

My husband and I brought our first dog home to foster on a Sunday afternoon in the fall of 2008. Her name was Paisley, and she was a beautiful Walker hound. Through friends who were Sarge volunteers, we had learned there was an emergency need for foster homes and several good dogs would be euthanized at the shelter the next morning if they could not be placed.

We didn't give the whole idea of fostering much thought that day. We simply knew we had plenty of room for one more (we had three big dogs of our own at the time) and we were willing to help out. We didn't really know how fostering worked, but we knew how to love and care for a good dog, and we figured that was mainly what we needed to know. So we brought Paisley home and we have basically had a foster dog (or two) in our home ever since. Balsam, Toby, Babe, Scout, Rusty, Luther, Tricia and Trina, Reuben, Gretchen, Ramble, Tom and Jerry, Louie, Annie, Autumn...more names than I can remember.

When I tell people we foster dogs in our home, I hear the same response over and over. People say, *I could never do that because I couldn't stand to let them go.* And my first response to this is, *Well, I can't stand to see them euthanized because they've got nowhere else to go.* And this is true—I can't stand for that. But the sadness of euthanasia is only part of the story.

The rest of the story is, fostering dogs and watching them be adopted into loving forever homes is the most rewarding, joyful thing I do in life. When a dog we've taken in and loved for a week or a month or a season, goes to a good home, it's a celebration for us. Yes, we miss them, but we never give ourselves much time to dwell in the missing. We go right back to Sarge's and get another because, what we didn't know that first Sunday afternoon in 2008 is, there is *always* an emergency need for foster homes. There are *always* good dogs in danger.

My favorite thing about fostering is that first day when we bring a new dog home. Most of the time, the dog woke up that morning in the crowded, noisy shelter and by evening, he or she has had a good bath, a good walk, and a good meal and is curled up on the couch in my lap watching TV. I always wish I knew what they were thinking at that moment and if they ever wonder how they came so far in one day.

As I write this, I can see our foster outside my window. He's a big handsome Redbone hound named McGee. He's running around carrying a big stick in his mouth. His tail is up, there's a spring in his step, and it almost looks like he is smiling. He seems perfectly happy here. How can I let him go? Well, because I've done this long enough to know, McGee can be perfectly happy anywhere someone will love him and care for him and treat him like the wonderful boy he is. As soon as we find that place for him, we'll let him go. And then we'll go get another...

—Katie Wood Ray