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## Opinion

# Guest Columnist: Rescued pets are a special joy

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By RICH WESTCOTT  
Times Guest Columnist

We have a new boarder at the house. Alice has moved in. She doesn't pay any rent, but we expect her to be with us for a while. She seems to like it here.

This Alice is not from Wonderland. Nor did she own a restaurant. She's a Bernese Mountain dog,

an expensive breed that originally came from the mountains of Switzerland.

Alice never saw those mountains herself. In fact, before she joined our family, she never saw much of anything. Alice, you see, spent most of her early life in what could be described as solitary confinement. It wasn't because of anything caused by her own doing, but because of mistreatment administered by her previous owners.

I won't go into the disturbing details except to say that Alice previously had no life, and she arrived in our house bearing deep scars. She was one scared, unstable, messed up lady.

Alice — that isn't her original name — is not our first adopted dog. Over the years, we've rescued a Labrador retriever, a Great Dane, two greyhounds, and several mixed breeds. It's been a joyous experience, bringing a needy dog home, caring for it, and watching it become a happy, contented pet.

When she came to live with us, Alice joined two other rescued canines. Gus, a beautiful, sweet, friendly yellow Lab, had been tied most hot, summer days to a tree or kept in a cellar where the owner threw beer cans at him. Jessie, now a 14-year-old mixed breed, was found by an SPCA worker, unkempt, undernourished, and wandering scared and lost along a road outside a little upstate town.

Given their backgrounds, the three dogs had a lot in common. They all needed tender, loving care. They all were anxious to please. And they related extremely well to each other. In fact, at one point, I think I heard Gus say to Alice, "What kind of a moron did you escape from?"

My wife and I feel very fortunate to have been able to rescue dogs. It's too bad the same isn't happening to the thousands of dogs and other pets, many of whom languish in facilities throughout the region, as well as the entire country.

The number of pets waiting to be rescued is staggering. Petfinder, a nationwide rescue service that operates on the Internet, claims there are currently some 273,000 pets that need homes.

Even locally, the numbers are not good. According to Heather Redfern, director of outreach programs at the Pennsylvania SPCA, there are usually about 150 pets — 80 of them dogs — just at the Erie Avenue shelter waiting to be adopted.

Like numerous people, legions of pets are victims of the nation's economic crisis. Shelters are overloaded with pets who have been turned in by owners unable to afford the cost of their food or medical treatment. In all too many cases, pets are also being found abandoned in streets or in empty houses.

One local rescue facility recently took in two starving dogs left in a foreclosed house that had been deserted by the owner. Another shelter found a severely emaciated dog alone in an empty back yard. And not long ago, a dog that once had rescued a toddler from a roof, was found alone in an abandoned house.

Older or abused pets, pets that belonged to the elderly, and pets whose owners are moving to new locations are also winding up in large numbers at shelters.

It's a sad situation. Combine it with the existence of numerous puppy mills, particularly in

Pennsylvania where Gov. Ed Rendell is trying to close the worst offenders, and it is clearly a distressing time for far too many pets.

It's taken Alice a while for her true personality to appear. At first, we couldn't even get her to come into the house and she was afraid of almost everything that moved. But now that she's settled down, her real character has emerged.

She's a tail-wager, her thick, furry tail constantly in motion. Even at 95 pounds, she tries to sit on your lap. She likes to lick your hand or even put it in her mouth where she gently holds it.

Alice is always at our sides, rarely letting us out of her sight. And she'll encourage patting any hour of the day or night. As I write this piece, she is trying very hard to nudge my hand off the keyboard so I can give her a pat.

We're mighty glad Alice came to live with us. She's made a very positive change in our lives. That's one of the many benefits of rescuing a pet. That, plus giving it a home that it desperately needs. There are thousands of pets out there begging for that chance.

Rich Westcott is a former Daily Times writer and the author of 21 books.

## **Comments**

The following are comments from the readers. In no way do they represent the view of delcotimes.com.

Koty wrote on Jan 5, 2010 8:48 AM:

" In my life I've had about 12 dogs. The first ones were purebred. All good dogs. Over the past 10 years we've taken in 3 different mixes that were at shelters. All absolutely wonderful dogs. We'll never again be buying pure bred as long as such wonderful dogs are available, and in need. All come with some baggage, but a loving home can solve the issues. "

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chrisd508 wrote on Jan 5, 2010 9:01 AM:

" As the owner of four rescued dogs, three of them from puppy mills, I greatly appreciate you writing this piece. I truly believe a rescued dog/cat knows they have been saved and return the favor tenfold with their unconditional love. "

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meddings wrote on Jan 5, 2010 9:55 AM:

" Rescued pets are the best! Bless you for writing this article, and for opening your heart & home to these precious creatures. "

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