

Pork Chops and Apple Sauce

by TJ Skarbo

When I went to the SPCA, I had the intention of looking for a Beagle. I had done the research and thought the breed would be a good fit for my lifestyle. I am a long distance runner and wanted some company on the long night runs. I wanted a dog that would protect me, but didn't bark and act like it was going to take a chunk of flesh of those who passed us by. So this meant a breed too big to fit into a purse, (Thank god!) and not too big to fit in a compact car.

Originally I wanted to get a Great Dane, but thought better of it. It wasn't the fact that I could see myself literally getting dragged along the pavement every time a cat or another dog would go by; it was not the thought of it chasing the occasional bike that went by. It wasn't even the thought that with my 5'2" frame a Great Dane would come up to my waist and I would feel like a dwarf next to it. No it was the thought of having to pick up the sub sized steaming deposits left by such an animal. No way, that was definitely not for me. I had also found out that large dogs live shorter lives than their smaller cousins. That meant heartbreak. Something I wanted to put off as long as possible.

I am not what you would call a "dog" person, at least not one you would call in the "traditional" sense. By that I mean one of those people who have an aversion to cats. The truth is, I like both cats and dogs and I think that there can be harmony with both if they are brought up together, or introduced gradually. Why not? Men and women live together, are we not in a sense different in every way? Men are from Mars and Women are from Venus so I have been told.

So the intention as I have said before, was to look for a Beagle, or some kind of similar breed. I went into the shelter and talked to the staff. When I said I wanted a Beagle and why I wanted it they told me that there were none at the moment and they could put my name on a list if one came in, but the outlook was not hopeful. Turns out Beagles are not one of the breeds that have a hard time assimilating into families. I asked if I could have a look at the cages for any of the other dogs that might fit what I was looking for.

They let me into a long corridor of cages, and it was one of the most heart wrenching moments of my life. To see all these wonderful animals looking up at me with hope in their eyes, hoping that I would be coming to take them for a walk or better yet to a home full of love. Tears sprung in my eyes but I continued on, trying to be judgmental about the task at hand.

I got to the last cage and was surprised to see a cat in the corner. The cats were usually kept in another area of the shelter all together. I would imagine it was because the sight of a cat would make most dogs go nuts. This was not the case here. I had just walked down this corridor of dogs and none of them seemed to mind what was behind cage number 7. Perplexed I crept closer. She was a grey short haired tabby with black striped markings; her eyes, pools of green surrounded by yellow. She also had little tufts at the ends of her ears, like a bobcat, only not as pronounced. When I approached the cage she came up to me mewing. Again I noticed that the dogs took no notice of the sound. She rubbed her head on the metal of the cage, and looked up to me. I smiled and tickled the top of her head. I looked past her into the back of the cage and found she was not alone. Her cell mate was a border collie. I immediately fell in love. He was the traditional black and white collie but one eye was brown and the other was ice blue. It was striking; the difference, making the brown one seem black and the ice blue one seem white. He is perfect I thought to myself, these dogs love to run, and are very intelligent. I had seen dogs like these

performing high jumps to catch Frisbees even competing in different cities all over the country. I frowned. Why was he not coming up to the door of the cage like the others had? Like his cell mate had? Did he have problems with human contact? Or did he have issues with women? I went back down the corridor to get the story of the cell mates of cage number 7.

When I asked the girls about the two I was interested in, they just looked at each other and hesitated. When I asked them what's going on, it was as though they didn't know where to start. Keesha was first to tell me that if I was interested in either of the two in cage 7 it was a package deal. There was no separating the two. If I wanted the cat the dog had to go too, and vice versa. That was why they were in the cage together like they were instead of the cat being with the other cats. When I wanted to know about the history of the pair of them Maya filled me in.

Apparently the two of them had been on the road together for some time, and had formed a strong bond. Maya didn't know why or how, but thought that it might have been likely that the collie had been around other animals before and didn't see a problem in the cat. Collies are taught to care for the livestock they herd, making sure none stray, so perhaps he saw the cat as some kind of herd. Never the less, there they were as a two some. Maya continued to tell their story. Turns out they were picked up in a grocery store. Early one morning both walked through the doors, (the collie had figured out how to get the electrical eye to open them) up to the meat counter, and started in on some pork chops. The dog had even taken some of the meat out and tossed it to the cat. That is what the butcher is saying anyhow. So the butcher coaxed them into the back of the store with some more meat and called the SPCA. He said it was like the dog was taking care of the cat, like they were some sort of family. He said he had never seen anything like it before. I laughed. Those two sounded like a handful, like they would have surprises in store for me at every turn.

I asked the girls what happened when you separate the two of them. Keesha told me that when they tried to separate the two of them on that first night it was so sad. The collie went crazy; he couldn't take the separation anxiety and began to run head long into the cage door over and over and over again. They gave him a sedative, but as soon as he woke there he was again running full bore into the door again. They were afraid that he was going to break his neck. So they tried bringing him out for walks to calm him down, but he would not leave the shelter and only sat at the door to the cat section and pawed at the door. Finally they brought the cat into the cage with him and everything settled down. At least it did with the collie. The other dogs were a little riled about having a cat in their quarters but soon they got used to her.

Keesha told me that if I did decide to take the two of them then it was the two of them all the time. I couldn't take one for a car ride without the other. I had to take the both of them to the vet together and to the park together. Apparently people take cats to the park and outside all the time. They even have leashes for them. I had no idea. Most of all, Keesha said I had to invest in some applesauce; apparently the cat had developed a taste for Mayas when the cat and dog were on their "free time". This is when well behaved animals get to wander the shelter freely. She would eat it right from Mayas spoon.

I knew I wanted the pair of them but what was I going to do with the cat when I went for my long night runs? I didn't think a cat would be able to go for a 10km to 18km run, and I didn't think the collie would leave her behind. I asked the girls if anyone was interested in the pair and found that no one was looking at them at the moment. I let the girls know I needed the night to think it over but was definitely interested in adopting them. I just had to work out some issues first. I went home and poured a hot bubble bath, grabbed a glass of red wine and went to do some serious thinking. I

thought of many different solutions to the problem of what to do with the cat while running. I thought perhaps some kind of specialized backpack for me would work, but would a cat really want to be in that kind of contraption bouncing up and down for the amount of time the run would take? What would happen if it rained? This was not the only problem. Running with a cat on my back would throw off my rhythm and form, would this result in back problems? I thought perhaps some kind of pack for the dog to carry the cat, but this brought up the same problems, only for the dog and not me. No I needed to think outside the box.

Then after my bath while watching television, the solution hit me. It was during a commercial when I saw a guy carrying 3 girls in a rickshaw. I thought that a lightweight basket carrier would allow the collie or me to carry the cat behind us. I called Tony, a contractor I knew who was good with his hands, to see if it was possible. We talked details through out the night and he thought it would be no problem.

The next day I stopped at the pet store after work and bought two pet caddies to take them home in and some leashes for when we went to the park or for walks, and some food and a litter box for the cat. I also picked up some shampoo for the both of them. A bath was first on the list of to do's when we got home. After the paperwork was done at the SPCA I was a proud parent of the furry variety. I found out at that time that the girls had named the collie Pork chop, due to the meat shopping fiasco, and the cats name was Apple sauce. I figured the names were perfect and didn't change them although when out in public I shortened them to porky and appy.

A week later Tony had the rickshaw ready to go for its first tryout, he had even made a great harness for pork chop. The carriage was a metal frame covered with canvas and plastic so it wouldn't get wet when it rained or snowed. It had nice big wheels on it so it would

have no problems on gravel or asphalt and I had no doubt it would be great for the snow as well. It was very lightweight so I had no concerns with Pork chop being able to pull it, let alone my own ability to run with it. And Tony had even put some extra space for water bottles or different things we might need on a run.

I was wondering if Apple sauce would get in it and if she did get in, if she would stay in it. I put a nice comfy blanket in the bottom of the rickshaw to try to entice her into it. I shouldn't have worried though, as soon as I had Pork chop harnessed into the rigging she was in the back like a shot. She seemed to know this was her chariot.

Tony came on the first run in case anything went wrong. He is not a runner so he took his mountain bike. It was only going to be a 6km trip to try it out and see how Pork chop did on his first run. He surprised me, we got to the 6km mark and he was still raring to go. So we checked the rickshaw at the 6km mark and once we saw that everything was great we headed out for the full 10 km. I was ecstatic. I now had the running partners I needed and no longer felt alone or at risk during the night runs. We look a little like a live Christmas tree going down the road with all the reflective gear and flashing lights to keep us seen by the night drivers.

When a reporter for the local newspaper heard about us he did a cover story, complete with pictures. I have even entered us in some of the fun runs around the city, and I was happy my furry companions were well received by the other runners. Some of the runners have even ordered rickshaws of their own from Tony. I keep trying to get him to set up a website to sell them online. Perhaps he will someday.

To those of you out there who think they are dog people, I say try a cat; and for those of you who are cat people I say try a dog. You

never know when you will get two characters like Pork chop and Apple sauce who will make you view the world in a different light.

