

Shelter Dogs Are Not "Broken"

How Did I End Up in a Shelter?

I thought my family loved me. I know I loved them unconditionally! Then one day they dropped me off at a strange place. I have no idea why. There were many other dogs like me. No family. No friends. No familiar faces. No toys. Just wire cages, concrete walls, cement floors, metal food and water bowls, a thin cot to sleep on and stale air reeking of disinfectant. I feel so lonely, afraid and unwanted. Why did this happen to me? What did I do wrong? Why was I abandoned? Is anyone going to ever love me again?



Please Adopt Me!

Breaking Through the Myth

Sadly, this pup's story is all too common. Approximately 6.5 million companion animals enter U.S. animal shelters nationwide every year. Of those, approximately 3.3 million are dogs with approximately 670,000 shelter dogs being euthanized annually (ASPCA). While the majority of Americans agree (86%) that adopting pets from shelters is a virtuous endeavor, many of those same people (6 out of 10) are more content to let others adopt from shelters while they buy from breeders or pet stores. But why?

According to a Best Friends Animal Society survey, this heartbreaking phenomena is directly attributable to people's stereotypes and misperceptions about shelter animals and is especially prevalent among young adults (ages 18-34). Rather than appreciating the many benefits of adopting shelter dogs – including but not limited to pre-adoption spaying and neutering plus cost avoidance – it is suspected that many young adults believe that:

- Shelter animals are not at serious risk of being killed in shelters before they are adopted; and
- Nearly half of the young adults surveyed said that they find shelter animals less desirable than those obtained by breeders.

"We were sad to learn that to some extent animals in shelters are stereotyped by young adults as damaged goods. The fact is that every day in this country perfectly wonderful family pets land in shelters through no fault of their own – all of whom need and deserve a home of their own."

- Gregory Castle, CEO/Co-Founder
Best Friends Animal Shelter

Why do these dogs end up in shelters? What are the **FACTS**?

In a recent study conducted by the National Council Pet Population Study and Policy (NCPSP) and published in the Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science (JAAWA), researchers spent one year in 12 selected United States animal shelters to find out the motives behind relinquishment. Here's what they discovered:

The "Top 10 Reasons" Dogs are Relinquished

1. Moving (7%)
2. Landlord not allowing pets (6%)
3. Too many animals in the household (4%)
4. Cost of pet maintenance (5%)
5. Owner having personal problems (4%)
6. Inadequate facilities (4%)
7. No homes available for litter mates (3%)
8. Having no time for the pet (4%)
9. Pet illness(es) (4%)
10. Biting (3%)



The above does not add up to 100% because it only represents the "top 10 reasons" given by owners for dog relinquishment to shelters. Note that of the total 44% of dogs surrendered to shelters, **only 3%** of the relinquishments were attributable to the dog's behavior. In 41% of the cases, the surrender had absolutely nothing to do with the dog's behavior. **The dogs were not "broken".**

In addition to relinquishment reasons, the study collected supplemental data on those pets being relinquished. According to the study:

- The majority of the surrendered dogs (47.7%) were between 5 months and 3 years of age.
- The majority of dogs (37.1%) had been owned from 7 months to 1 year.
- Approximately half of the dogs (42.8%) surrendered were not neutered/spayed. Many of the dogs (33%) had not been to a veterinarian.
- Dogs acquired from friends were relinquished in higher numbers (31.4%) than from any other source.
- Close to equal numbers of male and female dogs were surrendered.
- Most dogs (96%) had not received any obedience training.

Why Adopt Shelter Dogs?

Now that we understand the fact-based reasons as to why dogs end up shelters, let's now consider the "Top 10 Reasons" for adopting shelter dogs.

The "Top 10 Reasons" to Adopt Dogs

1. You save not one but **two lives!**

When you adopt, you'll save a loving dog plus open up shelter space for another dog who is in desperate need.

2. You get a fantastic dog!

Reputable shelters and rescue groups are brimming with happy, healthy dogs just waiting for someone to take them home and make them a part of a loving family.

3. You pay significantly less.

Typically dog adoption fees cover spaying/neutering, first vaccinations and possibly micro-chipping. In many cases you also save on housebreaking and training expenses.

4. Rescued dogs take the absolute best selfies – hands down!

Who doesn't want to see a happy, healthy photo of your adorable adopted pup – not only on Adoption Day but also to honor your pup's lifelong journey with his/her forever family. Everyone loves doggie birthday celebration photos...cute or funny moments photos...playful photos...or just "hanging out" photos...to name a few.

5. You take a stand against puppy mills – do your part to put them out of business.

Pet store, online seller or flea market dogs almost certainly come from puppy mills. Puppy mills are factory-style breeding facilities that put profit above dog welfare plus significantly contribute to dog over-population.





"Animals from puppy mills are housed in shockingly poor conditions with improper medical care and are often very sick and behaviorally troubled as a result. The moms of these puppies are kept in cages to be bred over and over for years, without human companionship and with little hope of ever joining a family. After they're no longer profitable, breeding dogs are simply discarded – either killed, abandoned or sold at auction.

These puppy mills continue to stay in business through deceptive tactics – their customers are unsuspecting consumers who shop in pet stores, over the internet or through classified ads. Puppy mills will continue to operate until people stop supporting them."

- Humane Society of the United States

6. Your home will thank you.

Many of the dogs from shelters and rescues are already house-trained. Not only are you saving your floors, but you save time in not having to house-train. Let's face it – house-training takes a lot of time and can be frustrating.

7. Your dog is not only great for your health but you will be setting an incredible example for others to follow.

Not only do dogs give you unconditional love, but they have been shown to be psychologically, emotionally and physically beneficial to their companions. Caring for your dog can provide a sense of purpose and fulfillment plus lessen feelings of loneliness. And when you adopt, you are showing the rest of the world how to help dogs in need!

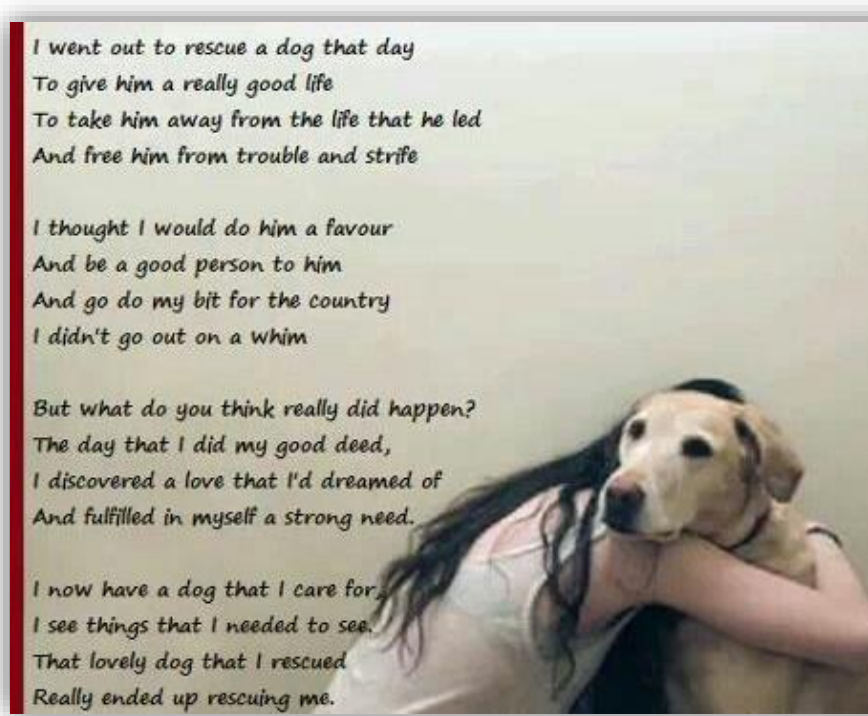
8. Your adoption fees help more than just one dog.

Overburdened shelters take in millions of stray, abused and lost dogs every year. By adopting a dog, you're not only giving your dog a second chance plus making room for another dog, but your adoption fees help shelters and rescues better care for the dogs they take in!

9. Reputable shelters and rescues make it easy to adopt your next best friend.

Their goal is to place the right size, color, temperament and dog breed with the right family!

10. You'll change a homeless dog's entire world and, who knows, perhaps your new best friend will change your world as well!



References include:

Top Reasons to Adopt a Pet, The Humane Society of the United States.

Survey Shows Disconnect Between Americans' Attitudes, Actions Regarding Pet Adoption, American Animal Hospital Association.

Goodbye to a Friend: An Explanation of the Re-Homing of Cats and Dogs in the U.S., Open Journal of Animal Sciences, Scientific Research Publishing.

