

Rescuing Buster

A dog in need is a best friend indeed.

It all began with what seemed like an innocuous call from my vet, who told me a woman client was seeking a home for her Schipperke, a 14-month-old male. The woman was moving to a place that wouldn't allow pets. I myself would rather live in a cardboard box than move somewhere I couldn't take a pet that has given me nothing but love and devotion—and a trust that it won't be deserted. Nevertheless, the vet called me, knowing my husband and I have two Schipperkes we are absolutely crazy about.

I took the woman's phone number and called her a few days later. She said Buster was "a beautiful little Schipperke with a wonderful disposition," but that if she didn't find a home *within five days*, she'd put him to sleep. I think I actually gasped, because she was immediately defensive.

"You're being emotional," she said. "Think about it. It would be better to do this than to have the dog passed around from owner to owner, or to have it living in a situation that isn't exactly right."

"What situation is not right?" I asked her.

"Buster shouldn't be in a home with children," she said. "They don't know how to behave toward dogs." He was used to sleeping in the house, also.

I realized I would have to coax this woman into giving Buster to me. I'd already told her I had two Schipperkes but would help find Buster a home, and one of her conditions was that she would have to meet the potential owner face to face. I told her I knew of a wonderful couple with no children (a lie) who wanted a Schipperke (not a lie), and that I would check on it and call her right back.

I called the people. "YES!" they said. But they lived three hours away by car and could not pick up the dog until the following Saturday.

I called the woman. "That will be too late," she said. She was not kidding. I began to wonder if veterinarians would



The author with Skippy and Minke.

really put a beautiful, young, healthy dog to sleep just because an owner is inconvenienced—or worse, just because an owner feels the pet is better off dead than without her.

I told her I'd call the people back, that maybe they could make the trip right away. They couldn't, but we cooked up a plan. The couple had a sister who lived near me. The sister would go to claim Buster, pretending to be the person who would really own him. She would say all the right things, say she had no children, say whatever the woman wanted to hear.

And that's what we did. Within three hours the sister and I were driving into the parking lot of a bank where I immediately spotted Buster looking out the window of a car. While the sister went to the woman's side of the car to say all the right things, I picked up Buster.

He was drugged. "I gave him a sedative so he wouldn't be upset," the woman told us. I don't know what was said next, but we couldn't get out of there fast enough. Our hearts were so heavy we missed our turnoff twice.

We went to my house, picked up my two Schipperkes, and we took all three dogs to the beach. A good walk helped Buster work off the sedative. It turned out he was actually a happy, well-adjusted little dog.

The next day Buster was delivered to his new home. His new owners and their children love Buster completely. He's up to his usual Schipperke tricks, and gets to run for miles every day to the beach—and he gets to sleep in the house. Buster's rescue is like a dream with a happy ending.

The very day Buster went to his new home I called the local humane society, as well as every veterinary office in town, to register my name for the rescue of Schipperkes. In so doing I learned there are national rescue networks for almost every breed of dog. I feel rather late in waking up to this fact, but I suppose that is because my husband and I have only owned pure-bred dogs for three years. And when I mention the rescue operations, and my story, to other breed owners, many tell me they, too, have not heard of such rescue organizations.

I write this story not only in tribute to Buster, but with the hope that my tale might encourage owners of pet pure-bred dogs to become involved in rescuing individuals of the specific breeds they have come to love and understand.

Above all else, there is a wonderful feeling one gets from rescuing a dog in need. I smile a lot when I think of Buster living his new, wonderful life, and the stories I hear from time to time about his antics give me a lot of joy. The very best experiences in life are truly those that require only a little extra effort on our parts, and they go a long way toward making the world a better place for people, and dogs, to live. ■

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