

ele:HOME

MINDFUL PETTING >> JEFF RICHEY



Bernie.



Ella.

While on vacation on the island of Santorini, Greece, several years ago, my partner, Sandy, became determined to rescue one of the countless street dogs. I argued that we should devote our resources to helping strays in Colorado, but she insisted we bring home the ugliest dog in need of a home, the one least likely to find a home.

The dogs of Santorini sit and respond to commands in a dozen languages. In return for doing so, the dogs are awarded scraps of food. After buying a bag of dog food, Sandy fed many of the dogs and decided that we would take a street dog the Greek women all called “Ella-Ella.” (We have heard since that “ella” means “come here” in Greek.) Ella fit the description of unwanted, with ears that seemed to be on backwards and a feral/coyote/mutt combination unlike any other.

After contacting three European women who help save dogs on Santorini and find homes for them, we took Ella to the only veterinarian on the island. The vet affirmed that Ella was healthy—and that she’d had a litter of puppies recently. “Do not concern yourselves with the puppies. They are most likely dead.” Many people in Santorini believe that “life is not worth living without testicles”—that’s a direct quote from a Greek man we interviewed for a video we shot as a part of Ella’s rescue! And so few dogs are neutered or spayed, and the dog population is kept under control by killing puppies by feeding them rat poison or broken glass.

The next day, a leashed Ella led us down Fira’s winding, narrow cobblestone paths that lead down the famous cliffs of Santorini. We had seen her beg from the tourists and eat from the trash. Pulling harder and harder as we got further down the cliffs, we ended up at a dead end on a ledge overlooking the Aegean Sea. Suddenly chaos broke out as Ella found her five young, small puppies and

they found her nipples. Sandy and a Swiss woman who was part of the rescue effort cried in disbelief and excitement! Apparently she hadn’t been begging and dumpster-diving just for herself.

Ella and her three-week-old puppies spent the next few weeks at the home of an American woman who lives on Santorini, until they would be old enough to make the long journey (along with a sixth unrelated puppy) from Santorini to Athens and then another layover in Frankfurt, before finally reaching Colorado. We arranged for hosts in both Athens and Frankfurt, but didn’t plan on Ella and the puppies getting left on the tarmac at a cold Denver International Airport. After relaying the dogs’ story, a wonderful Lufthansa crew got the dogs to us. Rocky Mountain high!

Ella and the six puppies joined our four other dogs while we began to find homes for the many newcomers. One by one, five of the puppies were adopted by family and friends, becoming “naturalized” American dogs. One puppy, who the Swiss woman had named Bernie (he had a face like a St. Bernard) was rejected by everybody. And so Bernie and Ella stayed with us while we tried to adjust to having six dogs.

Ella was dominant over her own puppy, Bernie, and our other puppy, Farfel. And so it was with some relief when Ella found a home with a older man who lives on a ranch in the Colorado mountains. Both man and dog have fuller lives than they had apart. She sleeps on his bed every night—quite an improvement from Santorini! Bernie and Farfel have been close since they were puppies. Almost four years old now, they live with Dexter, Crosby and Lily (our other rescue dogs!), and five horses.

It’s a good life.

Jeff Richey and Sandy Calvin run Farfel’s Farm, a dog and cat store that has a waterfall in the front window, beside which Farfel himself, a Bearded Collie, spends his days watching. For more: farfels.com (be sure to check out the links section).



rescue

>> **LIFE*SAVER** Skip the factory farm-bred pet store puppies, and rescue a dog. Your new friend will become a companion, first, and a best buddy sooner than later. The connection is unlike any other. How to create a relationship beyond ownership? Hint: like most friendships, this one requires self-awareness, first. There are many options once one decides to rescue a dog (most are far easier than bringing a dog home from another country!).

Humane Societies are in thousands of communities (just google yours). Or check out **petfinder.com**, and enter your zip code. It’s a comprehensive database of dogs and rescue societies. Invaluable.

The largest rescue group in the country is **Southern Utah’s Best Friends** (bestfriends.com). They are typical of the best kind of rescue organization: dogs are only “put down” if they are sick, aggressive or there is no alternative. In the case of Best Friends, animals brought there call it home for life if no suitable adopter is found!

One rescue agency is mindful in several ways: **Colorado Prison Industries Canine Training Program** (cijvp.com, then click on K-9 Companion). The program provides pre-trained dogs, and can also train dogs that have been adopted elsewhere. We have had a number of these dogs come into our store, and their behavior was perfect. The dogs are rescued, given great training and prisoners gain “new skills, improved self-esteem and earn a salary...”

Dignidad Para Los Perros (dignidad-mexico.org) goes to Mexico to spay and neuter dogs—and then find homes for them in the U.S.—that would otherwise join the homeless street dog population.

Dogs can put us back in touch with the natural world. Our generosity in adopting a stray dog or rescuing a dog in need of a home bridges the divide between two kinds of sentient beings. That connection contains all of the elements of love and right action that can only lead to a more open heart, a life worth celebrating—and lots more walks, fresh air and companionship.



>> KITSCHY KITTY BY GEORGE

Caroline Treadway says: This clever cache of catnippy kitty toys kept my teen feline spellbound for a good five minutes. The brown bag by George contains all the accoutrements my eco-kitty would wish to buy at her discerning local kitty boutique: mouse, bird, fish and milk stylishly accented with playful-slash-morbid (a rare combination) X's for eyes. All toys are made of plushy, durable felt, put together in Peruvian craft consortiums that still practice indigenous arts who are then matched with businesses that can bring these products to market. Heavy on style but light on catnip, these cute toys could do with a bit more of the smelly stuff. **Fo'mo': iamelephant.com's weekly blog.**

>> LOTS OF STUFF BY PLANET DOG

Maron Greenleaf says: The number of doggy

products are overwhelming—cute, squeaky toys everywhere! It feels like a big waste: most of them fall apart quickly and/or taste too yucky for my discerning pup. Planet Dog does it differently, making mindful products for conscientious dogs everywhere. So-so (the best dog in the world, in case you didn't know) is the envy of my neighborhood with her eco-fleece-lined (so soft!) **collar** and **leash**. The company's **Orbee-Tuff toys** (balls, fake bones) are recycled, bouncy and have holes for filling with treats such as Justin's Nut Butter. But wait, it gets better: soon, Planet Dog will source their products right here in the U.S. of A (fair-labor). Now that's my kind of patriotism. The bones taste minty (so says my So-So), so test 'em at the pet store first. If you do buy, know that a percentage of your purchase goes to support pup-friendly programs.

Fo'mo': [iamelephant's](http://iamelephant.com) weekly blog.

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