

Lucky is one of those dogs that we “rescued” from the side of the road. People throw animals out of their windows like empty soda cans. Sometimes they make them get out and stay while the owner drives off. And sometimes, they up and move leaving their pet behind.

My family does volunteer work for the Humane Society. Saving the animals is fine with me. Feeding and watering them isn't a problem, and I don't even mind cleaning up after they have gone to the bathroom. But I still can't get used to having them destroyed.

“It's the humane thing to do, Abby.” How many times have I heard that line? Humane? I can't see it that way, probably never will.

Poor Lucky, bad luck should really be her name. She's so beautiful too. The biggest German Shepherd pup I've ever seen. And her markings, that's probably why no one wants her. Her hair is burnt brown mixed with black, and her nose is long and black. It's the white cross on her chest. It's the only wrong thing about her, it should be black.

Her feet are huge. Plenty of room to grow into, I guess. As it is now, she's as tall as my bike. She looks so funny running along beside it. Her back feet smash into her jaw, then her front feet come down on her back feet. She rolls a few feet, all four legs sticking straight out like in a cartoon. Then she gets up to do it again.

She doesn't have much longer though. An hour, maybe two. That's when she'll go. Someone will haul her off in their car. She's too big for any of the cages that the Humane Society has, so she'll get to sit on a seat with her head out a window. She'll let her tongue hang out, the spit flying all over the side of the car. She'll think she's going to the lake for a swim. Or a short ride to town and back.

“We can't afford to keep all the animals, Abby. If we make them happy. Feed and house them for a few days, we're doing better than most. At least they can be peaceful before they have to go.”

I was thinking she really would be lucky. Some guy came by the other day wanting a big dog. He left saying he'd call us later. Never did. I wish people wouldn't lie about wanting these

animals. Tons of people stop by. "Oh how cute." "Mom, can I have this one?" "You'd make a perfect pet." They never take any. "We'll be back later." "I have to okay it with my husband."

I've learned to face the facts. There aren't enough homes for all the animals. Not enough for a quarter of them. It still hurts when the people never come back. It's always something's last hope.

Lucy will go soon. And there's nothing I can do to save her either. She'd been given a week, just like the rest of the animals. No one wanted her. I shouldn't have gotten attached, I know. Lucky was different. We couldn't keep her in any of the pens we had. When she stood on her hind legs she'd be half over the fence.

All she wanted was to play. Who was I to tell her she couldn't? She's supposed to be happy, isn't she?

Even if I had what little money it costs to adopt her, I couldn't. My home is already full to bursting with animals, and there's no room for another. It's the way it goes with Humane Society Animals. It's like they're the outcasts of the animal kingdom. Cursed and doomed to death like some dark shadow that people want to forget about.

Lucky came and put her head under my hand. I petted her, smiling as she blinked back a tear. She was so lovable. So beautiful. Why didn't anyone want her?

"I'm sorry," I whispered.

She licked me.

I looked at Lucky. I wasn't just going to sit here. I had an hour to find someone who would adopt her. Someone had to want her.

"Come on, girl."

I grabbed the list of endless names who had called. I decided on a few and called them.

“No, I’m sorry, not today.”

“I’ll need to think about that.”

A hundred different ways to say no. I tried again and again. I failed, again and again. No one seemed to want a dog— not today. The problem was, there is no tomorrow for Lucky. I looked for the number of the man who said he wanted a big dog. No one answered the phone.

I had twenty minutes.

I called the same man back. Still no response. I left a message on his machine.

I heard another car coming. It was much slower than most that passed by, and was likely turning into the driveway. This was it. All the pick up cars drive slowly. With the endless amount of cages, it’s hard for them to see. He was early.

Lucky ran to greet the visitor, unaware of her doom. She didn’t care. She thought it was someone else to pet her. Yeah, they were going to pet her alright. Then drag her off.

“I know it hurts when you think about the animals being euthanized, Abby. But at least it’s over quickly. They aren’t being mistreated or starved. Even sold off to labs somewhere.”

I agreed, but it wasn’t much comfort. Euthanized, or put to sleep, was something that I hated to think about. It didn’t seem so bad for dogs that were sick. When it came to perfectly healthy dogs it was harder to deal with. Around here you only have two things to worry about. The constant low funds, and which animals will go this week.

“How many animals?” the driver asked.

“I’m not sure about the number.” I had learned not to count.

“Will you help me load them?”

My throat closed up. I nodded my head.

The animals didn't come out to greet us like they usually do. They never do on Fridays. They know. I whistled and coaxed them out feeling like a traitor.

I started counting all the phone calls that promised to come by and 'have a peek at the animals.' Maybe half of them kept their word. Two came back. One took a dog. We got lucky this week.

"That's all I can take?" The driver said, after the fourth trip to the pens.

"What about her?" I asked, pointing to Lucky.

"That one has to go?"

I wanted to say no. I wanted to tell Lucky to run. I wanted to run with her. To run until we were far away from all this.

I kicked the dirt, "Yeah."

The two half doors on the van slammed shut. I heard a dog start to whine. It would probably wet its paper before it made it to town. I thought about how it must feel being in the van and not knowing what happens next. I shuddered.

"I don't have any cages left," the driver said.

"She doesn't fit in them anyway." I wondered why my throat had to open now. I wondered why my voice was so steady. Mostly, I wondered why I didn't just say okay.

"I'll see what I can do."

I looked at the driver wondering how he felt.

Lucky stood in front of me. Her brown eyes staring into mine. I wanted to tell her it wasn't my fault. I wanted to tell her that I'd keep her if I could. I looked away and started at a noisy truck that passed by. Lucky thought about chasing it.

I shivered even though the sun was so bright it was hard to see. The driver's footsteps were heavy. With each nearing footstep the wind seemed to howl, 'run Abby, run!' I stayed where I was.

I didn't look up. I knew the driver was waiting for me to hand her over. I held Lucky's collar for a moment. The truck came back, and this time it pulled in. I stood staring at it, but it was nothing more than a blur through my tears.

The man in the truck walked up to where we were standing. "I was here earlier this week, looking for a big dog. I got your message. I would really like to adopt the dog if I still can."

I rubbed my eyes with my fist. I felt a smile come over my face. I looked at the driver and then at the man who wanted Lucky. I handed the collar I still clutched to Lucky's new owner.

"You'll have to sign a few papers," I told him. "There's also a small fee."

"That's okay. I still want her."

The pick up man climbed in his van, "That's one lucky dog."


Author's Note:

Last year after we finally settled into our new house, we had the grubby job of sorting through our storage shed. It was a hot miserable weekend for it, but the weather didn't seem to care much about the large task ahead of us.

While sorting through hundreds of old memories, I stumbled upon a writing course I took back in 1995. Actually, according to the dates along all the assignments I turned in and received back, it spanned 95-97. Far enough back my parents didn't have a proper house

address, which made me chuckle when I saw the old route and box number at the top of my assignments.

There I sat in our garage, surrounded by piles of boxes, most of which weren't in the best of condition and had a funky smell about them, sorting through heaps of old memories. I made my way through a shoebox of wedding memories: cards, the pattern for my wedding dress, and other oddities. I was reminded of friends and family scattered across the globe who converged to celebrate that special day.

I found photos of long ago, when my grown children were still little things. Some of the photos had me laughing so hard I could hardly breathe. And some, like those of our fathers, now long gone from this earth, made me cry.

And then, I stumbled upon a box containing my old writing course. There wasn't much to it, just a white notebook with the insignia of the company on it. Inside were 12, or was it 14, dividers. The papers were terribly dusty and the smell of must was intense. But I paused, making use of no longer needed face masks to avoid breathing in the stench, and read through some of my work.

I'll confess, some of the assignments made me howl with laughter. I clearly was hell bent on young teen romance at that time, and all of it was entirely laughable at this point in my life. But each piece had critiques from the author I was assigned for the duration of the course.

I'd tackle each assignment, and then mail off my finished copy to her. I'm pretty sure just about every assignment was printed on our old dot-matrix printer. Whereas, I think her letters were typed on a typewriter. Mrs White, that was the name of the author I was assigned to.

She was also a former school teacher, and she didn't laugh at some of the hilarious stories I submitted to her. She acknowledged them, added suggestions for fixing them up, applauded titles, colorful writing, and plot lines. But there was one piece that clearly stuck out to her. I know this, because across the entire piece, written in green ink, is: *This is professional writing.*

Portions that really stuck out to her have extra notes like: *colorful writing* or *beautiful details*. At the very top, beside the title and all the finer details I had to include on each piece I turned in are the words: *This is a professional article*.

Mrs White clearly believed that, because she also gave me three magazine suggestions to submit my piece to. I have no memory of actually attempting to submit it. Why, I can't be sure. It was an incredibly personal piece of writing. It was based on many true things in my life at that time, and when someone guessed that I felt certain the whole world would know if I shared this piece farther. The proverbial voice that tells you your work isn't good enough. Which is laughable now, but still the memories this piece stirs up are quite deep.

My family did volunteer for the local Humane Society. We kept dogs, cats, a goat, and even a horse on our property while new homes were sought. We were, indeed, terribly underfunded despite the small groups best efforts to raise the much needed funds to feed, vaccinate, worm, and care for the animals.

We did, indeed, have a large german shepherd dog who was dumped, and it was impossible to keep her penned up. That dog was exactly as described in the above story. She enjoyed galloping alongside us as we traipsed around feeding animals, riding bikes, and whatever other antics we got up to.

She was not as lucky as the dog in the story though. No one arrived in the final hour to save her. She, like so many others, never found her forever home. There had been many who'd promised her one, but none who actually came through.

Volunteering for an animal shelter is a tough gig. It's easy to fall in love with all the cute, cuddly, and sometimes surly animals. And it's hard to accept that many will never have their "happily ever after", instead they will be moved out because there are only so many funds to go around.

When my children began to beg for a dog, as many young boys tend to do, my husband and I agreed that we'd go to the local dog's home back on The Island and see what was available. Our youngest, at that time, was fascinated with dogs but was really dead set on a Dalmatian.

We'd read 101 Dalmatians, countless times, and he'd watched the varying movies even more.

We did not adopt a Dalmatian, instead we adopted what was dubbed a "staffy/x". He had all the markings of a border collie, but was short, stocky, and hard of hearing when any form of fowl was nearby. We were told he loved water, and had a small issue with cats. As it turned out, he had a very large issue with cats, but we didn't own one. We did not name him Lucky, he came with the name Ronald.

When we arrived back at home with our new family member, one of the boys opened their car door and declared, "We're home Ronald, want to come see my room?" Ronald jumped out of the car, sniffed the ground and spotted a wild chicken. His impulse for fowl was proven on the spot as he took off running after the screaming, clucking hen. Wild chickens, back on the Island, swim, and so the chase didn't stop when the hen reached the small private dock at the back of our property, but continued as Ronald took a flying leap straight into the water.

We had two crying children, and there I stood shouting, "Ronald, for goodness sake, come back here!" followed with grumblings of wondering why we'd not thought to keep hold of his leash as opposed to letting the children alone hold it. And there stood my husband watching his family fall apart over our new found dog. He sighed, took a single step forward and screamed, "You'd better get back here right now buster!"

That dog stopped on the spot, swam back to shore, and returned to the emotional mess that was to be his new family. Forever after, he was called **Buster**. Perhaps not the most unique dog name. Perhaps not the luckiest dog alive. But to us, we felt like the luckiest family for the 12 wonderful years of delight he brought to our home.

As for the story of Lucky, I've copied it exactly as I wrote it for Mrs White, save for adding in a few commas, per her suggestion, and fixing two misspelled words she kindly pointed out to me.

The Reluctant Author

