



# They Never Came Back

I had no reason to think today was going to be any different than the rest of my life had been. My parents and I were out driving when we pulled up to a house. We all got out and went up to the door and knocked. The door opened and out poured a bunch of complete strangers who really seemed excited to see us. They invited us in and then after a bit of conversation, my parents said goodbye and left. Wait... Oh, I see... these must be my sitters. No problem. The people were nice and seemed to be so interested in me. After a while I noticed it was getting late and I began to worry. It was now dark out and I saw the people getting ready for bed. What's going on? I couldn't understand why they weren't concerned my folks hadn't returned. I began to pace, trying to figure this out. I started feeling stressed and confused. Soon everyone had gone to bed and I began to whine and walk in circles. What is going on I thought? "Go to sleep," they said, but I was too stressed and scared for that. It was a long night and eventually morning came and still no parents. Did they go on vacation? That must

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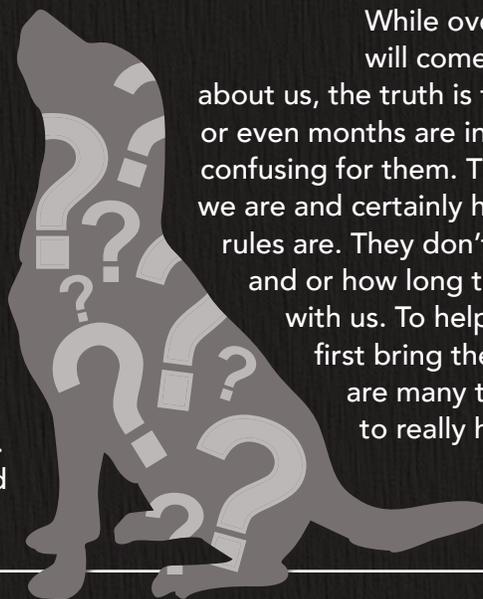
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be the answer, but it wasn't, and after many weeks I finally realized, my parents were never coming back.

When we bring a new dog home that is how they probably feel. Compare that to how we feel that first day. We are full of excitement and can't wait to shower the dog with love and kisses. How fortunate the dog will feel that we rescued them, and won't they immediately realize that this is such a good situation.

While over time our rescue dog will come to see everything about us, the truth is that the first few weeks or even months are incredibly stressful and confusing for them. They don't know who we are and certainly have no idea what the rules are. They don't know if they are safe and or how long they are going to be with us. To help our dogs when we first bring them into our home there are many things that you can do to really help them out.



## **Patience**

It's important to realize how stressed and confused our new dog is when we bring them home. They may pace and whine. They may bark and do all sorts of things that in turn stress us out, but we must understand the position they find themselves in. Take a deep breath. Give them space and allow them to express themselves as they certainly have that right given their new predicament. Stay calm as this will pass.

## **Routine**

I consider this the most important thing to help your new dog. If we can establish a consistent routine, we allow them to predict the things that are going to happen. Can you imagine living life not knowing what comes next? I make sure to walk the same route at the same time. I feed them at set times. Dogs are great observers and will learn fast. My new girl learned our routine in less than a week. She knew when things were going to happen and how. Because of this she was able to settle quickly and gain confidence about what her day would bring.

## **No Training**

I know this sounds crazy, but can you imagine your parents leaving you for good and then being sent to school to learn a lesson or take a test. Do you think you could concentrate or pay attention? Dogs feel the same. They are too stressed and confused to start training this early. The best thing we can do is get a big bowl of treats and play the "THINGS I LIKE" game. This is where every time you see your dog do something you like, you immediately walk over and give them a treat. When they sit give them a treat. When lie down quietly walk over and give them a treat letting them know how good they are. No expectations on the dog or requirement to do something. This is just about watching for times they are doing things you like and letting them know it with a treat and kind word. Yes, in fact this is training but one that places no stress on our dogs. The fact that they get rewarded usually means they will do that thing more often and given it was something we liked, that works for everyone.

## **Settle**

I usually find the first few days that our dogs have a hard time settling especially during the night. I have found if I make my dogs world smaller it helps them. Given they don't know what dangers may lurk throughout my house, I might gate off the room that we are sitting in. My recent foster would pace in circles, while we tried to relax watching tv. I found if I put her on the leash, she would harrumph a bit but eventually would lie down. And of course, because I liked when she did this I would throw a treat. (see my point on No Training).

## **Give them space**

While we all want to hug and kiss and just love our new dog it is important to give them space and give them control over how close they want to be. Remember that while we are incredibly happy to have them, they have no idea who we are. It would be like a stranger walking up and just start hugging and loving you. So allow your dog time to get to know us. Give them space and let them decide and control when they are ready for those hugs and kisses.

Most important — don't feel offended if they decide not too right away. Remember that we are strangers to them.

## **Let them sniff**

One of the best ways dogs learn about their neighborhood is by smelling. For dogs it is like having a newspaper that tells them about all the other dogs in the neighborhood. It gives them information about their surroundings and will help them feel confident and more secure. So, when walking your dog, take your time and let them sniff to their hearts content. After all, the walk really is for them most times anyways.

## **They are not your old dog**

While we all know this in our hearts, it is hard not to compare with our last dog we loved so much. See your new dog for who they are. They might be more cautious. They might bark a bit more. They may be more energetic. Just watch and enjoy who your dog is as they are all different.

I write this article having brought in both adopted and foster dogs. Every first night I always say to my wife, "*remind me why we do this.*" We never get any sleep and usually have a pacing, whining dog all night long. Each time I must remember what has just happened to this dog. Doing this gives me patience and understanding to help them get through a hard time and to settle into a new family that in the end will bring tremendous love and happiness.

**Stuart Hoffman,**  
**LRAS Volunteer and Trainer**

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Photo credit to Stella (formerly Daisy). She was adopted from LRAS in Winter 2011, at the age of seven.