

Finding Hope . . . and finding hope

By Richard Huss



For this issue, my column is a reflection brought on by our magazine cover...and the great Aretha Franklin song, *Rescue Me*.

This is a story about hope and Hope. In the photo, she's the one to my left... the good-looking one. It's also a story

about being lost and found. And, it has the potential to be a real love story.

Drop back in time a few years. I'd come out of a messy divorce and remarried. In my prior marriage, all the animals were my responsibility – horses, dogs, cats, fish, rabbits. In my new marriage, my decree was "we live pet free."

I'm living in Connecticut. Twelve years ago. It's a cold, rainy, sleety March. My kids are visiting during their school spring break. My wife and I wake up early. She spots a bedraggled, wet, beaten-down dog slink past our rear window, which overlooks gardens and a totally fenced-in rear property.

My reaction: How in the hell did a stray dog get into my backyard? My guess is the gate, or gates, were not latched. After all, the kids are visiting and you know that routine...in and out, out and in...gates probably left open.

Outside I go. Check both gates: closed; walk the fence line: no breaks. I can't find the dog. Kids asleep, so I don't mention the dog. I know what would happen. I'm still committed to living pet free.

Next day. Dog slinks past rear window again. This time kids are awake in the bedroom with us. Ooops. Bad timing. Shouts of "Dad, Dad. There's a dog in our yard!"

Great. Now I have help looking for the dog. Sure enough, they find her. Up in the back curled in a den she's created in the root base of a huge Rhododendron. Sheltered as best she could be from the icy sleet and rain.

"Dad, Dad. Can we keep her? Can we?"

Not on your life. We don't know anything about her. She could bite you. I don't want any more animals. She's probably too sick. All these thoughts running through my mind.

My daughter cuts through all thought processes with, "Dad, if we had a dog, we'd be a real family." Music to a divorced dad's ears.

My pet free life? Kiss those thoughts goodbye.

We scoop the dog out from the Rhododendron and bring her inside. Start warming her up. Drying her off. She's really sick. Plucked 20-30 ticks off of her, even though it's just March. Wonder how long she's been out.

Everyone looks happy. I look at dollars going to the vet, pet paraphernalia scattered around the house...starting with a crate, poop piles. Is she housebroken? How old is she?

She's been inside the house for about 30 minutes. The doorbell rings. I forgot I had called local animal control. The call placed before the "real family" knife was thrust into my heart. Go to the door and there's instant distrust between both of us. He wants to search my property for the "stray dog," stating that he's been after her for over three weeks. I get a feeling... not a good one. "You can leave now. She escaped," I say firmly, a smile on my face.

He doesn't insist. But he does look around the property as he heads back to his ugly animal cage truck. For sure, now I'm no longer pet free.

The kids name her "Hope." Actually her full name is "Howling Wolf, Full of Hope." She spent the first few nights in the house howling all night. Not a good start.

So, Hope is a "Rescue Dog." I laugh every time I think about that term and I tell folks this story. They think: Hope's so lucky. She got rescued.

What they don't know is Hope rescued me. The lost and found applies to me. I'm the lucky one. I was the lost one. Hope found me.

Twelve years ago, with Hope's help, I started walking two plus miles daily. If she doesn't get her walk, she flops around the house and pouts – staring you down with those pathetic brown eyes. I'm healthier than I've ever been.

Hope has taught me to love without expecting anything in return. She just wants to be around me...with me. Though I know it will happen, I can't imagine living without her.

Hope has taught me to enjoy the moment – live in the now. I watch her as she pays attention to everything. She stops to smell, not just the roses, but everything. I'll take a pass on some of the smelling, but for Hope, it's all about noticing and being in the present. She's still patiently trying to teach me how.

All Hope wants from me is a kind word – a gentle pet. Raise my voice or speak with hostility and she covers, showing me real fear. In the 12 years Hope has been with me, I've learned to speak with love. Speak quietly – show her my gentle side. At times I catch myself speaking to Hope with more gentleness, love, and affection than I do my wife. That's a real eye-opener.

So, Hope and I hope you'll hear our story. Take it to heart. Her kitty cousin on the front cover may well be the one who rescues you, as opposed to you rescuing her. Lost and found is a two-way street... the cat or dog you find "lost" in the shelter just may help you find a wonderful part of yourself that you have lost.

Hope thinks...there's always hope! (P)

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