

## Walking Shelter Dogs

*Overview: Dogs resident in no-kill animal shelters — especially long-term residents — need extended human contact and exercise. Volunteer to provide a dog the simple pleasures of a walk once or twice a week; it will enrich both your lives.*

The last dogs adopted from animal shelters tend to be black dogs and older dogs (which explains why our first was a black 5-year-old.) Some of them can live at a shelter for years before they're adopted. But it isn't such a great life. They desperately need human contact — for more than a few minutes at a time — and regular exercise. After all, their DNA is 98+ % wolf — they're hard-wired to roam.

Words cannot express the joy on a dog's face — in his whole body — when his "walker" shows up once or twice a week for an hour-long walk. These walks help keep the dog grounded, socialized, and most important — more adoptable. Two keys to success are the shelter's commitment to a walking program, and your commitment to a regular schedule for the dog. Dogs love routine — he knows when it's his day. Don't let him down.

Again, some dogs have been sheltered for years; it is heartbreaking that they don't have a forever home. Some shelters have "open adoption" weekends — like open houses — where they dispense with much of their paperwork. Sometimes people will make appointments to see an older, larger dog. If you can be there when they meet the dog, you can provide some insight and help "sell" the dog — even take them along for a walk so they can see what a happy dog he can be.

Volunteering at your shelter doesn't cost anything. It's a couple of hours a week. The only prerequisite is love and being a sucker for the underdog. And you will both live longer.

- **Gerry Bell**
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