



Mariah Finds a Home— Forever

By Mariah
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Schoessler

P. SANSALE

Hi my name is Mariah. I want to share my story with you about being given up for adoption and living in shelters and foster homes until I found my forever home. I don't know much about my birth story. After living in a home with my birth mom, brothers and sisters, I was adopted very early in my life. I had three adoptive homes before my first birthday. I was just 10 months old when I was sent to my third home. In people years, that is about six years old. Even though I was really little, I didn't feel like I could trust people. They kept disappointing me. I often felt scared and lonely. At the shelter, I received good care, but not the constant, loving attention I really wanted.

One day the people who cared for me at the shelter took me to a workshop to learn how to behave and do tricks. I was really nervous and kind of scared because there were so many people and lots of dogs that didn't look like any I had ever seen before. I had a really nice teacher named Linda Tellington Jones. That was a big name so everyone just called her Linda. She had a happy smile that stretched across her whole face.



When Linda came up to me and tried to touch me, know what I did? I tried to bite her. I wasn't really trying to hurt her. I was just trying to protect myself. Linda didn't even get mad at me. Instead, she told me to relax. She said if I took deep breaths that would help me feel calmer. Linda kept gently touching me and saying nice things to me. I really liked her soft, kind touch and quiet voice. Her energy made me feel safe and good. So I took lots of deep breaths and enjoyed each moment with her.

I didn't know I could trust and be treated so nicely by people I just met. So many other people in my past had made me feel hurt, sad and disappointed. Linda promised me treats if I let her teach me new things. She said all I had to do was try my best. I learned how to sit, lie down and show off a little bit. It wasn't hard for me to do my best for her because I love treats! I got lots of treats from Linda. And even better, lots of words that made me feel good. "Good Girl. Way to go. Hooray for you!"



After I finished working with Linda, she returned me to my crate. I loved my crate; it was my safe place. No one could hurt me while I was in my crate. I took a long nap because I was tired after learning so much and eating so many treats. When I woke up, I overheard the person who brought me to the workshop talking with Linda. She told Linda somebody wanted to take me home with them. I began to wonder-and worry. After all, I had already lived in three homes and each time the family who said they really wanted and love me returned me to the shelter. They used big words like ‘unmanageable’ and ‘uncooperative’ to describe me when they returned me.

Even though families kept returning me to the shelter, the people who worked there told me every dog deserves another chance. They told me that those words did not describe me. They were used to describe my behavior and they were not correct words. The people at the shelter said my previous owners didn't understand puppy behavior. I was still a puppy and I just had too much energy for some people. They told me to never give up hope. There were many great people in the world. Someday I would find the perfect home. I tried to believe that but after a while, a dog can start to feel kind of down and sad, know what I mean?

A lady with dark brown hair and black-brown eyes was suddenly kneeling in front of my crate. She said, "Hi there, this is your lucky day. You get to go home with me." I wasn't so sure how lucky I felt. I thought, "been there, done that—and rejected by each family!" Not my idea of being lucky! How would this time be any different?

I gathered up all my courage. No matter what, I had a powerful spirit deep inside me. I knew I was a strong puppy. Maybe others could break my heart, but not my spirit. That didn't mean I wasn't scared to go home with this new woman. It just meant I was going to have to pretend to be strong even when I didn't feel that way. I knew I had a brave heart and a smart brain so I would be okay.



At my new house, the people talked softly. Their names were Denise and Molly. I knew I wanted to impress them, so when they asked-me to show them some tricks, I wowed them with ones I learned from Linda. When one of them raised an arm, I laid down. If they lifted their hands, I sat straight up. I did my best to impress them and it worked. I got lots of yummy hot dog treats. I even impressed the landlord. He gave me a treat whenever he visited.

Guess what? They let me stay in the house from the very first night I arrived. I didn't have to sleep outside all by myself. Sleeping alone outside is kind of scary for a little puppy. Maybe this place would be different. I tried really hard to learn and follow all their rules. I wasn't to go into the kitchen. Ever. When I had to go to the bathroom, I needed to go outside. Always! I already knew I wanted to do my best, stay living here and call this new place my home. Forever. I was going to work hard to make that dream come true.



I was a strong and mighty little puppy, though I still had fears of being rejected again. Each time I was returned to the shelter, I couldn't help but feel like no one loved me. It made me feel a little worthless. I did my best not to think that way and protect myself from those icky feelings. I thought if I didn't have to go back to the shelter again, my feelings might get happier.

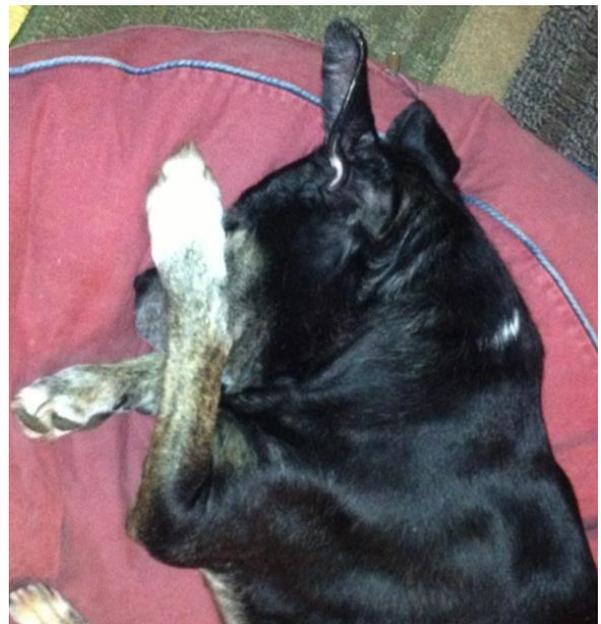
Molly let me stay in her room. I loved having my safe crate near her bed. One day Molly hurt her leg and came home with sticks to help her walk around. I knew she was hurt and couldn't go very fast or far. When she walked me, I was really careful to move at her slow speed. Even when I wanted to run ahead, I took one step and stopped to let her catch up. Molly attached a rope to my neck. She called it a leash. I didn't care what she called it, I didn't like it. I let her put it on me though because I wanted her to feel safe with me. For sure, I didn't want Molly to think I was complaining. Especially when none of my other owners ever took me for a walk—with or without a rope! I also wanted to make sure Molly didn't fall and get hurt worse. Mostly, I really wanted her to know I was a great dog. Maybe even a new best friend. Definitely worth keeping. Forever!



When I needed to (as humans say) 'blow off some steam', Molly's friends took me outside to the back yard to run and play. They threw balls around for me to chase. I especially loved playing Frisbee. Sometimes if it was really hot out, they took me to the lake to go swimming. That was awesome. I learned to come to them whenever they called my name. If I came running to them right away, they rewarded me with pieces of meat. They used hot dog treats often to help me learn new things and reward my good behaviors. Molly and her friends said this would help me build up my self-confidence.

Life was looking up. I got to sleep, walk, run and chase balls with Molly. She taught me a new food game so I even got to play while I ate. I could see and smell my dinner stuffed into a toy cube that I rolled around on the floor until my food fell out. It was-so much fun except when the cube got stuck under the chairs. Since I don't have thumbs, I got frustrated when my paws couldn't reach under the chairs to grab ahold of my fancy dinner toy. I whined. When no one came fast enough, I used my outdoor voice and barked loudly until someone came to help me. No one liked it when I used my outdoor voice indoors. I was supposed to learn to be patient and wait. Waiting and patience were definitely not easy tricks for me to learn. A girls gotta do what a girls gotta do! Okay, maybe not.

As nice as Molly was to me, it took me awhile to relax in my new home. I kept thinking I had to be perfect. Sometimes it was hard for me to accept love and care given by others. Especially strangers. When Molly and I took walks together, people would stop and ask her about me. They had lots of questions about where I came from, how I looked, what I was like to live with. Sometimes this made me feel uncomfortable.



I didn't like people talking about me. I just wanted a good scratch and some kind 'Atta girls' instead of all that attention. Sometimes when I knew Molly was talking to a nice person, I put my head right between his or her knees and wagged my tail—that got them every time! They gave me a calm and soothing “Nice Dog. Good Doggy!” and sometimes even a treat! Now that's the kind of attention a dog wants! I don't recommend this behavior for people to try, but it sure worked for me.

After a while, I began to feel more relaxed and even a little safe. Safer than I had ever felt before. So this is what it's like to feel special and cared about—all the time. Sometimes I worried that if I made a mistake, Molly might stop liking me. I found out that I worried more about my mistakes than she did. Sometimes Molly didn't even notice my mistakes.

She never judged me by how I looked or when I messed up. Molly always told me to try new things. She said mistakes were practice. If I made a mistake, it was my job to learn from it and keep practicing, instead of think badly about myself. For the first time in my life, I found someone who trusted and believed in me. Sometimes even more than I believed in myself. She told me to stop worrying about the mean people and mistakes I had made in the past. She called it forgiveness and letting go. I secretly thought it would be easier to forgive and let go of everything in my past if this could be my future life to hang onto. Forever.

Molly taught me that even when things got hard, everything was going to be okay. Including me. I was beginning to know what joy and hope felt like. One day Molly said she was going to take me to a ‘dog park’. YAY! A park just for me! There were many gazillions of dogs running around the trees and playing in this park. We took one of Molly’s friends with us the first-few times we went to the dog park. Molly said she was nervous I would get overly excited and forget to listen or behave. She wanted help to keep an eye on me to make sure I didn’t get hurt.

I-was so thrilled to run and play I just wanted-to run and run and run. Running is the bomb. I love running fast into the wind. I got my name because of my zoom-zoom speed. Did you know Mariah means ‘the wind?’



Sometimes at the dog park, Molly made me take a break. She put the leash on me and we'd go for a slow walk around the whole place. Or, she had me sit quietly by her to calm down and catch my breath. If I got too excited and forgot my manners, she for sure gave me a break. After a while, I seldom had to take breaks. I just got to run and play the whole time we were there. I learned when to give myself a break or a rest.

My life started to settle down. I was happy. I had people I could count on and friends at the dog park. Molly let me try new things like swimming. I got to leave my crate and sleep in my own bed. I started trusting Molly, a LOT more. She was the best caretaker I had ever had. I began to explore my world and trust other people, even strangers who passed me on our walks. Now when people stopped us, I knew I would hear kind words and be treated nicely. No more self-conscious walks for me.



I started school. This school was WAY fun. Whenever I learned something, I got a cookie. The teachers made a clicking noise to remind me to use my brain more. Each time I heard the noise, I did what I was supposed to do and a yummy doggie cookie appeared. Soon, I knew my lessons by heart and had a tummy full of treats! Even though I had homework and needed to work for my supper, I liked learning. It gave me the courage to try new things and pushed me to think harder.

Living with Molly was so much fun. It was the neatest thing that had ever happened to me in my whole life! I liked all of the daily routines she had for me. Molly continued my clicker school training at home. I tried new behaviors, showed her better tricks and minded my manners. Sometimes, Molly was so happy and proud of me, that she gave me broccoli and bananas. On a lucky day I got my all-time favorite treats: watermelon and popcorn!

The luckiest day in my life was the day Molly took me on a walk and told me she was going to keep me as her very own dog. FOREVER! She said we would always be together. Even if she moved, I would move with her. She even promised all of her friends that she would share me with them. Can



you believe that? I finally had a permanent home with are person I really, really liked. Okay, I can admit it; I actually loved her very, very much. Before that day, I was too afraid to admit it, especially out loud. I could call Molly ‘my person’ now because I had a forever home. Now for sure, I knew I was loved. I think Molly knew she was loved too.

After clicker school, Molly had me attend agility school. I did so well the teacher took Molly and me aside one day. She told Molly that I was too quick and overly excited. I had to learn to slow-down. Bummer! That was the day I-jumped off the high plank. It looked like a good idea at the time. Good-thing my friend was there to catch me when I took my flying leap. Unfortunately, I knocked her down. Sometimes I forgot how strong I was. Once again, Molly and I had a conversation about using my brain more before I moved. Molly was always reminding me not to run off without thinking. “Easy” became a word I heard a lot. I had so much fun in agility school, I took the class twice!



Following agility school, Molly bought me a big soft dog bed to sleep in. WOW! My own bed, indoors, outside of my crate, where I felt safe. This is truly what a permanent home feels like. She took me for rides, not just rides to and from school and the dog park. I went on lots of errands with Molly. My favorite place was called her office. It had a couch, chairs, and a bed for me. I got to meet lots of new people there. Everyone was nice to me and made me feel good to be hanging around. I wanted to wiggle right up to them, sometimes even snuggle up and lay down next to them.

I heard the word ‘therapy’ a lot at Molly’s office. I didn’t know what therapy meant. People, called clients, came in and sat on Molly’s couch. Sometimes they laughed and sometimes they cried. I just tried to make friends with them. I did silly stuff to make them laugh. I found out, just like on my walks with Molly, that if I wagged my tail and put my head between their knees, they would smile and talk to me. Even if they felt sad, I could make them laugh and help them forget their troubles, Even if it was just for a little bit, I wanted to help make them feel happy again.

Molly said I was becoming a ‘therapy dog’. Know what that meant? Yup, we had to go back to school and take more classes. I had to learn about emotions and not be scared of loud noises. We had to attend classes over two whole years. They taught Molly how to become my best handler. I had to learn how to become Molly’s best therapy dog. We made a good team, Molly and me. Poor Molly. She had to take a test at the end of school. I got out of it because you can’t write with paws!

Surprise. I still had to take a test. Bummer! At least I got to take it with Molly. But, we didn’t pass because I got too excited, moved too fast and pulled on the leash. Oops! Once again, I forgot to slow down and use my brain before moving my feet. Molly and the tester knew I was trying to be good and do my best so we got to try again. We passed. Yippee! I became a therapy dog called a Pet Partner. Not to brag but I received the runner up for Therapy Dog of the Year for the DELTA Society.



I work really hard with Molly in her private practice. It was good that I learned to keep trying and do my best when I was a puppy. She says I'm one of the best therapy dogs ever. I believe her because I know I'm really good at helping so many people who come to visit her feel better. It's easy for me to do because I know just how they feel. I felt that way once before in my life too.

When I was about ten years old, I started bugging Molly to help me finish my book. Just like I can't write with my paws, I can't type either, so I needed Molly's help. I told her I wanted to tell my story because she helped my biggest dream ever come true. I wanted to share my story about foster care, shelters, adoption, finding a family and a forever home. You know why? Because if it can happen to me, it can happen for anyone! When your dream comes true, it's the best treat ever! May your dreams come true—forever!

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

MARIAH

Mariah passed away at the age of 13 just before her story was published. She was a mixed Labrador and Boxer Staffordshire rescue dog. As a rescue dog, Mariah experienced and knew the challenges and joys that come from living in foster care and adoptive homes. She was passionate about providing loving, stable, safe learning environments for all—children, adults and animals. Mariah loved running, playing, and agility clicker training, snuggling with humans, playing with squeaky toys and taking long, long naps in the warm sunshine. And treats!

Mariah's favorite thing to do was to serve as a Pet Partner, where she helped Molly DePrekel provide psychological services at Cairns Psychological Services at the Midwest Center for Trauma and Emotional Healing. Mariah was head receptionist and co-therapist as she greets people who came to their appointments and calmly sat down next to them before and during their sessions. She helped clients process through difficult emotions and situations through her spirit of compassionate empathy and timely sense of humor. \\\

Mariah distinguished herself through her discipline, gentleness, tireless obedience and grounded nature. She was an amazing healer and had meaningful relationships with each person she knew. Mariah reminded us not to take everything so seriously as she engaged us in the importance of play. She also reminded us of the importance of daily rest and reflective introspection. A big fan of the Animal Humane Society, Mariah always encouraged pet rescue and adoption. As a proponent of respect, kindness and healthy treatment of all animals, Mariah was featured as the May dog of the 2013 Rescue Dog to Therapy Dog calendar.

Visit Paul and Lynn Sansale's website at www.classicpetpaintings.com to purchase a current dog calendar. You can return Mariah's kindness and desire to help others by supporting national and local animal assisted therapy programs and organizations that support children's adoption and foster care.

MOLLY DEPREKEL

Licensed psychologist Molly DePrekel utilizes the unique relationships people have with animals and nature to assist her in facilitating growth and transformation with individuals in their therapeutic work. Her areas of expertise comprise trauma informed therapy using EMDR and Sensory Motor Psychotherapy and training professionals to become proficient practitioners using animal assisted therapy. Molly combines the latest techniques in the neurobiology of trauma with animal assisted therapy in the treatment of trauma within educational settings and out-patient mental health programs to create unique holistic client treatment.

Molly is in private practice at the Midwest Center for Trauma and Emotional Healing and Hold Your Horses. She is an EPONA Qwest Services approved instructor and has served as an adjunct faculty member at the University of Minnesota and a Board Member of the Certification Board for Equine Interaction Professionals <http://cbeip.org> Molly has taught and facilitated global workshops and trainings, among her favorites, working with tribal members on Williams Lake, Canada and the Rotta Love Rescue Organization. She is engaged in animal assisted therapy research, has published numerous articles, including two chapters, “Equine-facilitated Psychotherapy for the Treatment of Trauma” and “Animal Assisted Group Interventions for the Treatment of Trauma” for the book *Harnessing the Power of Equine Assisted Counseling Adding Animal Assisted Therapy to Your Practice*. Molly has participated in the PROUTY STRETCH projects and currently seeks to publish her children’s book for at risk youth, incorporating animal assisted therapy.

You can often find Molly with her beloved therapy partners, Whisper, a Morgan horse and her canine apprentice, Willow, who is training to become a Pet Partner®.

Molly can be reached at www.cairnshealing.com

MARY SCHOESSLER

Mary Schoessler is a certified coach from The Hudson Institute of Santa Barbara, CA, an Accredited Business Communicator (ABC) and experienced business leader specializing in helping individuals and teams successfully move through challenging times of transition, change and adversity. Mary has provided coaching and consulting services to leaders in healthcare, finance, manufacturing and technology, not for profit, design, academics, park and recreation and small business entrepreneurship. Topics span business growth, leadership and management challenges, effective communication, professional development and values based decision-making. Parallel topics often include pragmatic and spiritual navigation through personal transitions of grief and loss, familial/relationship challenges, defining healthcare events and integrated lifestyle choices.

Mary uses her skilled coaching, leadership and communications expertise and intuitive knowledge to help clients gain greater insight and clarity, find their rightful place and use their voice to generate greater opportunities for focused leadership, growth and contribution. Her passion for storytelling, ancestry and awakened vision guides others to dig deeper to get to the heart of their stories to live and lead lives of ascended purpose, joy and legacy. Visit www.thespaceofgrace.com for more information.

Prior to launching her coaching practice, Mary had a successful track record providing executive marketing communications leadership, serving in the roles of Vice President, Executive Director and Community Relations Director for a variety of organizations and businesses spanning nonprofit, business, education and government sectors. She has authored and co-led numerous strategic

planning, brand development, crisis communications, donor and volunteer engagement, community outreach and public relations initiatives. Her leadership, creative vision and teamwork contributed to numerous stories and awards, including: Outstanding Citizens Award for her community affairs leadership, National Presidential New Freedom Initiative Award, Second Most Highly Respected Nonprofit in MN, tpt's documentary 'Possibility' for Courage Center.

Mary received her Bachelor of Arts in English Literature and Speech Communications from the University of Northern Iowa, has MBC graduate studies from the University of St. Thomas and is a continuous-learning writing member of the Loft Literary Center in Minneapolis, MN. She is a non-denominational licensed minister and healing touch practitioner. Mary has served on numerous boards and resides in St. Louis Park, MN with her husband Mark and daughter, Alyssa.

Mary seeks work life balance and challenge through sailing, her ZED writers group, yoga and Spiritual Salon studies, trips back to the Iowa family farm, running the Army Ten Miler and participating with Molly in the Prouty Project STRETCH Adventure Challenge. She is forever grateful for her Irish humor and steadfast German roots. Humor, generosity and joy generally accompany Mary.