

A PICNIC TO REMEMBER

By Daly Dodsworth

The Collie Rescue of Greater Illinois Picnic buzzed at Green Valley Forest Preserve. Many picnickers, with their collies, filled the large open space. The perfect green grass reflected the sunshine from above. Large oaks provided the needed shade on the very unusually hot September day. Tents lined the area, all with a different purpose: prizes, raffles, auctions, and under the main pavilion was a delicious feast to be served. The sound of barking collies and people's excited voices filled the air. More than 60 dogs became instant companions, all on their best behavior.



CRGI is an organization founded 23 years ago by Tina Kiselka. CRGI rescues and finds loving homes for dogs with specific needs. Due to the difficult process of finding homes for dogs like these, Tina has taken on another job besides her regular work. Although retired now, she continues to run this amazing organization and it's her top priority. Her sacrifices and dedicated work have helped countless dogs. On the day of the picnic, I accompanied Mr. Ted Slupik, my mentor in volunteering. He introduced me to people who perform many duties in the organization. The picnic was also attended by many inspiring adopters, 3 of them were the most memorable.

First, I met Jazzy an 8 year old, "collie wannabe" Australian Shepherd, who was accompanied by her owners, Wendy and her husband, Ron. She was a very cute spunky little dog. Wendy and Ron have had Jazzy for just a few years. Before Jazzy became their dog, the couple had Pepper for 14 years. Both, Pepper and Jazzy, adopted dogs, have been great companions. They reflected on their adoption experiences with only positivity. Pepper comforted Wendy through a long and successful recovery after Wendy was diagnosed with a brain tumor.



Next I interviewed Finley and Brodie. A pair of super laid back and beautiful collies accompanied by Thom and his wife, Dawn. Finley was taken in by this family at the age of 4 months and Brodie at the age of 8 years. The dogs had a few undesirable behaviors they needed to work on. For example, one had a bothersome fear of cars. Thom and Dawn adopted Brodie, the senior dog, because of Thom's kind heart. He and his wife wanted a senior dog, which typically have more trouble finding a home. Finley and Brodie were brought to Collie Rescue, and Collie Rescue provided the resources for the dogs to find a loving home.

A PICNIC TO REMEMBER

By Daly Dodsworth

Misha was an energetic but relaxed and friendly rough coated collie who I interviewed third. His escort was Michael, who has had Misha for 6 years. He was a first time adopter in search of an older dog due to his long work hours. He shares his favorite thing about adopting as “having someone to come home to.” Misha was fostered, and eventually given a forever home when he was adopted by Michael at the age of 5, making an easy transition to his home. Astonishingly, it only took 15 minutes for Misha to adapt to Michael and his new home.

In addition to adopters, there were transporters who attended the picnic. Transporters are volunteers who pick up and drop off dogs in order to deliver them to veterinarian clinics, foster homes, or their new homes. The job they do is very important; I had the opportunity to meet 2 transporters who shared their experiences.

Bill reported he transports because his dog, Lulu, needed to be transported to get to his loving home. Interviewing Bill provoked a misty-eyed response. He likes volunteering and participating in making a difference. He normally drives between 150 to 200 miles to pick up a dog. The farthest he has ever gone was 1,300 miles, showing his marvelous commitment to the organization. He stated he had transported dogs from Saint Louis on several occasions. Being a transporter is a team effort; many different transporters meet and call it, “The Cracker Barrel Relay.” The transporters call it this because Cracker Barrel’s parking lot is a convenient meeting point where dogs are transferred from one car to the other. Bill’s largest transport was 7 dogs, including 6 puppies that were only weeks old.

Mary was another transporter I interviewed. Once, she retrieved a hurting dog that had many ticks and was in poor condition. Mary claims that she fell in love with the dog during the trip, named him Scout, and included him in her family. The farthest Mary has driven was from Chicago to Nebraska, about a 450 mile drive. When Mary picks up the dogs she takes them to the vet right away due to the fact the dogs are usually in miserable shape. Many of the poor dogs she transports to the rescue come from unfit homes where they have been unloved and mistreated.



Besides adopters and transporters, the organization has a team of kind fosterers who take these homeless dogs in and care for them until they find their forever homes.

Cathy told me about her experience as a fosterer. She’s fostered a number of collies in her 20 years of volunteering. In fact, she fostered Misha, before he was given a permanent home with Michael. Misha and Cathy had a happy reunion and Cathy was overjoyed to see Misha so happy in his new loving home. Cathy has fostered 18 dogs, including the one she had at that moment named Maddie. Cathy said that she is delighted when she finds and gives a dog a home that fits their needs. However, she states, “It is always a hard goodbye, but I can be nothing but happy for the dogs and their adopters.” Many fosterers have difficulty letting their fostered dog go, demonstrating Cathy’s courageous acts.

Collie Rescue of Greater Illinois is an inspiring organization. I gained an insight into the amazing attributes that people put forward to give back to their community. All roles in the organization are vital. From the founder, to adopters, fosterers, and transporters, they all have an important role to play. Despite the difficulty of the job, they are dedicated to persevering for the greater good, and providing for these homeless dogs.