

Sunday Column – Worth Waiting For For publication 8.20.17

As a limited admissions animal shelter, PAWS Humane likes to see our pets move through our system as quickly as possible. The faster they move the more lives we save. Last year we adopted out 1,755 dogs, cats and miscellaneous critters. This year we hope to do even better.

PAWS Humane is lucky to have a beautiful building with large well-appointed rooms for both dogs and cats. Our animal care staff members are trained to recognize behavioral concerns and report when an animal seems depressed or is becomes anxious from too much confinement.

Staff members and volunteers provide frequent rotations to outside pens, play groups, and leash walks through our woods. Community members may check out dogs for special day-long outings. Advanced volunteers provide dog training to help challenge their minds and help them become better adoption candidates. Our cats are visited by children who read to them and adults who simply wish to give them a little comfort and company.

But nothing we do here can come close to the family life we hope for all of the pets in our care. There is no way around the morning cleaning which is designed to sanitize our building to within an inch of its life. Visitors and prospective adopters peer into the windows of animal enclosures throughout the day to see if this is the pet meant for their home. After that it's a long night when we all leave at 6 pm, not to return again until 7 am the next morning.

Our goal is to get a pet in and out of PAWS Humane within a two week period. The vast majority of them make it but not everyone fits neatly into the fast track. Tiny, the Cane Corso I wrote about a few months ago, went home last week after 328 days at PAWS, and it couldn't have been a happier outcome.

Tiny was surrendered by her owners last September, who simply stated that they were "unable to care for her". We soon learned that Tiny had Exocrine Pancreatic Insufficiency. It can't be cured and requires a very expensive dietary supplement to control the devastating symptoms which would have eventually killed her.

This 85 pound dog also had to have surgery, in both knees, for something similar to ACL. Tiny was purchased from a breeder - both of these conditions are hereditary. Even though Tiny's original family probably purchased her for as much as two-thousand dollars they were not able to afford her extensive medical treatment and surgery.

This is the most extreme medical case PAWS Humane has undertaken and many would (and did) criticize us for doing so. The thinking is that so many more animals could have been saved while Tiny occupied her room at PAWS Humane and we easily spent \$7,500 on her surgeries and dietary supplements.

Under our care this dog, who was skin and bones when she checked in, regained her health and exalted in her stuffed bear which she carried everywhere. How can anyone possibly say, “No” to that? We couldn’t afford it but we do what is in front of us to do and hope it will be supported.

Last week Tiny went home with a family of three who loves her to the moon. They came in this weekend to tell the story of how their 9 year old daughter woke up crying one night. Tiny ran to her room and now spends every night with this little girl.

This was an outcome worth waiting for.

Bobbi Yeo lives in Opelika, AL. She is the CEO of PAWS Humane in Columbus, GA, an animal shelter and veterinary clinic offering low-cost spay/neuter and other services to the public. Email her at byeo@pawshumane.org with your comments and story ideas.