

TEACHING A DOG TO SIT



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For Bailey, who opened my eyes

All dogs know how to sit, don't they? I mean, they're pretty much born knowing how to sit on command, right? You take a treat of some kind in your hand, hold it above their head and slightly in front of them, and they just park it. Works almost all the time, like they were born knowing it. I really thought that almost every dog either came out of the chute knowing how to do that or, if they didn't know right away, it was one of the first things that they learned and one of the easiest things to teach a dog to do.

So why wouldn't he sit?

I couldn't see anything that would make that sound, but it was at once very familiar and yet completely out of place, and I just stood there, perplexed. In fact, I now cannot even remember exactly what I was doing at that instant. I thought that my mind was playing tricks with me, replaying a sound that had been almost my complete focus for the past 3 nights and days. I was pretty sure that I had completely lost it.

We were hanging out in the driveway - Jackson, Bo, and I - and I was finishing a little trimming of the Amur maples that flanked the garage. Beautiful small trees that I had planted three years ago and that had finally started to find their shape as they stretched more each summer, trees that I have been fussing over excessively and doing my best to defend from every deer that dines in my yard in the hours when I can do nothing about it. Their leaves would be a brilliant deep shade of red in just a few weeks and I was doing some final shaping before the nights got cold. It was just something mindless to do while I had a beer, watched the dogs practice their touches and escapes on each other, and took in the August sunset. I could also kid myself that it was taking my mind off of this week's drama...

The sound really confused me, and I wasn't even sure if I had actually heard something or if I had just imagined it, I will admit it. I looked at both dogs to see which of them had made that sound, but both of them were lying quietly in the driveway. Then they looked back at me, and both stood up and looked toward the pond. I glanced in that direction but couldn't see anything except the warm pink glow of the twilight on the pond's surface. I was sure that I must have imagined the sound and told myself that there must be a cat lurking somewhere, that both dogs were just poised to absolutely detonate. I went back to my maples.

I wanted to believe that it could be him, but I knew that wasn't really possible. It seemed cruel, actually, a really bad joke to play on me. I thought that I must have been looking too hard for him, had been too focused on trying to undo what had happened to him, which was a mistake that I hated even thinking about. Too sure that we could make this right, and yet not an inch closer to making it right after all this time. So I knew that I had just imagined the sound of his dog tags, that was all.

The dogs didn't move, but kept looking. I went over to them and knelt down between them.

And then I heard it again.

It had been a little while since Bo and I had picked a dog at the shelter to really work with. Spooky had found her home awhile ago - it just happened one day all of a sudden and everything seemed to be going well for her and, even though I half expected to see her back, we never did. I was thrilled for her, and hugely relieved every time I went to the shelter and she wasn't there. We didn't really have any responsibilities for a particular dog yet this summer, so I took some of them out for walks and outdoor time, and then started taking a dog or two to the farmer's market every week, just to find a better focus for my volunteer time and to see if we'd make some adoptions. And I wanted an excuse to go to the market every week.

Tracey usually lets me know if she has a dog that needs some individual attention, and she called me in early August to meet a new dog, wondered if I had some time to spend with him. She said that it was very timid and pretty scared. And an Australian Shepherd. I think the whole shelter knew by then that I couldn't say no to a herding dog.

We went to one of the yards to meet him - his name was Jax - and he immediately turned away and ran to the far corner of the enclosure. He tried to hide under the corner of a dog house and he seemed to become smaller and smaller with every minute. He looked toward us, but never really at us and, when we slowly lessened the distance between us and the dog, he just looked away and, I assume, hoped that the end would be quick and painless.

He had two white eyes - they're blue really, but they often look white when he's scared or in bright light - and had a kind of scruffy, thick coat for an Aussie. He was a red merle, but his red was more the color of champagne. He was a little guy, small for an Aussie, and his tail had been docked. Tracey said that he had been rescued by a woman from a shelter in Utah because he was scheduled to be euthanized. We looked at each other and tried to imagine a good reason why a healthy 10 month old puppy could or would be killed, but neither of us is capable of even making up an answer to that question.

Jax wouldn't take *any* food that we offered and whenever he saw enough daylight, he would run to another far corner of the fence and try to be invisible. I leashed him up and was half surprised that he didn't bite me, but he seemed too scared to do anything, really.

I took him to farmer's market that day, and again the next week. I saw that he loved other dogs, and that he seemed to be much more comfortable when he was with other dogs. He did better on the week that I took him with one other dog for company and he wanted to meet every dog we saw. My dogs seemed to give him a lot of space and, uncharacteristically, Bo made no effort to engage him at all, just kind of ignored him. I came to understand that, as is often the case with older or sick dogs, dogs such as Jax are usually treated by the other dogs with kid gloves, and clear rules of limited engagement are followed. He never took any treats from me or anyone else, and everything I did seemed

to scare him. I could pick him up, put him in a crate, and put a leash on him, but any of these things or any movement toward him, even just looking at him, caused him to freeze. I've worked with a number of shy and scared dogs, but had never met one that shut down so completely or seemed so completely terrified of everything around him. Everything, that is, except other dogs.

I guess you could say he survived the trips to the farmers' market - the many people leaning forward to pet him (way, way too scary!), the kids, everybody moving at the same time so that he couldn't keep track of anything - but it was clear that he just wanted to go be somewhere that was quiet and be away from people. So I started sitting with him in his cage at the shelter, reading a book to pass the time and trying my best to ignore him. At first he always ran to the far corner and stayed there, and I spent the first few visits just reading and trying to figure out what treat I could bring that would overcome his fear of taking food from humans. If I stood up or moved toward him, he would just keep running to the farthest corner that he could get to without having to pass too near me. We just went on that way for several visits - me reading on the cold concrete floor and throwing treats that he wouldn't pick up, him sitting there watching. I went back to the pet store and bought what I thought would be irresistible venison sausages; at first he wouldn't eat them while I was there, but I waited just outside the cage once and saw him gobble them up after I had closed the gate. Days later, he started eating them if I stayed in one corner and threw them all the way to him. After that, I left pieces on my pants leg while I read, and he would sometimes feel brave enough to take a few, as long as I kept reading and didn't look at him, and the pieces were far enough from my hands. I had known Jax for weeks before he finally took a piece of venison from my hand. When he finally did that for the first time, I was tremendously excited but couldn't even tell him what a good dog he was. I had learned that he became scared whenever anyone spoke to him, no matter how quietly, and so I had to just enjoy this moment, in silence and by giving him another slice of venison. It was a great morning.

Jax seemed to have had no life experiences at all. I was told that he had been in a shelter in Utah and was scheduled to be euthanized, and that a woman had rescued him from that situation and somehow lost him. We thought he was only about 10 or 11 months old, and I guessed from watching his reactions that he had probably been in that shelter most of his short life - everything seemed completely new, unexpected, and terrifying to him. After he started taking food from my hand - very carefully and only if everything was just so - the dogs and I started taking him out in the big world of Carbondale, rides in the truck, walks around Delaney, errands at stores. Tracey and I both thought that he was one

of those dogs that just couldn't cope with life at the shelter and that the stress was taking a toll, so I decided to take him home for a few days and see how he liked life with me, Bo and Jackson. I barely got to find out.

I stopped at the Moose for a sandwich one afternoon and thought I'd have Jax sit with me at one of the outdoor tables. Warm and sunny afternoon in August... His crate was in the bed of the pickup and I opened the door to leash him up. He was scared of getting into or out of his crate, or going through any type of door, really, and we'd been working on having him walk through the opening on his own. He stepped out, looked off in the distance for the tiniest fraction of a second, and in just the instant that I raised my hands to hold his collar and attach the leash, he made a break for it.

It happened so fast that I hardly could even react or believe that he had run 100 feet away. He looked back for a moment, and I assumed that he would stop or come back like virtually every other dog that I've known, but there was nothing but blankness and fear in his eyes. My pathetic attempt to run after him in my flip-flops made him run even faster, across the road and toward the steep embankment above the Roaring Fork. I kept yelling "Jax" but it was pointless - he had never once responded to his name before, and he certainly wasn't going to now. Great, I thought, I've got a runner...

Actually, the truth was that what I *had* was... nothing. He was gone so fast, and running so blindly, that it was over in about 5 seconds. My pulse up around 250, I started driving around the area hoping to catch a glimpse of him, but I had no idea if he would go down to the river, cross over to the Highway, run out into the ranch pasture down below the bluff, or run to the houses of a nearby subdivision. I called Worth at the shelter, and he headed down to help. We would see him, sometimes even corner him, but the presence of any person or even our trucks stopping nearby and he was off to the races. We went on like that for 2 hours, 2 hot and dehydrating hours, and never got within 50 feet of him. I even cornered him in a fenced yard once and sent my dogs over to make him feel more comfortable - he ran right up to the dogs but when I took one step towards him, he blew across the road before I could even call his name.

We got him back that day, but not because of our efforts. I don't know why he decided to lie down under a bus and let someone tie a scarf around his neck, and I still can't figure it out to this day. I took him home that night, and never let him off a leash again.

I had met a woman at the farmers' market the first day I took Jax there; she and her young son and daughter had spent a lot of time that morning visiting with Jax and we ran into them again a week or two later. She said that her son had been talking at home about Jax and that he really wanted the family to adopt him. They seemed quite nice and were experienced with Aussies, and I heard later that they had filled out an adoption application. Jax seemed fine around the kids and it all seemed pretty straightforward. Then he escaped from me that day, and I ended up going home hours later, with a dog but without the sandwich that I had gone for. Everything changed that afternoon.

We were all worried that he would escape again, but the shelter had a long talk with the people and made sure that they were prepped - the fence around their yard would need to be intact, he'd always have to be walked on leash, always supervised, all of that. Jax went home with them on Saturday afternoon, August 29th.

By that evening, he was gone.

Twelve nights

He had been out two nights already when I found out. CARE had mobilized and there were fliers and radio announcements and people out looking for him. I drove across Carbondale to the area where the family that had adopted him lives and started putting up the fliers everywhere that I could think of. I didn't actually have a clue as to what I could possibly do to either find him or catch him, and no plan whatsoever, but this little guy seemed so helpless and totally unprepared to be living outside that I had to do something, anything. The family said that they had been putting out food for him at the nearby school where he had been seen the next day and that the food was being eaten.

That first day that I was out looking, I happened to run across the father of the adopting family when I was passing out fliers; he was headed out on a bike ride. But not to look for Jax, just to take a ride. It was a nice day. I was completely, utterly dumbfounded - this was *his* dog, yet he was going for a ride while we were putting up posters. I have a friend who often reminds me that, to some people, dogs and other pets are companions, members of the family, an important part of their lives. To other people, they're livestock. My friend is right. Before I had put the truck in gear again, I thought to myself that if

somehow we ever got this dog back again, I would personally give them their money back and make sure they didn't keep the dog.

Later that afternoon, I decided that we'd take our evening walk toward where Jax had disappeared and see if we could spot him. That part of town was something over three miles from the house, but there had been a call on Monday morning that Jax had been spotted in a neighborhood near the grocery store about halfway between where he ran off and my house, so I took Bo and Jackson and we walked around that neighborhood, putting up fliers and asking everyone we saw if they'd seen the dog. Worth had put out food in that area, but neither of us had a clue where he might really be and it had been many hours since he'd been seen, so there was nothing even remotely approaching a warm trail. I watched the dogs closely, but never got the feeling that they had picked up his scent. We walked for hours that evening.

The next evening, we did the same thing. There had been another call, but it was a cold lead by now and we never saw him. I let the dogs swim in the river near the neighborhood where he had been spotted twice and imagined that he had probably found some sheltered place nearby to use as a base camp. Some people were putting out food, but there was no way to know if it was him getting it, so it started to seem pointless. In fact, the whole search seemed pointless to me that evening - I could keep walking all over town every day, but I really had no idea at all where he was, just unconfirmed sightings that were hours old, and I had no idea what I would do if I *did* find him. He had too much fear to come to me if I offered him food and I didn't think there was a chance in the world that I could actually get close enough to him to put a leash on him. I know now that all I was thinking at the time was that I just wanted to see him once so that I'd know for myself that he was alive. At least if I knew he was alive, there was a chance. A chance of what, I didn't know, but there would be a chance. In all the time I scanned the yards and the trash cans and the dumpsters and the places under porches on those walks, I was most worried that we'd just find him run over on some street, a little puppy who most likely never even knew a home, that someone was going to euthanize before he was even a year old, that had never really done anything wrong and yet had never been given a chance in life. I don't know why it just seemed so damn unfair to me, but I just couldn't accept that this was his fate.

As we turned toward home that evening, I started to think that perhaps his fear had made him a survivor, that maybe he actually knew how to take care of himself and would be okay outside. Perhaps then I started to regard him more as an animal than a pet, and I thought for the first time that maybe we'd never catch him. I was kind of thinking about this as we walked, and remembering that I had cornered him twice in the last escape and yet didn't have a prayer of actually capturing him either time. Our little escape artist, the Harry Houdini of dogs. No such thing as a collar or an owner that can keep me, one minute I'm here and the next I'm gone. I started thinking of him as Harry - he never liked

the name Jax to begin with, never *once* responded to it as near as I could tell, and the name Jax was confusing the heck out of Jackson, who I called "Jacks" half the time anyway. I couldn't really say that his name was now Harry, as I didn't actually have a dog to go with the name, but that's what I called him when I thought of him.

The second time that I heard the sound, I was sure. All three of us were just motionless, trying to identify where it was coming from, but now I knew it was him. He had been out for three nights and more than three full days now. And then he just walked out of the tall grasses flanking the driveway, right into my yard. I simply couldn't believe my eyes.

I was stunned. And elated. And very nervous. The dogs didn't move, but I made the mistake of saying "Hi Jax". He darted right back into the grasses and the dogs went after him. When they knew it was him, which to them didn't seem wrong or unexpected at all since they live in the present and had no idea that he was "missing" to begin with, they just came back and laid down again. Jax started to follow them back but as soon as he saw me he stopped on the edge of the grasses. He seemed extremely nervous and scared, and he started running a few feet this way and that, finding places where he could conceal himself in the tall grass. He stayed nearby, but he wouldn't come any closer. I tried to encourage him by speaking to him in a very quiet voice, but it was more than he could handle; he turned and ran away as fast as he could, down toward the pond and then past the houses. Gone again.

I put food out that night. The bowl was empty in the morning. I was so excited that I could hardly work that day.

I put out meals every morning and evening, with a simply outstanding and varied menu of burgers, venison sausage, Jackson's good food to give him nourishment, hot dogs because - well, who wouldn't come over for a hot dog? Whatever I could think of that smelled really, really good. My dogs, who got none of this good stuff, were starting to act like I had gone completely mad. I could see their point.

We'd see him around once in awhile - sometimes he'd just canter down the driveway on his way to somewhere, or I'd be shaving and see him through the bathroom window when

he came to eat the breakfast that I put out in the driveway next to a crate, always before the sun came up, or he'd be trotting down the stream by the house, just going from one place to another. Once I was playing golf with Jim and he just appeared, trotting along on the second fairway while we were walking to our drives. He'd never let us get close and whenever I spoke at all, he'd pick up the pace and disappear around a nearby house and be gone again. It went like that for days.

Having now been involuntarily re-enrolled in Dog 101, I learned that any movement toward him, or any words at all, no matter how calmly or quietly spoken, set off alarms in this dog and so I never spoke to him. I watched him, but ignored him. He hated eye contact so I stopped looking at him too.

After three days and nights of this, I had no idea what to do. I was completely stressed and preoccupied with trying to think of ideas as to how to catch him, and our dog walks became totally focused on where we might go that we could just see him for a minute, if for no other reason than to confirm that he was alive for one more day. Every night that I heard coyotes, I couldn't sleep.

CARE decided to try and trap him, but we spent days trying unsuccessfully to arrange for a trap. Then we ordered one from Denver, but we didn't know how long it would take to arrive. Worth thought the trap would work, but I had been watching Jax and thought that he now had too many street smarts to be trapped. On the other hand, I couldn't think of any other thing to try. I think Worth was just trying to keep my spirits up.

By Thursday night, I had accepted the situation and admitted to myself that there would be no resolution in the short term, or maybe ever. We had no trap yet, and we weren't going to catch him. He wasn't going to walk into my house and ask for a cookie. My dogs had been patient, but they really needed some exercise, and I needed to take a break too. It was obvious now that Jax had figured out how to survive, but I'm not sure he had a plan beyond that, so the two of us were pretty much on an even footing. I decided to take Jackson and Bo on a hike the following day.

We drove way up the Fryingpan early Friday morning and then took a track into the mountains for a few miles. I had never been to this area before and it was pretty remote. The plan was to hike to a lake that we had never been to before and scout the trip for when Bob would arrive in a few weeks. The first valley was very lush and nice hiking, and the dogs were thrilled to be out and running. Bo is now clearly the hunter, roaming a few

yards each side of the trail to see if there's prey out there. He doesn't chase game or other wild animals, but I always see him as being in "hunting" mode anyway, a wolf. After eight years together, I cannot even imagine going out in the mountains without him.

Jackson, on the other hand, is a trail rat. This has been his first summer, and so his first season of hiking in the mountains, and I have seen him develop a remarkable sense of route finding. In all of the places that I have taken him where I have been before - in years past, without him - he is very tuned in to locating and following the trail, even when there is no visible trail at all, which is my favorite way to hike. On the return, or on hikes when we have gone back to a place that he has actually been to before, Jackson is better than a GPS. He will detour with Bo for a short run through the woods, but I think Jackson has decided that I am certainly incompetent and would be totally and utterly lost without his services in keeping me from following false trails, and so that is now his job for the pack. He hikes with his eyes and nose forward and he always seems to know where he's going.

Back to the story... After a couple of miles, we run across a bow hunter who tells us about being confronted the evening before by a mother bear and two cubs just a hundred yards from where we are now standing. The bear didn't retreat, and the hunter had to climb on a huge boulder and make lots of noise before the mother bear decided he was too much trouble. I am always glad that I have a dog or two with me, but am now really, really glad that I brought extra ammunition too.

The hike was perfect, and the adventure of doing a new route into two different valleys, and only seeing that one person all day, felt refreshing. The presence of bears really concerned me to an unusual degree that day and I was in a much higher state of readiness than usual, I think because it had been such an intense week. The hike turned out to be much longer than I had expected, and somewhat more difficult, and so I found myself in that wonderful empty space that you can get to after hours and hours of walking and breathing hard. Everything is simple and straightforward, you're just hiking. On the way down, it started to rain lightly, then harder, and then lightning and thunder began to enter the very valley where we walked, explosive concussions and brilliant flashes in front of and behind us, sound and light about 1 to 2 seconds apart. Not above us, but very nearly down to our elevation. We were now really, really wet. And coming to the woods where the bears had been sighted. I was thinking mostly how great it was that Jackson was completely unafraid of the thunder and light show, and how lucky I was to now have two good outdoor dogs, but even though I was thinking about those things, I made sure by checking every 5 or so paces that I had my right hand where I could reach my gun without having to move my jacket. This was actually just the kind of day that I needed.

As we hiked down the last two miles of this trail, soaked to the bone and looking forward to a warm truck ride, a thought just passed in front of me, seemingly out of nowhere but made possible only by letting my mind empty itself out in the mountains.

I would never catch Harry. I couldn't catch him because he didn't *want* to be caught. And I suddenly realized that, simply by trying to capture him, I was thinking like a human and that was... all wrong. And then, after many, many days, I finally knew what to do.

I started watching Harry more now. I kept putting food out, but I was not trying to catch him anymore. I just watched him for most of the next week.

On September 9th, I should have been hiking up into the mountains to visit Bailey with the other two dogs. It has been eight years since I carried her there, and yet I still miss her and think of her almost every day. I had planned to do the hike on the 9th as always, but she and I thought about it together and there was something else that needed to be done that day. I would visit her in a few days, and I knew she was fine with that.

I put a thin leash in my pocket and carefully arranged it so the clip would be exactly at the pocket's edge, but not visible. I practiced pulling it out several times, wondering if it would tangle right when I needed it. I was pretty sure it would. I got a large bag of Zuke's training treats, and put on my straw hat. I would be out in the sun for a long time, if I was lucky. It was late morning, the neighborhood children were all at school now, and the street was nice and quiet. The dogs and I walked down the street to Cali's house and they were romping all around because I let them go down the street off leash, breaking the rules and having a good old time. There could be no leashes today, period.

Today would be the day that I would bring to Harry a pack of dogs, a pack that he could be a part of if he chose to be. I would show him that we were all a pack, and that this was *my* pack. I would ask him to respect me as one of his own, and I would try to find a way that he would want to be with us more than he wanted to run away. I would not try to catch Harry today, or ever again. As I had walked along that trail on Friday, soaked and a little

scared and yet feeling relaxed being in the mountains where I feel most comfortable, it became absolutely clear to me that I had to start thinking like a dog, and I had to try and learn from this dog what it would take for him to *want* to walk to me.

Cali, a pretty and puppyish golden retriever, came bounding out to greet us and made sure to be properly deferential to Bo, licking his chops while Bo decided whether she warranted any kind of growl or other instruction. Apparently not today. I didn't really know this dog at all; my dogs had only met her once when we had stopped by this neighbor's house because they had sent me an email letting me know that Harry was hanging out with Cali all the time in their back yard.

He was sleeping in some dirt and tall grass, separated from the mowed yard by a few very important feet, and so not easily seen. Jackson ran right up to him and got him to come out, but he eyed me very warily and stayed 50 or so feet away, moving from one part of the yard to another, but never approaching any of the dogs unless they were well removed from me. I found a shady spot on the patio and sat down with Cali and my dogs. I knew that I could count on a Golden to want to sit in my lap if at all possible and to be first in line for any treats, and Cali didn't disappoint me. I fed the three dogs treats, played with them, pulled Cali over for some hugs and belly rubs, and roughhoused with each of them in turn. I never looked at Harry, and I waited until his curiosity absolutely got the best of him and he stuck his head out from behind a stone wall, then I looked away and threw a treat in his direction.

Harry decided that he wanted to be with the other dogs, and so he would circle our little group trying at once to be part of the group and yet safely just out of reach. I fed the dogs like mad, rewarding them for every little thing that they did, and I could see that Harry was really hungry. I threw treats to him where he was, and then gradually closer and closer to me. Every time I sensed a boundary that he couldn't let himself cross or saw him retreat to the weeds, I'd have to create more separation and start again. I never once stood up that whole afternoon. Instead, I sat or crawled and I always had one or more dogs right on top of me, playing or doing tricks or wrestling or getting belly rubs.

After a couple of hours, I could hold out a treat and, if I turned my head and didn't look his way, he would take it from my fingers. He was right there, his collar couldn't be more than 4 inches from my hand, his muzzle touching my fingers - this was it, I had him!

But every time any finger went any closer to him, just the tiniest movement past his nose, he would immediately back up. I looked at my hand just inches from his collar, and I wondered how fast I could really be. Just a few inches - how fast are you? One quick, perfect grab and I'd have him. He seemed impossibly close, but I knew that, had I tried to

grab for the collar, he would be gone. If you've ever groomed a dog or clipped an animal's nails, you have experienced the virtually instantaneous flash of a dog's head turning, the speed with which they can turn their head all the way backwards and get ready to bite you. And, you would know that I had absolutely no chance of crossing that four inches faster than he could react to me. I knew that I had, at best, one chance at this, and the odds weren't looking very good. The leash in my pocket? I now knew that it was a waste of time. Had I actually reached down and tried to pull something from my pocket, made that much of a movement where he could see it, no matter how slowly or carefully, he would have been in Wyoming before I had even touched the leash, I was certain of this.

So we hung out in the grass, me playing with the dogs and occasionally enticing Harry to walk toward me, picking up a sequence of dog treats thrown ever closer like landing lights at the airport. Come this way, just come a little farther this way. Oops, too close, start over. Again, and again... and again. Don't look at him. Don't stand up. Don't do anything quickly. Don't say anything. You have to be calm *inside*.

As the afternoon wore on, and knowing that the family's children would be coming home from school soon, I decided to decide that the day had been a success, if only in a "first step" sort of way. I wouldn't get a leash on him, but I saw him up close and now knew that he wasn't sick or injured. He ate from my hand, and he didn't run away. I never touched him, but I was hot and thirsty and thought I could go no farther today.

I crawled away from the dogs, stood up, and called my dogs to leave. Of course, Cali wanted to come along and I had a few minutes of confusion trying to figure out how to get the dogs I wanted and yet leave behind the dog that the children would expect to be there. I finally got my two dogs out to the end of the driveway, Cali to stay on the front porch, and we started walking home. And then I heard his dog tags jingling.

I could not let myself turn around and look, but I knew that Harry was following us, I could hear the tags. I walked a little more slowly, and pretty soon I had three dogs trotting along beside me, Bo on the left and Jackson and Harry on the right. This was unbelievable! I kept expecting him to just take off all of a sudden, and I tried very hard to not look at him, but I glanced to the right and he was walking along in a heel like we'd been doing it forever. Now I could hardly breathe.

As we got close to my house, Laurie turned the corner in her car and I had to wave her off somehow, get her to stop and to not roll down her window or say even a single word until we were well out of the way - I knew that should anything unexpected or scary happen, Harry would be gone. She knew about Harry and kept a safe distance. But I didn't even know where I was going next! I had no plan for this. I turned toward my driveway, but I could see Harry start backing up and look around for where he was going to go, because he

certainly wasn't going to follow me down that driveway. He stood in the street and watched, so I turned and walked across the street to my neighbor's house and called to dogs to come sit. This must have been a satisfactory neutral ground, because Harry followed us there. After awhile thinking about the situation, I called the dogs and crossed the street to my house, but made sure to walk around by the stream on the open, street side of the house, and Harry followed.

Now what? I had no idea what to do next, but Harry wasn't running off, he was just staying nearby and watching us. I sat on the steps out back and... did nothing. I threw him a few treats, but could see that he wasn't as hungry as before. So I sat there for another hour, petting my dogs and letting them go check out Harry whenever they wanted to. Bo was letting me know that it was dinnertime, so I went inside and thought I'd bring their dinners outside so we could watch Harry some more. I was convinced that by the time I got back Harry would have split, but I made him a bowl of dog food with some venison sausage anyway and took all three meals outside. I was really surprised to see all three dogs were still hanging out together in the grass, so I fed my two and took Harry's bowl to a place well away from me and the others, out in the open where he wouldn't feel trapped. After some hesitation, he cleaned the bowl.

I was very uncertain as to what to do at this point - there was no way that he was going to let me touch him, the day was quickly heading toward sunset, and I had no idea what the outcome of all this would be, anyway. I figured that we'd made a start, that he would know I was the one putting food out for him, and - most importantly to me - I now knew for myself that he was physically okay after 12 nights outside. So I called it a day. I figured that as soon as I stood up he'd be gone anyway, so I stopped worrying about it. I was right near the studio door, so I went in and started up the stairs, calling back "let's go, dogs" as I always do when it's time to go to work. We went upstairs and, as I got a bottle of water from the fridge, I heard his tags. I couldn't be sure, but it sounded like he had come to the outside door below! I was just puttering around now, staying on the far side of the studio - there was NO way that I was going to go over to the stairs and see where he was - and then I heard his tags jingle as he started up the stairs. He wanted to be with his dogs...

I could see out of the corner of my eye that he was in the room, sniffing at the dog toys, but I kept my back to him and fiddled around with something for awhile, quietly. I carried some drawings over to the table, and I could then see that he had gone into Jackson's day crate and laid down - I broke my rule and looked because I couldn't believe that it was really happening. He was in a cage! But the crate door was wide open, and so was the door downstairs. He'd bolt, I knew it. I'd make one little slip-up, and he'd be airborne down those stairs in a heartbeat.

I turned my back to him and went over to a far corner of the room, then walked past the crate as nonchalantly as I could, facing the other way. Very slowly, I took a few backwards steps with my hands by my sides and, as my right hand got near the crate door, I casually brushed the door closed. And quickly latched it.

The worry, and misery, and almost complete inability to pay attention to anything else during these last twelve days and nights was, suddenly and most unexpectedly, now over. It didn't even seem real.

I looked at him through the wire of the crate for a minute or two, and he seemed completely contented there, probably thinking only that after nearly two weeks of sleeping on cold ground with one or both eyes open, this dog bed sure felt good. How could he look so calm? Didn't he know how excited I was? I checked the crate latches a couple of times, then went downstairs and deadbolted the outside door, locking us in. When I came back upstairs, I carefully and slowly reached in to pet him a little and gently clipped the leash to his collar, the leash that I had been carrying around all afternoon but could not bring myself to show to him until he was ready for it. Then I kneeled down so I could crawl in and put my arms around him, and I forced him to endure being hugged as best he could. And, although no real dog would ever do anything like this, I could stop pretending to be a dog now. I could feel myself shaking with relief that he had survived the last twelve nights.

I called Worth and told him that I had Harry on a leash, but that I wouldn't be bringing Harry to the shelter tonight. After all, it was still September 9th, and that was not a day that I could take a dog to a shelter to sleep, even for one night...

Even later, I just never quite got around to taking Harry to the shelter, and he lived with us for another five weeks or so. We all knew from before that he was even more stressed when he was up there. In my mind, he had probably never even had an opportunity to know what it would be like to live in a home, and that is a very critical thing for dog to experience, and then to want. To know and enjoy a daily routine, to have the predictability that lets a dog learn, to enjoy cozy places, to experience the nice things that people will do for you if you behave. To not have fear. To trust.

At first, he slept a lot and all of us - me, Bo and Jackson - pretty much let him have his space. He had a comfortable crate in the garage; he ate there, and he slept quietly every night with classical music to keep him company. He liked having other dogs around, but seemed to enjoy quiet time by himself, and so I let him have that. His mood and even his thoughts seem to pour from his eyes as clearly as if they're written on paper, and I learned that this Aussie had a sensitivity to the atmosphere around him that was markedly different from most other dogs I've known. Even the border collies that I'm more used to are not like this - I used to think of them as generally very similar dogs with a slightly different look and physical structure, but have come to think of the two breeds as being really quite different in temperament and behavior.

Harry started learning things that I thought were important for him to learn. Not dog tricks, but very small and simple things, often things that other dogs would take for granted because they learned them at such a young age that they weren't even aware of learning them. It took awhile, but he learned to take food from my hand, and then he learned to take food from other friends, and then even from people he didn't know, but anyone that my eyes and words told him he could trust. He learned to walk through a door without an explosion of fur and leashes and terrible fright, and he learned that very good things would happen when I touched him or soon afterwards. He experienced new and unexpected things - garbage cans, the noises of something being dropped, car horns, riding in the car seat next to me - and he learned to accept them. He learned something every day, and he watched my two dogs, in the same way that Jackson learned from Bo, and so he now had two very good teachers, each far more capable and skilled than I could ever be.

As he started getting more comfortable, I tried to teach him some of the normal dog tricks or skills, like "sit", "lie down", "come" and so forth. He seemed to have absolutely no idea what the heck I was asking him to do and did not even pick up on the behavior / reward patterns that he could see the other dogs performing so effortlessly. We wondered if he was somewhat blind or deaf, but quickly ruled those out. I decided that he really wasn't much for verbal communication from humans, period, and so began working with him without using verbal cues. Hand signals, body language and, most importantly, situational triggers. He would learn *when* he was supposed to lie down or come back to me, and be rewarded and praised, but I would spare him verbal commands and eye contact, the two things that I had quickly learned could send him into a state of fear in an instant.

He made progress with several of those "commands", but never once sat when I wanted him to or never making a connection between a "sit" and a reward. In fact, "Sit, Harry" became something of an unspoken joke between us and I would often tell him to sit when

I was frustrated with the dogs or frustrated with something else, because his complete refusal to even acknowledge that I had spoken those two words always made me laugh.

My fishing buddy Bob came for a visit with his dog, Daisy, and he convinced me that, with two people and three other dogs, we could adequately prepare for and execute a hike into the mountains and not lose Harry permanently. I wasn't so sure, and didn't really want to find out. We discussed it for days and thought it through from every conceivable angle because it was one thing for Harry to run off in a town like Carbondale but quite another thing to lose him in the mountains where the food chain is non-negotiable and the chances of recovery virtually non-existent. With considerable trepidation on my part, and also a combination of two different leashes and a full body harness (I am not exaggerating), we took a hike up to the lakes on Mt. Sopris. It was great, Harry loved the whole experience, and nobody got left on the mountain. He went wading in the ice cold lake with the other dogs, and he's been on the hiking crew ever since.

After a few initial rebukes and corrections, mild by Bo's standards but which timid Harry did not take all that well or lightly, Bo apparently decided that he had gotten Harry on an even keel behavior-wise, and then the three of them started connecting. The relationships between any two of them are quite different, and there is still a lot of leeway and space that is granted to Harry, but both of my dogs have let Harry well into their circle of acceptance. I often see Bo keeping a protective eye on any dog that approaches Harry. Bo generally demands, and gets, respect from other dogs, and he will now stand next to and slightly behind Harry or walk between Harry and another dog if he thinks there is any question about the situation or the manners of a dog approaching Harry, just as he did with Jackson when he was a puppy. When Bo does that for you, you are officially one of us.

It was five weeks of nothing all that exciting, and that was what it was supposed to be. Every day, one or two new things, but most of every day doing things that we had done before, or accepting that not much was happening right now and it would be a good time for a nap. I am not a dog trainer, or even close to one. I just try to see what a dog needs, and I felt that this dog needed to have the uncertainty and isolation of his former life (at least as imagined by me) replaced with something quite normal and predictable, and fun. I took him everywhere, because over the past twenty years I have come to the opinion that is the very best single thing you can do with, and for, your dog.

In the evenings I would pick him up and put him on my lap so that he could experience some physical contact other than from the dreaded human hands and not have to endure being looked at. At first, he was rigid as a board and when I would let him get down after a few minutes, he would scamper off to some distant corner and curl up. But I could tell he didn't hate it and so the next night we'd do it again. After a week of this, I had him in my lap one night and was scratching his muzzle and I just stopped. He immediately

turned his head toward my hand, just the slightest bit, and I knew then that I owned him. It actually took a couple more weeks, but one night I was reading with him in my lap and, after 15 or 20 minutes, I heard a quiet exhalation and what had always been an "on alert", wary dog in my lap suddenly became 30 pounds of dead weight. I peeked over his head and saw that he had closed his eyes for the first time and was sleeping soundly.

After a month, I noticed that Harry would occasionally be lying down somewhere and looking at me. With any other dog, and certainly the Border Collie types that I am used to, having two eyes trained on you would be nothing special at all, but for this dog it was quite unprecedented and remarkable. This is a dog that would go to extreme lengths, and contort into impractical positions, in order to avoid any eye contact whatsoever. In fact, we have an arrangement to this very day whereby, now that he has learned to accept and even look forward to the customary toweling off of the dogs before they come back into the house, he will gladly let me dry his back legs however I want, but I must be in a position when I'm drying his front paws where he doesn't have to look at me and he knows that I'm not looking at him. And then he's fine with it.

As more days went by and nothing bad happened to him, he would make eye contact more and more often. When we were preparing to go for walks, he would now lie down in front of me and look straight at me, just like a normal herding dog is hard-wired to do. One day, while he was looking directly at me because he knew we were preparing to go do something fun, I knelt down low in front of him and just looked back at him while I scratched under his chin. He didn't break the eye contact, and then the little nub where his now docked tail used to be started wagging.

I thought to myself - you're ready now, Harry. It's time to find you a home.

Bo and I have had dozens of dogs come to live with us over the past eight years, and while Bo has always graciously welcomed them into his den and been an extraordinary teacher and example, it isn't quite so simple or straightforward for me. Certainly, it's an unusual type of relationship where the most successful outcome for all involved means with almost total certainty that you will never see the other again, and yet that is exactly what we work and strive for. When one of "our" dogs gets connected with the owner they have always wanted, I feel a mixture of sadness, nervousness, and - to be very honest - relief, and I also enjoy more shallow emotions like pride and self-satisfaction, at least for the few days or weeks until I meet the next dog. I guess it wouldn't be surprising that, after feeding them and caring for them and sometimes having to tend to an illness or wipe their butts, I

probably get a little too protective of them. I wouldn't doubt that some people who are considering taking a dog have asked themselves if I was really serious about adopting out a dog, or if I actually didn't want to keep it myself and couldn't be honest about it.

The latter has happened just three times, and I will admit that Harry was the third. I told Jackson that he was damn lucky that he was born last year.

We got calls and emails, but this one would not be an easy dog to adopt successfully and we have been learning this the hard way. We got a number of inquiries that I knew pretty much immediately wouldn't be the right situation for Harry but then we were contacted by a family that seemed to have the right temperament and family dynamic, and none of us could really think of any reason why they couldn't adopt Harry. Plans were made for me to bring him to their home the following day, and we spent the rest of that Friday doing only the things that the dogs loved the best. I was very nervous about sending him to a new home, knowing that he had so many important things left to learn before he could be considered a well-adjusted dog, but I could see clearly that he was starting to get attached to me, and it wouldn't get any easier from this point forward. It was time.

On Saturday morning, we took an extra-long walk and I let the dogs play with each other in the driveway, Bo and Jackson wrestling and herding as always, and Harry practicing his "come" and learning to pick up a thrown ball. I glanced at my watch and, although I would be relieved to have a measure of simplicity and lack of complication back in my life and house once Harry was gone in a few minutes and was really looking forward to that, I also had to admit that I was obviously not being in much of a hurry for this adoption to happen.

It was past time to go. I gathered up all the things that had familiar smells and meaning for Harry and loaded his crate in the truck. All three dogs were near the back door, waiting to find out what clothes and equipment I would grab from the nearby hooks, and thereby deduce with absolute certainty what type of adventure we were going off to do. I put on my coat, but none of them moved. I picked up a leash and turned to Harry, who had by now had actually made a positive association from leashes to walks and hikes and car rides and all manner of good things, and was therefore no longer terrified of a leash, and he was standing there looking directly into my eyes.

I looked back at him, and now I could see the beginnings of a different dog, a dog that didn't fully exist yet but one that I had seen with my heart and intuition the very first day I met him, a dog that Tracey knew was there and wanted me to see. I was very, very proud of the effort that he had decided to put forth in these past weeks, because none of this had been easy for him and I could just imagine that letting go of fears and allowing trust to develop, even to the very smallest degree, required an enormous, concentrated effort on his part every day.

So I looked into his eyes for a moment while I told him silently that I would miss him. He looked back steadily, without fear.

And then he sat.



Postscript

It turned out that the place Harry went to live that weekend would not be his forever home after all, and he came back to live with Jackson, Bo, and me again for several more months. I was very discouraged, but over time I learned that there was a reason that Harry came back.

Before the end of the year, and in spite of my profound fears that he would run away or that I would lose him, Harry had actually learned to hike and ski with me off-leash and would now come *racing* back to me upon hearing his name or seeing our hand signal. He learned to walk from my house to my office off-leash every morning, and then happily bound up the stairs with the other dogs to “go to work”. He slept in my lap in the evenings. He never ran away, because he didn’t want to anymore.

On New Year’s Eve of 2009, Harry went home with Rob and Melissa and their other Australian Shepherd, Zebbers. He has his very own bed. He has lived with them for awhile and hasn’t run away. I think that he now has the home and the life that he always deserved, thanks first and foremost to the second chance at life that he was given by a woman from somewhere in Utah whom I’ve never met.

I would like to thank her deeply for what she did for him.