

Paws Up for Pets

Rusty finds happy home in Florida after 10 years attached to chain

In my 25 years as a pet-centric journalist, I have had the honor to spotlight some amazing animal stories. But this one definitely demonstrates how a never-give-up resilience can lead to a tail-wagging happy ending in West Palm Beach.

This tale begins in a dirty backyard in rural North Carolina. For 10 years, a medium-sized black dog named Rusty spent his days and nights attached to a chain.

For 10 years Rusty never stepped foot in the home of his owner. His world was limited to a dirt patch in the backyard with a shoddily built doghouse.

Members of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals learned about Rusty early on.

“Rusty was one of thousands of dogs we visit every day, 365 days a year, by our field workers,” says Rachel Bellis, director of local affairs for PETA US. “Studies show that dogs who are chained are almost three times more likely to attack than those who are not.

“That’s because they are forced to eat, sleep and go to the bathroom in this tiny patch of dirt. Their life is the length of their chain they are on. They can become protective and possessive of their space.”

PETA members reached out to his owner and got permission to visit Rusty. Senior field



TOP: Rusty was chained inside a fence with only a shoddy doghouse as shelter. RIGHT: Hannah Caldwell of West Palm Beach adopted Rusty after PETA rescued the pooch. Photos provided

worker Chris Klug made many of those daily visits to bring treats and offer company.

“Rusty became one of our favorite field dogs,” says Bellis. “We reached out to his owner continuously to try to convince her to surrender him so that he could be adopted and live in a home and be part of a family.”

Bellis was ready for my next question: Why keep a dog if he lives on a chain outside?

“People give different reasons to us,” she says. “These dogs to them are cheap alarm systems, or they breed them to make a few bucks on selling the puppies or they simply believe that dogs belong outside and not in the home.”

Finally, the owner gave PETA permission to take Rusty.



He was immediately placed in a foster home. Once given thorough medical care and further assessment, Rusty was ready to be featured in PETA’s website adoption pages.

Hannah Caldwell of West Palm Beach spotted Rusty. Something clicked. She quickly reached out to PETA.

“Rusty looked adorable in the photos and reminded me of my childhood dog, Bentley, who is now 10 and lives with my parents,” says Caldwell, an executive assistant. “I have a soft spot for older dogs because they are so sweet. I saw this as an opportunity to rescue an animal in need. I emailed PETA right away about wanting to adopt Rusty.”

The timing was right for both

More on PETA

PETA is the largest international animal rights organization with more than 9 million members globally. It is headquartered in Norfolk, Virginia. Learn more about it and its volunteer programs at www.peta.org.

Rusty and Hannah. For the past few years, Caldwell was unable to have a dog in the condo she rented, but she now lives in her own home.

“The second that PETA told me that Rusty was mine, I immediately started ordering dog food, doggy items and toys, even though I was not sure if Rusty even loved toys,” says Caldwell.

PETA coordinated Rusty’s 13-hour car ride to Hannah’s home. Klug and a videographer chronicled the trek, sharing photos and videos of the happy Rusty in different states.

On the morning of Aug. 12, 2024, Rusty arrived at Caldwell’s home.

“Aug. 12 — I will always remember that day,” she says. “The first time Rusty saw me, he was wagging his tail at my front door. He just entered and it was like this was his home. The bond between us was instant — 100%. He trusted me and I trusted him

right away.”

Since then, the pair have been nearly inseparable. Rusty joins Hannah for long walks on the beach, at pet-friendly outdoor cafes and when she shops at a Saturday outdoor market. At home, Rusty is never far from her. He also enjoys wearing colorful bow ties and bandanas.

“He definitely has furniture rights, and he sleeps on my bed at night with his head on his pillow,” says Caldwell. “His favorite toy is a stuffed green frog. His favorite treat is peanut butter. I just love his white muzzle. And I especially love that he is happy now.”

Hannah and Rusty illustrate the immeasurable benefits that occur when a person decides to adopt a rescued dog or cat.

“I definitely believe in ‘adopt, don’t shop’ for pets,” says Caldwell. “Give older dogs a chance. Rusty is so easy. He doesn’t chew my furniture. He enjoys his daytime naps. With him in my life, I smile so much more now.”

Arden Moore is an author, speaker and master certified pet first aid instructor. Learn more by visiting www.ardenmoore.com.



When Isabel wanted to try watercolors, *we were there.*

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