

# Happy Hound

*Develop a Great Relationship  
with Your Adopted Dog or Puppy*

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Logical Expressions, Inc.

## *Happy Hound*

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# Contents

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<b><i>Adopting a Dog</i></b> .....	<b>1</b>
About Me.....	2
Every Rescue Has a Story .....	3
Why Adopt a Dog? .....	8
Pets and Us.....	9
Is Adoption Right for You? .....	11
Time and Patience .....	11
Should You Get a Dog?.....	12
Choosing a Breed .....	13
Breed Checklist.....	15
Acquiring a Dog .....	16
Adopting from a Shelter.....	17
Breed Rescue .....	18
The Darker Side of “Rescue” .....	19
Parking Lot Pups.....	20
Finder’s Keepers.....	21
A Puppy for Christmas? .....	22
Dog Personality Tests .....	23
<b><i>Bringing Your Dog Home</i></b> .....	<b>27</b>
The First Days .....	27
Essential Dog Supplies.....	27
More on Collars .....	29
Dog Beds .....	30
Bonding with Your Rescued Dog .....	31
Happy Spay Day .....	33
Early Age Spay/Neuter .....	34

## *Happy Hound*

The Mythical Miracle.....	35
Adjusting to the Family .....	36
Canine and Feline Cohabitation.....	37
Kids and Pets .....	38
Retaining Pack Harmony .....	39
Dog Group Names .....	42
<b><i>Understanding Your Dog.....</i></b>	<b>43</b>
Be Leader of Your Pack.....	43
Dog Body Language .....	45
Mad Ears .....	47
Canine Communication.....	48
The Mighty Woo.....	50
Walk the Dog.....	51
<b><i>Educating Your Dog .....</i></b>	<b>53</b>
Socializing Your Dog.....	54
Nip Mouthing.....	56
Preventing Dog Bites.....	57
Training.....	59
Learning Manners .....	59
Dog Training Tips.....	60
Dog Training Misconceptions .....	61
Positive Reinforcement.....	62
The Power of Positive Reinforcement .....	63
The Value of “No” .....	65
Teach Your Dog to Sit.....	67
The Sit Stomp .....	69
Stay vs. Okay.....	70
Teach Your Dog to Stay Down.....	71
Teach Your Dog to Come When Called.....	73

Teach Your Dog to Walk on a Leash.....	75
No, I Will Not Go .....	78
Teach “Go to Your Bed” .....	79
Housebreaking.....	80
The Basic Principles .....	81
Housebreaking Schedules.....	82
Deal with Mistakes.....	83
Cleaning Up “Accidents” .....	84
More on Crate Training .....	85
<b><i>Dealing with Behavior Problems</i></b> .....	<b>89</b>
Providing Structure for Insecure Dogs.....	89
Sometimes Dog Problems are People Problems.....	91
Think About the Pets .....	92
Canine Teen Rebellion.....	94
Jumping Dogs .....	95
You Must Chill.....	96
Behavior: The Good, The Bad, and the Really Bad .....	98
Running Dogs .....	99
Be a Good Neighbor.....	100
Dealing with Escape Artists.....	101
Finding Your Dog.....	102
Dealing with a Shy Dog .....	104
Submissive Urination .....	105
Barking Dogs .....	107
Digging Dogs .....	108
Marking.....	109
Fear of Loud Noises.....	110
Thunder Paws.....	113
Destructive Chewing.....	114
Dog Aggression .....	115

## *Happy Hound*

What to Do About Dogs that Eat Non-Edible Things (Pica) .....	117
Canine Murphy's Law.....	119
Licking Dogs .....	120
<b><i>Keeping Your Dog Healthy .....</i></b>	<b>123</b>
Grooming .....	123
Dealing with Mats .....	124
Washing Your Dog .....	126
Full Body Shake.....	128
Stink Dawg.....	129
Canine Pedicure.....	130
The Ears Have It.....	131
The Houseguests You Don't Want .....	132
Hair, Hair Everywhere .....	134
The GURP .....	136
Health Care .....	137
Choosing a Vet.....	137
Pets Need Physicals Too.....	139
Help Your Vet Help Your Dog.....	141
Fat Dogs.....	143
Why Vaccinate .....	144
Boarding and Bordetella .....	145
Doggie Dental Care.....	146
Post Surgical Pet Care.....	148
Miss Cone Head.....	150
Heartworm Disease.....	151
Bloat .....	152
Canine Pancreatitis .....	153
Arthritis.....	155

Canine Epilepsy and Seizures .....	156
Licking, Biting, and Chewing.....	158
Endless Slurping .....	160
<b>Keeping Your Dog Safe.....</b>	<b>161</b>
Puppy Proofing.....	161
Poisonous Outdoor Plants .....	162
Antifreeze .....	163
Hot Weather Tips .....	164
The Bear Pool .....	166
Have a Safe Fourth.....	167
Get Your Dog Ready for Winter .....	168
The Wood Stove Incident .....	169
Do You Need to Winterize Your Dog?.....	170
Tender Toes .....	172
Holiday Treats Your Dog Shouldn't Eat .....	173
Pet Proofing the Holidays.....	174
Tannenbaum Bomb.....	177
<b>Dog FAQ.....</b>	<b>179</b>
Why Do Dogs Chase Their Tails? .....	179
How Old is Your Dog? .....	180
Do Dogs Dream?.....	182
Why Do Dogs Eat Grass? .....	184
How Can I Have a Dog and a Job Too?.....	185
Top 10 Reasons Dogs are Better Office Mates than Humans.....	187
What is The "Human–Animal Bond"? .....	188
How Can I Say Goodbye?.....	190
It's All Worth It.....	191

*Happy Hound*



# *Adopting a Dog*

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This book is about many things. It's about how to prepare for dog adoption, how to choose the right dog for you, and how to deal with all the challenges that go hand in hand with owning and loving a shelter dog. Yet underpinning all these topics is an even more important idea: reality.

For me, the reality of developing a lifetime relationship with an adopted dog is one of the most emotionally satisfying activities on the planet. You don't read about this kind of dog-human bond in most training or dog care books, which often sound like manuals in programming the perfect, "pushbutton" canine.

This book takes a more realistic approach. It's all about finding, nurturing, and relating to a hound you can happily live with for a lifetime, even if that hound isn't the model of purebred beauty or obedience trial behavior.

During the years I've worked in animal shelters and veterinary offices, written about dogs and cats, and raised my own shelter pets, I've learned that perfection isn't just unimportant, it's also impractical. In spite of what so many books claim, in the real world there are no "perfect" dogs. There are only imperfectly wonderful, wacky, charming, cute, heroic, and loving dogs, and the equally imperfect humans who love them.

For every slick, textbook-trained canine "robot," there are thousands of imperfectly glorious human-dog relationships. Sure, the basics need to be there: no biting, no going to the bathroom in the house, no destruction of objects or people. Those are the foundations of civilized coexistence, and this book addresses all those issues thoroughly.

## *Happy Hound*

But once you get beyond the basics, this book is mostly about care, communication, and understanding. All relationships depend on trade-offs, so in this book you'll find plenty of real-world guidance about how to decide which house rules and doggie behaviors are non-negotiable.

In the end, you might be one of those people who are horrified when their hound jumps on the sofa, but will gladly allow Rover to climb into bed with you at night. Or you might decide that all human furniture is off limits, yet you happily let your dog drag you for miles on long hikes. Neither scenario is perfect, but who cares? Whatever works. If you and your dog are happy, healthy, safe, and love each other in spite of the imperfections, everything is fine.

This book is dedicated to you and your adopted dog. May you enjoy your imperfections and be happy together for years to come!

## **About Me**

This book is designed especially for owners of dogs that have been adopted from humane societies, animal shelters, or breed rescues. It's about dogs that have been given a second chance at a new home, so I don't talk about the latest in "showing dogs" or "breeding to type." There's no snob factor here; plenty of books exist for breed enthusiasts. Instead, this book is for people who want to develop a good relationship with their family dog.

As a former animal shelter volunteer, veterinary technician, and owner of six shelter critters, I've seen a lot. This book contains my best advice for people like you, who have chosen to adopt, but need specialized guidance on dealing with "previously owned" dogs.

This book also includes my personal experiences in solving the problems of my own adopted canines. I've helped them through the entire spectrum of post-pet-adoption woes and I've explained them in sidebars that appear throughout the book. The sidebars also contain a few personal reflections on life with weirdly wonderful happy hounds.

With four dogs, I have lived through and found solutions for the following problems: separation anxiety, barking, submissive urination, excitement urination, jumping on people, destructive chewing, digging, and many other horrible things that I've probably blocked from my memory. Are my dogs perfect? No. Am I an extraordinary pet owner? No. I'm just like you—someone who likes dogs and enjoys their fuzzy presence in my world.

However, I do realize that every pet is an individual and you have to work within the limitations of the animal's personality. My dog Cami, for example, had numerous behavior problems. We've worked through a lot of them, but she is always going to be a shy dog and as such, she's not fond of new people or places. She is a creature of routine. (I can think of a few people like that too!)

My dogs' behavior and medical problems have often stumped me. But I found answers, which I share here with you. If you've ever read a dog book that sounded like it was written by someone who has never owned a dog, rest assured, this book is different. I helped my dogs with myriad problems, and now they are joy to be around. If I can do it, so can you!

## **Every Rescue Has a Story**

Because I refer to my own animals throughout this book, it's probably good to start with a few introductions. You'll find

## *Happy Hound*

caricatures of my critters in the sidebars, so here I give you photos of the real live dogs, along with my rendition.

When I worked at an animal shelter, I learned that every rescue has a story. So without further ado, meet the all-furry team!



### **Leia (Black Border Collie Mix)**

About a month after moving to Idaho, I started volunteering at the local animal shelter. There I met a fuzzy little black pup who wasn't healthy. She also had the disadvantage of being a black puppy and getting older. As shelter workers will attest, black dogs often are harder to

adopt. Suffice it to say, no one wanted this dirty, somewhat sickly pup. The folks at the shelter said she either had kennel cough or distemper. I decided I didn't want that little black pup to lose her chance at a home, so I adopted Leia, and took her to the vet.



The problem turned out to be kennel cough and a few antibiotics later, as you can see, Leia is a happy, healthy hound. Her main vice was separation anxiety. In other words, when we left her alone, she tried to eat her way out of the house. We tried many things, but basically the

best thing we did was get Tika. We always say that Tika is Leia's dog, and it's true.



**Tika (Golden Retriever)**

Tika's story starts off badly. She began her life as a puppy mill puppy. When the mill was raided in the winter of 1997, she was dumped in the street and found with her feet frozen into the ice by an elderly couple in downtown Sandpoint, Idaho, about 30 miles away from the puppy mill. Tika

was about 6 weeks old at the time and her medical records said she was "immunosuppressed." But the older couple took her in and put her in the back yard. Unfortunately, by the time Tika was 5 months old the couple couldn't take her hyperactive ways anymore and brought her to the animal shelter.



When I adopted Tika, she had almost every behavior problem in the book. Submissive urination, excitement urination, jumping on people, you name it. She couldn't focus on anything long enough to even begin to be trained. Suffice it to say, Tika was completely

out of control. My husband James couldn't touch her for the first 6 months we had her. After consulting with a behaviorist and vets, I discovered that Tika is hyperkinetic (the doggie equivalent of ADHD in kids), a situation that has been resolved through obedience classes and behavior modification training.



**Cami (White Samoyed/Aussie Shepherd/Lab Mix)**

Cami was the cutest puppy I had ever seen. (And as an animal shelter volunteer and employee, I have seen a LOT of puppies.) When I was volunteering at the shelter, I spent some time holding and cuddling her. After I got

home, I told my husband about the tiny adorable fuzz ball puppy I'd met. When I showed Cami to James, it was love at first sight. He cuddled Cami and couldn't leave the building without her.



Cami was well adjusted, until she hit 4 months old. Then she became psycho weirdo dog. I thought I knew about dogs, but I couldn't figure her out. No one else could either. After three years filled with vet trips, veterinary university consultations, medications, and socialization

classes, I ran across a reference to a study indicating that thyroid imbalance can affect canine behavior. So I had the vet do a "full thyroid panel" and, lo and behold, Cami's problems were because of a lack of thyroid hormones! Now with her daily thyroid supplements, Cami is a happy, healthy little hound again.



**Leto (Off-White Great Pyrenees/Retriever Mix)**

The big boy's story is a tale of travels. Originally, Leto was picked up as a stray in Los Angeles, California. Because he was white (sort of), the shelter called Samoyed rescue. He looks nothing like a Samoyed, but because he was SO nice,

the rescue folks took him anyway. He went to foster care in Temecula, CA, and then later Redding, CA. Meanwhile, because of Cami's myriad mysterious behavior problems, I had subscribed to an online Samoyed discussion list, SamFans (<http://www.samfans.org>). The link to Leto's picture was posted and I saw it and fell in love with his gentle brown eyes. After much email discussion and applying for adoption, the task of getting him to Idaho presented itself. Enter the Canine Underground Railroad, a network of volunteers who drive dogs to their "forever" homes.



All told, Leto went from the Lancaster (LA County) shelter to Murrieta, CA: 120 miles; Murrieta to Redding, CA: 325 miles; Redding, CA to Vancouver, WA: 430 miles; Vancouver to Seattle, WA: 164 miles; then Seattle, WA to somewhat north of Sandpoint, Idaho: 400 miles.

For a grand total of 1439 miles! When I got him, he was extremely skinny and after months of the "good life" here in Idaho, he still wasn't putting on weight. After conventional medicine failed, I cured his digestive problems through more alternative means.

## Why Adopt a Dog?

Obviously there are many more dogs out there than there are permanent, loving homes for them. Recent pet care industry studies estimate that there are 60 million dogs in the U.S. Yet only about 30 percent of puppies spend their lives with their original owner. That adds up to a lot of dogs who will eventually be sold, abandoned, or wind up in animal shelters.

The best reason for adopting a dog is to save a life. Staggering numbers of dogs are euthanized every year, and most of these are not “bad” dogs. They’re not mean, dangerous, crippled, or sick. They’re just unwanted and unlucky. If you’ve decided to make a dog a part of your life, choosing to adopt means you’re going to give a dog another chance at a good life.

If you need another excellent reason to adopt, consider this: you’ll be lessening the amount of animal suffering in the world. More than 80 percent of the people who give up their dogs for adoption say they just don’t have time for a dog. What that really means is they never anticipated the responsibility of pet ownership. Because of their lack of foresight, the dog is taken to a shelter and his whole world is turned upside-down. When you adopt, you restore happiness and love to that critter’s life, which is definitely something to feel good about!

When you adopt a dog, you’ll also be doing a good deed for your community. There are financial as well as emotional costs associated with tracking down cases of animal cruelty, impounding unwanted or abused dogs, and maintaining an animal shelter. When you adopt a shelter dog, you help to ease those financial and emotional burdens.

In fact, let’s look at one of the biggest challenges facing animal shelters today: pet overpopulation. Every shelter braces for the annual spring onslaught of unwanted puppies and kittens.



Shelter employees hear just about every excuse in the book for people dropping off their pet's "accidental" litters at the back door. The reason this problem continues is obvious: unlike people, cats and dogs don't have just one offspring at a time. One cat or dog who has babies and whose babies have babies can be responsible for the birth of 50 to 200 kittens or puppies in just one year. The reproductive rate of dogs is 15 times that of humans, and the reproductive rate of cats is 30 times that of humans.

Spaying or neutering is the solution to this pet overpopulation problem. It's better for you, better for the community, and (contrary to the endless old wives' tales) much better for the animal as well. It's simple: spayed or neutered animals are better behaved and healthier. Females spayed before their first heat cycle are healthier than those that aren't. (Ask your vet, it's true!) Neutered male animals are better behaved and have fewer problems with aggression. Neutering reduces roaming and fighting and most animals lose the desire to constantly mark their territory. Animals that have been spayed or neutered also tend to live an average of two to three years longer than unsterilized pets.

## **Pets and Us**

Many of us live a stressful existence. As you run from place to place with a cell phone glued to your ear, it can be a challenge to just stop for a minute and look at the world around you. Fortunately, those of us with pets have a live-in example of how to be "in the moment." Dogs and cats don't worry about deadlines and they don't nag you (except maybe for dinner). You may have noticed that a dog sleeping in the sunlight is rarely stressed out. Dogs can be endlessly amused simply by watching an ant crawl across the floor or by chewing on a toy.

## *Happy Hound*

Many studies have shown that owning a pet is good for you. Although a pet isn't a substitute for human companionship, people who have pets are less likely to become depressed. Having a pet forces you to think about something outside of yourself and your own little thoughts. Coming home to feed or let out the dog gives you a sense of purpose and responsibility. Someone is depending on you.

A recent study showed that owning a pet can actually have a beneficial effect on your blood pressure. Apparently those who had adopted a cat or dog had lower blood pressure readings in stressful situations than their pet-free counterparts. This study is one of many that indicate that owning a pet can keep us healthier and happier for longer.

When you have pets you are never alone. Even as I sit here typing away, four canines are quietly sleeping on the floor. It's only a matter of time before one of them leaps up and does something really dopey or makes a disgusting sound. Who can remain completely serious in the midst of all that silliness? If laughter is the best medicine, pets can be a great prescription for the blues.

Unfortunately, when this human–animal bond is broken, the results often affect far more than the pets in the family. In homes where spousal or child abuse exists, animal abuse often happens first. In fact, many women who would otherwise seek shelter end up staying with an abuser because of threats to kill the family pet.

Fortunately, the link between animal abuse and family violence is becoming more well known and publicized, so that in some communities law enforcement and animal services are working more closely. Most humans struggle and stress over problems of their own creation. Pets can be a valuable window into a simpler,

more peaceful existence. Adopting a pet is a way to add more love into your life and that's certainly a good thing.

## **Is Adoption Right for You?**

The purpose of this section is simple: to make sure you're really ready to take on that shelter dog or puppy. Millions of dogs end up homeless because their former owners didn't stop to think about the impact a dog would have on their daily lives. So even though you're excited about saving a shelter pooch, remember that once you bring her home, your life is going to change.

Some of these changes will be emotional, since many shelter dogs need extra love and patience. Others will be lifestyle changes. You'll need to make adjustments to your routine, your housekeeping, and your schedule. It's also important to consider the financial challenges of dog ownership. If you have children or other pets, you should consider the impact your newly adopted pet will have on their lives.

Before you actually start visiting animal shelters, spend some extra time with this section. Try to imagine what life with a dog will be like. This little adoption "reality check" will pay off in the long run for both you and your dog.

## **Time and Patience**

When it comes to owning a dog, the two most important things you need to have are time and patience. You need time and patience for feeding your dog every day, housebreaking him, brushing him, cleaning up after him, walking him, taking him to the vet, playing with him, training him, and most importantly, for loving him. All this has to happen whether you feel like it or not.