at the rear, and Leya in the middle. I could feel her giving herself over to me and felt a unity with her as she trusted me to hold her, and I

loved holding her so closely. By the end of the day, she had figured it out. We now could begin houstraining and exercising as we could easily get her to the fenced yard. Now was also the beginning of taking turns sleeping with her. Leya was afraid to go into other rooms in our house. She would not pass through a doorway without putting the skids on. So not wanting to leave her alone just yet, we had to figure out what to do. We needed our sleep, that's for sure, so one of us got a good night's sleep upstairs while the other slept with Leya in the family room on a mattress. Leya loved this and often slept in our arms. This sleeping arrangement lasted for almost a month until one day I put Leya on a leash and took her for a walk *inside* our house. It seems the leash gave her some comfort by assuring that I was staying with her. We walked to the dining room and sat for a short while, then to the living room where we sat a while, and then upstairs for a tour. That was the end of her fear of portals, and we all were able to sleep together in the bedroom from then on.

Soon we hired a dog trainer to come to the house. Leya, still recovering from the pneumonia, fell asleep while the trainer, left with nothing to do to fill the hour, demonstrated

her skills with our 13 year old Maltese! Later we tried again, this time with a behaviorist. Because Leya loved her bed so much and rarely left it, he recommended we teach her the command "stay" by giving her a treat if she stayed in her bed as we walked by. It was so obvious that Leya wasn't going anywhere that we laughed ourselves silly. It felt good to alleviate the tension and have some fun with her. But something told us we were asking too much of her too soon, and we let the training go for the time being and decided to just relax, love her as she was, and let her heal at her own rate.

About six months later, Leya wagged her tail, and luckily we both were there to see it. It was a swish-swish, and that was it. We were thrilled. For all this time you wouldn't have known that she had a tail at all because it was between her legs. This was our first signal from her that she might be emerging from her dark world. She began to wake each of us up in the morning by sniffing at our sides of the bed. She would even stay to enjoy a little back scratching. We could see a growing sense of happiness.

We bought a harness that prevents pulling so hard on the leash and walked her twice daily, all the time talking to her

and showing her the birds and rabbits on the way. Our neighbors still talk to this day how they could hear my husband talking to Leya on their walks together. We learned the benefits of positive reinforcement training, which is perfectly suited for a fearful dog. We worked daily with her, spooning out small doses of new experiences until she reached a comfort level. What Leya needed was time to begin to heal, feel safe, and trust the constancy of her new home.

There was always something new for Leya to learn. When company came to our house, she retreated to the basement. Although we explained Leya's discomfort with these types of situations, only a handful of our visitors dedicated themselves to joining in our therapeutic program. They lovingly entered our home almost on their knees, with quiet voices, gentle movements, and treats we set aside for just this purpose. Today Leya wholeheartedly welcomes those folks with wags and kisses. This past Christmas was Leya's third, and while the grandchildren eagerly and loudly opened their presents under the tree, Leya lay comfortably on the floor, head on her paws, watching the glee. There was even some tail wagging. She is content these days and enjoys her daily routine.

Recently Leya and I were going upstairs together. Reaching the top first, Leya turned around to look at me approaching her. In that moment, I felt a little dizzy and started to fall backward slightly. I said, "Help me, Leya." Leya moved a step closer and offered her head to me while I reached for her collar, which was enough to stabilize me. She seemed to know that she had done a very good thing and received lots of thank you kisses and hugs.

We did eventually take Leya to obedience training classes. She was the only dog in her group that obeyed the command, "Get in your bed." Of course, we knew she was a shoe-in for that one! Leya has graduated from beginner and intermediate classes so far. A very interesting thing happened while in class. Though Leya's teacher was always understanding about Leya's issues, her voice grew louder and sterner one day when she asked Leya to "sit," and Leya stood motionless. I said to the teacher, "Watch this," and I whispered the word sit into Leya's ear. Leya sat. The teacher, to her credit, said she would remember that.

One holdover from her mill days in the rabbit hutch is that Leya sits in a slouch as if the ceiling is touching her head.

When she is sitting in that way, I often say, "Leya, posture!" while giving her a hand signal to raise her head. She readily straightens up and seems to smile. She was not debarked, as we have heard her bark once or twice, but she is a quiet girl who doesn't choose to bark. She now has three new siblings, all puppy mill rescues, with which to play: Grace, a senior Lab; Abby, a silly, middle-aged Rat Terrier; and Beau, a handsome Poodle lad. The cat? Missy sleeps in Leya's bed with her at night.

There is a sweatshirt for sale in many of the pet catalogs that captions, "Who rescued who?" Well, I don't know. I do know from the soulful moment in which Leya and I made that deal, I never again had a moment of self-pity or fatalistic thinking. I lived so that Leya could get well. Her wellbeing was my reason for being. Her gains were my gains, I guess. I felt satisfaction and joy in my daily life with Leya. She kept her part of the deal and proved to be the gentle soul that I saw that day. And for my part, in time I realized I did in fact get stronger in many ways.

Dogs are such exemplary souls. I often consider Leya's journey and how she never let the abuse she endured change

her nature, tucking it away until she found her special place in the world. I consider her courage, and it makes me brave. I consider her sweetness, and it makes me softer. I consider her loyalty, and it makes me more committed. I consider her beauty, and it makes me see more of it. And when Leya romps and acts silly, she cheers me.

So, "who rescued who?" Well, I guess we both did, but I give Leya all the credit.

By Lisa Fischer

WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM MY FRIENDS



Kiera: Boston Terrier

Ollie: Boston Terrier

Adopted by: Michelle and Jim Bondi

Who can resist a Boston Terrier? Just their black and white markings alone are enough to turn heads. Add to that their snort-snorts and their little stubby tails that wag so hard their entire hind ends swing, and you can't help but smile. Put two Boston Terriers together, and they are simply irresistible.

When a family with a very shy puppy mill survivor adopts another more outgoing dog who was not subjected to such cruelty, the new dog often assumes the role of teacher, and the puppy mill survivor begins to heal by following the teacher's lead. It's as if the happiness and freedom of the new dog sparks a memory deep within the survivor's brain, and it will start to come alive too. The survivor will watch both the new dog's behaviors and the reception those behaviors receive from their people and will eventually give it a try. You might see a play bow or two or some happy sniffing of each other, when all of a sudden a full blown game of tag erupts. This is what the Bondis encountered, much to their delight:

We have always adopted from the SPCA, but when we began looking this time, a work friend told me about her wonderful experience adopting from Main Line Animal Rescue. We began by looking at the dogs on MLAR's web site. We had always thought we wanted a Boxer but later in life reconsidered that maybe a smaller breed would be better for us. We researched the Boston Terrier breed and read about puppy mills. When we went to MLAR to see their dogs, we were introduced to little Kiera, a Boston Terrier whom we instantly fell in love with.

She was two-ish and was a breeding dog whose last litter was stillborn. (The breeders didn't want to take a chance on feeding her for another six months only to get another stillborn litter and no income.) After a careful home study, we were approved to adopt her. We will always remember hammering additions to our fence in the snow in order to meet MLAR's standards!

Once in our home, we found that Kiera was extremely shy. It took a whole month before she would even look into my eyes directly, and then it only lasted a second. But, oh, when that happened my heart melted. She was finally beginning to trust me. Even though I had researched puppy mills and kind of knew what to expect, I guess I didn't realize how long it would take to help her rehabilitate. It was not hard to teach her housetraining manners, but she remained extremely shy and skittish. She was afraid of men, actually people in general. Her fear of my husband became hard for us, making having Kiera very one-sided and totally leaving Jim out. She would not even let him pet her without being in my arms.

I felt bad that my husband was not able to experience the lovely feeling of having a dog in his lap and began to consider the advice of some of the members of Over the Mill, who

recommended getting Kiera and my husband another dog who was not from a puppy mill. I was most afraid of losing the ground that we had accomplished with Kiera, but I did notice how happy she became when we went to “Over the Mill” meetings and she got to play with the other dogs. I began by asking Bill Smith, the MLAR founder, if he would look for another dog who would be comfortable with my husband and good for Kiera. One day Bill called to say he had a dog for us—a Boston—which delighted us even though it wasn’t a prerequisite. We had a little “interview” to see how he interacted with my husband and Kiera. Based on the good vibes we saw, Ollie came home with us that day.

Ollie is a very handsome three-year-old, who is not from a puppy mill. His paperwork says that he was seized from a household for cruelty or neglect. I can’t imagine anyone hurting this dog; he is such a lover. He kisses and hugs anyone, much to my husband’s delight. He acts like he just can’t get enough contact, and he has managed to change Kiera in many ways. For the first time she is able to approach a visitor in our home, at least to sniff them, instead of barking at them. She has watched Ollie get up on the couch with my husband, so now she does too. She even lets Jim pet her.

I didn't realize how quiet Kiera was until Ollie came to stay. He is one busy boy all day long. Now that they play together, we have so many laughs watching them. Ollie will always give up his toy or bone to Kiera after a little keep-away fun. They are cute because they will both pick up toys and try to entice each other that theirs is the best one to play with. Since we adopted Ollie, I don't have to chase Kiera around the room to pet her or get her on my lap; Ollie jumps up and Kiera always follows. In fact, she does not want to come up unless he is up there too. Kiera is now able to let me pet her, and she will even nuzzle my hand and offer a kiss or two.

Ollie does get them both into mischief though. We have learned to keep anything we care about out of reach. They especially love to pull the contents out of my purse. One day I came home to find the large stuffed bunny that had been waiting on my table to be wrapped as a Christmas gift spread in pieces all over my brown carpet, which was now white from cotton stuffing and little Styrofoam balls. I had to scrape it up with a cat hair brush. But you know, when you love them, you just have to laugh. I could just imagine how much fun they had with it.

Kiera and Ollie enjoy playing, sleeping, and cuddling together. It is such a joy to see them leap off the back porch to run out to play. FREEDOM, TOYS, AND JOY, OH MY! They are a bonded pair now and do not want to be without the other, just like my husband and I. We now have "his and hers" dogs, and we are all happy.

By Michelle Bondi

CHOSEN



Salty: Black Labrador Retriever

Adopted by: Scott and Connie Belden, sons Parker and Cameron

Ebony, onyx, black marble, and Salty—all eye-catching in their glistening glamorous skins. Salty was rescued from a puppy mill at a young enough age to avoid the inevitable evidences of poor nutrition to her body, especially her coat. The only physical scar she bears is a broken canine tooth, most likely from trying to chew through the wire cage. When you

meet Salty, her magnificent coat is the first thing you notice. Sadly, the mill life did injure her on the inside, as she carried with her the memories of her tortured days on the farm. With every human interaction, Salty expected the worse. Scott tells the story:

The first time I saw Salty, she was being coaxed out of the door of the kennel building. She was very skittish and walking very low to the ground, almost crouching. She was looking side to side as if something was stalking her.

The Beldens had come to Main Line Animal Rescue specifically to meet Salty. The volunteer working with them arranged a meeting with the Beldens' cherished dog, Mia, to see how they would get along. Mia also had a rescue story to tell, having been saved from a North Carolina shelter where many animals are euthanized due to overcrowding. She and her four pups were then flown to Pennsylvania by Pilots N' Paws," an organization of pilot volunteers who transport rescued dogs around the country.

Mia, a very social dog, needed a sibling, and the Beldens made room for another in their hearts and home. That is the thing about rescuers: their hearts keep growing and growing. A

volunteer brought Salty to a special fenced-in area on Main Line's property, where the family spread out waiting to see what Salty would do. Salty and Mia had an immediate friendship with no tension at all between them. Salty then began making looping circles around the family, eventually tightening her circle around Scott:

I held out my hand, and she brushed past it a few times. After several touches, she walked to my knee and sat down. That was when I realized how truly beautiful she was. Her black coat was as shiny as any I had ever seen. Her build was extremely fit and trim, bordering on underweight. As I stroked her fur for the first time it felt like satin, soft and supple like no other dog I had ever touched. I found it hard to believe this dog was just in a kennel, let alone spent years in awful conditions as a puppy mill breeder. Unfortunately, her beauty was most likely the reason she was chosen to breed and forced to suffer through litter after litter until she was spent.

Scott admits he fell in love with Salty at first sight. They all did. As a family they committed to help Salty overcome her fears with love and patience. What lay ahead were problems common to rescued breeder dogs who had never seen anything

other than cage bars. Salty's world had previously only stretched to the four corners of her cage, and now that it was opening up, she was stressed out. Often adopters think that their puppy mill dog will be so happy once they can run all over their home, but the opposite is usually the case. Houses, rooms, and yards are more than the puppy mill dog can absorb immediately. Because of this, introductions to the new, big world should happen as slowly as possible. In her case, Salty was afraid to go through doors and hallways. She fatigued easily and could not navigate stairs well. Her tail remained between her legs and her eyes darted back and forth with any movement in the room. But luckily for Salty, Mia's motherly instincts came in handy.

The first time Mia trotted up the stairs Salty watched and then followed her. That would be just the first act in the huge role Mia would play in Salty's rehabilitation.

It's amazing how similarly the drama of where the new dog sleeps plays out in the families I know. The first night Salty slept in an open crate in the master bedroom:

The second night she was much more reluctant to go near the crate by the bed. She would bolt when I tried to come near her and would squirm when she got near the door. We swore we would not start allowing a dog on the bed if we ever adopted another because once they're up there, they'll never get down. Ah, the second night... When you are tired, all resolutions are thrown out the window! Lack of sleep made us compromise quickly, and we brought Salty up on the bed for the night. She slept like a baby, and so did we. As I watched her sleep, I wondered how she slept in the mill. Did she have enough room to lie on her side? Was the bottom of her cage wire with no floor? Were there barking and crying noises from neighboring dogs in distress all night long? At least that was over for Salty.

The next morning she was like a different dog—much less skittish and jumpy, and her tail was up and even wagged once or twice. It was if she realized she was part of our family and that her new home might not be all that bad. While it may not be the answer for everyone, we believe bringing her onto the bed was a pivotal point in her rehabilitation.

On this the third day, Salty still had not eaten from her bowl, as she was fearful of the new eating situation. Scott had

tried all kinds of things when he got the idea to seek Mia's help again.

When it came time for breakfast, we decided to praise Mia when she ate to see if that would make a difference to Salty. Every time we said, "Good girl, Mia," Salty would emerge from her corner to circle the area, and occasionally take a passing bite of food. When Mia had completed her meal, Salty had eaten about one quarter of her food, but at least she was eating. Loving the praise, Mia came over to me to sit to receive more of it while Salty went to her bowl to take another mouthful. Eventually, she ate the entire bowl. Mia had come through again, and we learned a new way to get through to Salty.

Later that day as I walked with Salty in the yard, I became overcome with emotion at the scale of damage the puppy mill had done to this beautiful creature. I wished I could apologize to her for the horrors she must have faced. I thought of all the dogs still in puppy mills at that moment and prayed for their deliverance. I wished I could tell her I would never leave her and that she would be safe here for the rest of her life. I watched her tail go from between her legs to up and then wagging as she sniffed around the yard, and I knew that though I couldn't tell

her, I could show her. The few years of suffering and anguish she had endured would be replaced with many years of love, compassion, and friendship. It would just take time.

This is what I think about the experience of rehabilitating a puppy mill breeder dog: Sometimes you move forward and sometimes take a step back. One day Salty refused to come back in the house, and we couldn't figure out why. We tried everything we could think of, even using the leash to coax her, but she would not come up the steps of the deck. Eventually we realized she didn't like a wet towel placed over the railing of the deck. Once we moved it, she trotted in without a problem, intently eyeballing the spot where it used to be. As small as they may seem, little things can be the largest problems. If any little thing is changed, she will pick up on it.

The important thing we have found is to keep a consistent and patient attitude and always present a calm and even presence. It's not necessarily the details of the training that matters as much as your energy. Keeping a confident attitude makes all the difference. If you show frustration, the dog will pick that up immediately, but if you remain confident and calm, they will pick that up as well.

Having Salty is a blessing. We don't mind that she is a little different from other dogs. She is sweet and gentle and the prettiest dog I've ever seen. Salty will have a good life with our family, and she is already giving back all the love we give her. Now, as long as she lives forever, we'll be alright.

By Scott Belden

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



A volunteer at Main Line Animal Rescue (MLAR), Lisa Fischer is the coordinator of their Over the Mill support group, which helps rehabilitate adopted puppy mill survivors. Initially shocked to hear about the horrific conditions in puppy mills, Lisa decided to dedicate herself to helping MLAR's anti-puppy mill and animal rehabilitation efforts. Retired now from her former occupations of teacher and attorney, she, along with other volunteers, devotes her energies to giving new lives to all the animals at Main Line Animal Rescue.

Lisa lives in beautiful Chester County, Pennsylvania, with her husband, four puppy mill survivors, and an understanding cat.

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Happy Tails Books™ was created to support animal rescue efforts by showcasing the love, happiness, and joy adopted dogs have to offer. Our books entertain and educate readers about animal rescue, adoption, and dog breed characteristics. Happy Tails Books™ donates a significant portion of proceeds back to rescue groups nationwide.



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