Adopting A Rescue Dog or Cat = Unconditional Love, Joy & Happiness

***“Dog is man’s best friend"***

There is profound truth to the above adage.  I can tell you from my own experience that my dog Otis is a constant companion and protector.  He waits for me to wake-up in the morning and just as my eyes open, but not a moment before, he jumps into my bed and licks my face as if I have been away for a long time. He then expects a belly rub and a cuddle, and I happily oblige.

From there, we usually run 4-6 miles together in my neighborhood. And when I come home at night after a busy day seeing clients, Otis can’t contain his excitement to see me. He makes a guttural noise as if to say, “Why did you leave me?” and “I missed you!” as his tail wags so hard his entire body shakes.

He is my best friend and is thrilled to just be with me every moment. He curls up next to me when I read a book or while I binge a program on Netflix. He shows his protective side by barking whenever he hears a strange noise outside.  Sure, it may just be the wind blowing or a stray cat passing through, but Otis is forever vigilant.

Adopting My Best Friend

I adopted or rescued Otis three years ago from Los Angeles’s South Central Animal shelter. The shelter estimated him to be a year old - but no-one knows for sure.  I saw him on the city’s comprehensive animal rescue website where he was listed as female and full Wheaton Terrier.  He turned out to be neither.  But that’s okay.

I can’t imagine a better companion. I often wonder what his life was like before I adopted Otis or how such a wonderful dog ended up in a shelter.  And I can’t fathom what would have happened if he was not adopted.  The Human Society of the United States estimates that 3 million dogs and cats are euthanized every year because their owners give them up.  People also say, rescue dogs are the best because they know they were rescued and have such an appreciation for that.

Adoption is Easy and Can Change Your Life

Pets of all types can have a life changing impact on people - especially people who suffer from loneliness, depression and anxiety.  And for this reason, I often invite my clients to consider adopting a rescue dog or cat.

Typically shelters and animal adoption organizations allow a grace period of 10-14 days to “get to know and try out” a new pet and for adjustment. This allows a potential pet parent to see if that pet’s energy and needs match their own.

For example, cats don’t need exercise. They, for the most part, take care of themselves. You do need to provide things to keep them busy and happy like a cat tree, toys, scratching posts and places to perch or they will find other things to occupy themselves. Though the cat will love it, you certainly won’t be happy with a scratched-up sofa or the all-time favorite; shredded toilet paper game.

When choosing a canine companion, you need to remember that a dog isn’t just a dog. Each breed has its own unique qualities. For instance, terrier breeds are higher energy and Great Danes, though enormous, do great in apartments and small homes. So do a little homework to find a breed that best suits the qualities you want.

Puppies and younger dogs require a little more training and exercise while senior dogs might not.  If you’re away at work all day, no worries! Dogs do well on their own or with a doggy companion and dogs are very easily crate trained. And, of course, there is always doggy day-care and dog walkers as well as many businesses being pet friendly - take your dog to work Fridays.

The Benefits of Being a Pet Parent

I tell my clients that having a pet is helpful for people dealing with loneliness, depression and anxiety for a myriad of reasons:

* Pets offer unconditional love and support.  And for some people, this might be the *only* unconditional love they experience or have ever experienced.  For a single person to come home to a welcoming, loving pet who is overwhelmed with excitement to see them might be the highlight of their day. Imagine the tail-wagging, butt-wiggling glee of a dog or the purrs and figure-8 leg rubs of a kitty.
* Being with a pet calms us down. The physical act of stroking or petting a dog or cat has a positive impact on our nervous system which results in calming us. In addition, it’s been proven that being with a pet lowers blood pressure. It is for this reason that many hospitals and nursing homes offer “pet therapy” for patients.
* Pets provide emotional regulation. This might be the only support we have consistently on a daily basis. Pets are incredible listeners and have a sixth sense about how we are feeling.
* The act of caring for a pet provides meaning and gives us structure on a daily basis. Taking care of another being takes us out of our own head and worries which helps to relieve stress and anxiety.
* Pets can be the catalyst for motivation - walking, jogging, running - which can lead to reduced anxiety and stress and even to weight loss and better health. Walking a dog gets us out of our house and into the world, often interacting with people instead of staying at home and watching TV. The fresh air and exercise do you both good in addition to helping you bond with your canine companion.
* Often, pets connect us to other people - when we go to a dog park or meet another dog on the street. It’s also good for your dog to interact with other dogs and people as dogs are pack animals; the more, the merrier!
* Pets are not emotionally challenging; they don’t talk back, hold grudges or withhold love and affection. Pets never judge you nor do they laugh when you’re dancing in a towel after a shower or have a bad hair day.
* Pets provide companionship, fun, novelty and even joy. The bond of love between a pet and a human can be deep and meaningful. As I mentioned, there is truth behind the adage “dog is man’s best friend." And for those who aren’t dog people, cats can be a best friend too, on their time, when they’re in the mood and don’t have those all-important cat things to do.

Pets Equal Unconditional Love

Most importantly, pets provide consistency and unconditional love.  This can give people an opportunity to have an experience and think of themselves in a different way - lovable - and actually rewire our neurons to have more positive experiences when interacting with humans. In this way, pets can change our lives forever.

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