

On the positive side

Foster family is best gift for homeless dog

By Roberta Hahn For the Sun-News

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Shortly after moving to Las Cruces about 17 years ago, my husband and I went to the local animal shelter to adopt a dog. We picked an Alaskan malamute named Nanook. Nanook was very different from any dog we'd ever had so I began to educate myself about the breed.

Through an amazing coincidence, I learned of a woman in Albuquerque who directed a national nonprofit organization that provided education about Alaskan Malamutes and rescued those that had been abandoned by their owners or picked up as strays.

It took only a couple of conversations with her and suddenly I was also rescuing Alaskan Malamutes and any other dog I could help re-home.

Since then, I've become acquainted with many similar organizations in New Mexico and across the country. The people involved share a number of similarities: a love of animals, a desire to make a positive difference in the world, the strong belief that to enrich the life of just one animal for any period of time is a life-enhancing experience, and a serious lack of resources.

The No. 1 item on these rescue organizations' wish lists is this: a person or family willing to provide a temporary home for a dog while the organization works to find an adopter. Many rescue organizations, including mine, will pay for all the expenses associated with the dog's care and feeding.

All the foster family has to provide is a loving, safe environment until the new home is found.

Dogs in foster care are more adoptable and have an easier transition period than those placed in shelter/kennel environments. This leads to a happier experience for adopter and adoptee. And of course, from the dog's point-of-view, it's much more pleasant to endure a stressful situation with a family that's similar to (or better than) the one that was suddenly and inexplicably lost. It's kind of like the difference between your family shipping you off to a large nursing home in Idaho vs. sending you to Aunt Mary's house when they decide they don't want you around any more. Which would you prefer?

Foster volunteers can do so much good with so little money and effort. You don't have to leave home. You may not have to pay for the guest in your home. If you choose to become more involved with rescue efforts, that's great. If not, you're doing more than enough by simply providing a dog with a temporary home. I know of nothing else you could do to get so much reward for so little outlay.

Sixteen years and hundreds of dogs later, I have learned to live with the successes and the failures of dog rescue. The cynics are right that not every dog can be saved. But we who rescue know the lifesaver's basic principle: one is better than none. And that's how we find the courage to keep rescuing.

Please search your heart and decide to help just one, too. Contact the Humane Society of Southern New Mexico (www.hssnm.org) for a list of rescue organizations in the area, or contact me at (575) 644-7094 or malamuterescue@zianet.com. On behalf of cold noses and wagging tails everywhere, thank you.

Roberta Hahn is the president of Alaskan Malamute Rescue of New Mexico Inc.