

On the Positive Side: One poodle's success story can help other animals find a home

By Cheryl Fallstead For the Sun-News

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Not every animal is fortunate enough to have a wonderful life. That much is made evident by the large number of dogs and cats that fill our shelter and are euthanized each year. But I want to tell you about one small success story. It is about a little poodle named Winston, who was adopted in 2008 from our local shelter.

When my parents moved from California to Las Cruces that year, my mom insisted they were going to adopt a small dog. In fact, she was pretty specific about what she wanted: a small, white female poodle mix, preferably well-trained and 2 years old. Hmm, that shouldn't be too hard to find, I tried to convince myself. However, after multiple trips to the shelter, we hadn't yet found that perfect little pup.

One day when my parents and I went to continue the search, we found a small, sleepy bundle of fur that had just been added to the puppy area. Poodle mix? Check! White? Check! Female? No. Two years old? Well, at just 8 weeks, the little guy missed out on two counts. But he was darned cute, so I scooped him up in case one of the other families searching for a new dog noticed how adorable he was and took him before my parents could decide.

This is where our stories don't quite match. I just wanted to keep him available as an option until they were sure whether or not they wanted to adopt him. They claim I wouldn't put him down until they agreed to take him home. Either way, he wriggled his way into their hearts and came home with them that day. We even decided the name Winston, provided by shelter staff, was just perfect and it stuck.

I provided lots of advice on crate training, books on dog care, and served as his puppy-sitter. He got along great with my two dogs right from the start, even though Schotzie at age 11 thought he was a bit rambunctious. Sullivan, just middle-aged, thought Winston was a special gift just for him and tolerated all of the pup's ear-chewing and attacks with the patience of a saint.

All of my parents' previous family dogs had been outside pets, perhaps permitted use of the garage for bedtime. Not so for Winston. He soon worked his way out of the crate and into my parents' bed. They just couldn't resist him. He cuddles with them on the couch, visits Caliche's for puppy cones, and generally has a pretty pampered life.

In fact, he is lucky enough that he has two families. When my older dog died, my parents decided to give Winston to us so Sully wouldn't be lonely. Well, that and he barks too much at their house. So he lives most of the time with us and visits my parents when they need a "Winston fix."

He has figured out how to keep everyone happy and knows the rules at each house. Their house: jump on the bed and burrow in for bedtime. My house: slip under the bed or cuddle up with Sullivan on the bedroom floor. Their house: beg for treats at the table. My house: might as well give up, it's not gonna happen! He has learned a multitude of cute tricks to entertain visitors at either home and earn extra treats.

It is amazing how much spark one little white poodle, known affectionately as "Winnie the Poodle," has brought to two households. He cranks himself up once or twice a day for mad dashes through the house, hoping Sully will chase him. When we settle down on the couch, he'll take turns between sleeping on my feet or bringing a toy for a rambunctious game of fetch. My husband, the former poodle-hater, even admits that Winston is a fun little guy to have around.

Winston is a very lucky little dog. And we are all lucky he joined our families. He brings smiles and enjoyment to our lives every day.

There are hundreds, thousands, of other dogs and cats who want nothing more than the opportunity to be as special to someone as Winston is to us. They await new homes at the Animal Services Center of the Mesilla Valley and through

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a number of other organizations such as Safe Haven Animal Shelter and breed-specific rescue groups. I get e-mails daily about animals needing to be re-homed and wish I could do something to save them.

So maybe Winston's story will help. There may well be a dog or a cat waiting for a new home right now who could bring happiness and joy to your life like Winston - and Sully - have to ours. It would be worth a look!

Cheryl Fallstead lives in Las Cruces with her husband, Brian, and two rescue dogs. She is the editor of Southwest Senior newspaper, president of the Foundation for Las Cruces Museums and the Las Cruces Press Women, and is a freelance writer and photographer. Fallstead is also a part-time faculty member for Doña Ana Community College and owns Desert Moon Communications.