



Fear to Freedom: Rehabilitating Loki

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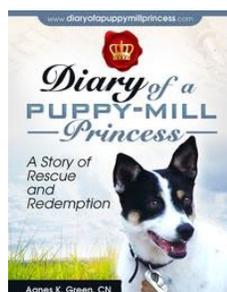
In the spring of 2009, my husband and I adopted a very fearful, diminutive border collie-sheltie mix dog from Burns through the Oregon Humane Society. At the time it was the biggest rescue effort undertaken by the organization, and the situation was heartbreaking - a makeshift puppy mill where 200 dogs were trapped in misery, devoid of human company except for the abusive owner.

We honestly did not know what we were getting into when we adopted the scrawny, dirty and terrified little dog that my husband named Loki. Brad, a dog lover and owner all his life, thought that food and a good home would bring Loki around without much trouble. I, a cat person, was secure in the knowledge that we could give our new pet all the love, care and attention she deserved. We already had a cat and a dog, and were prepared to add another pet.

We soon discovered we were in for a long rehabilitation process with a dog who crammed herself into the back of her crate or under our coffee table, always sticking close to our other dog at all times. Loki had never known a leash, petting or a bath. She cringed and growled at us, and trusted no one. She was not housebroken and she had never eaten out of a bowl. She was most terrified of Brad, and men in general, so that meant he could not train her as he was used to doing with previous dogs.

Browsing the internet one day, I stumbled upon Caroline Spark's name on a website about fearful dogs. I called her, desperate for sound advice about how to help Loki. She quickly arranged a time that was convenient for our family for her to come visit us in our home. In one session, she gave us the initial tools and knowledge we needed to start the rehabilitation process. She deftly assessed the relationships between family members and our pets, and coached the whole household (at the time this included a teen and young adult children) on how to read Loki's body language, how to interpret her behaviors, and how to modify our approach to best move Loki from total fear towards a more normal and happy canine life. She gave us so much encouragement and advice in just one session, and was thorough and available in her follow-up comments and emails.

Just 9 months after adopting our Loki, we are reaping the heart-felt rewards of having a beautiful, smart and playful young dog in our family, and her trust for us continues to develop each day. I really think that without Caroline's help, we might have never found the patience and fortitude to keep working with Loki, using treats, play and key changes in our approach. Caroline stressed consistency, explained Loki's perspective to us, and pointed us to numerous resources for more information as we went along. Caroline's professional experience and kind-spirited guidance made all the difference.



Rehabilitating dogs from puppy mills or hoarding situations often takes a lot of time and patience, and involves a steep learning curve for dogs and people. Cathy and her family are inspiring examples of what can be achieved, and what it takes to get there.

Here's a great new resource from Agnes Green, who adopted a dog similar to Loki, and chronicled her experiences in an e-book and blog: [**Diary of Puppy Mill Princess: A Story of Rescue and Redemption.**](#)