

# Colleen's Fund Newsletter

September 14, 2008

written by Alexandra Morgan

As I sit here in my living room on a rainy afternoon, writing this latest installment of our newsletter, I am surrounded by some of our recent rescue animals who have somehow managed to persuade us that we are their **Forever Home**, and not just a stop on the way there. Since we already own a large number of animals, most of those we rescue stay only days or weeks before moving on....but then, there is **Johnson**. One of my clients was looking for a companion for their current dog, and asked me to help. They wanted a rescued dog, who was adult, small, low or non-shedding, good natured and friendly with other dogs. They asked me to find such a dog and keep him for a few weeks to make sure he had good house manners before they took him home. I found a little fellow at a local shelter whom I thought would be a good match for them, and brought him home for training. He is a Border Terrier- Chihuahua and maybe Lhasa mix, and cute as anything! We named him Johnson. He was already quite well behaved, and in a week I felt he was ready to move to the clients' home, but just then the wife developed a serious health complication, and they decided they could not take him. Well, we could easily have placed him in a different home, but he had started following me around like a silent shadow, charming us all with his exceptionally quirky and delightful personality, and...sleeping curled up beside me every night. So, we decided he would stay forever. I am sitting on the sofa, and where is Johnson? Snuggled up beside me, as always. He has huge fruit-bat ears, and the biggest vocal repertoire of any dog I have ever met. We plan to get some video of him "talking" up on the website soon! ( [www.alexandramorgan.com](http://www.alexandramorgan.com) )

Our most recent rescue, and another who will stay, is **Abby**. I was at the Scituate Animal Shelter recently evaluating dogs for them, and had my husband Dave with me. He fell in love with a kitten who has some sort of neurological problems that cause her to have trouble balancing, It is still uncertain whether it is "wobbly kitten syndrome" which is the result of the mother having had FIP while pregnant, or whether she has some sort of other neurological damage...she is adorable, but I foresee more vet's bills in the future!

On that same day out in Scituate, we saw a dog running across the road near one of the reservoir causeways. She was a big dog, probably a Great Dane-Pitbull mix, and quite skinny. She was clearly terrified, with the panicked look and behavior of a dog in real trouble. We stopped to help her, and she bolted back across the road towards us, almost being hit by a passing car. Despite wanting to come near us, she was too scared to let us touch her, and it took almost half an hour of crouching in the edge of the woods and tossing food to her before I was able to slip a leash on her. As soon as she was leashed, a change came over her face, and she ran straight for the car and jumped in! I left her at the shelter for a week in the hopes an owner would claim her, but no one did. She was not doing well in the shelter environment, being too scared to make friends with anyone, and so I went back and picked her up. She was delighted to see me, and jumped right into the car again! Currently, she is napping on my feet. We have named her **Truie**, (pronounced "troo-ee") which is the French word for a female pig, because she makes the funniest snorting, snuffling pig-like noises. She is theoretically up for adoption, but everyone in the family seems excessively fond of her...hmmmm.

Most of them however, do get adopted out when they are ready. Last year one of my clients called me about a little stray dog she had found at her house. She knew he needed help, but she was not sure what to do. I told her to call the local shelter, since the first step was to find out if he had an owner looking for him. She called and was told the shelter was in quarantine for 2 weeks with an outbreak of canine distemper, and she should just "shoo him away!" She called me again – I went and picked him up. We called him **Joey**. Two weeks of advertising him as "found dog" brought no owner, so I decided it was time to adopt him out. First, a trip to the vet for heartworm and intestinal worm checks, shots

and neutering. He was very cute – a sort of long-legged, medium-snouted Pekingese. A family in Barrington had hired me some time before to find the right dog for them, and I thought Joey would be a good match. They met each other, and their son and daughter fell in love with him immediately! The parents liked him very well, too, and so another little lost dog got a happy ending.

Another easy adoption happened when a woman who had bred a litter of **Labra-dale** (Labrador-Airedale) puppies decided to donate the last one to Colleen's Fund as a fundraiser for us. We advertised the puppy and sold her within a week to a wonderful family! It isn't often that an animal increases the Colleen's Fund bank account instead of decreasing it. Our heartfelt thanks to both the kind breeder and the adopting family!

This was a year when I had several dogs surrendered to me by dog training clients who ended up deciding they could not keep the dog. One was a highly aggressive **Wheaten Terrier**, whom sadly even I could not save, and decided to have euthanized. If a dog cannot learn to be safe and trustworthy with me, then I cannot possibly offer him for adoption, but it is a terrible decision to have to make. On a much happier note, another client decided she could not keep her **Yorkie** mix, and I found her a good home in just a week. One client had three untrained **Papillions**, and was determined to succeed in housetraining all three, as well as teaching them not to bark, to walk nicely on a leash, etc etc. Wow, did she have her work cut out for her! I suggested she might consider rehoming one and thus reduce her rather overwhelming task, but she did not want to. To my delight, she devoted herself to the training and succeeded very well. However, about a year later her life went through some changes, and she decided that two of the dogs needed new homes. Thanks to all the training work she had done, I was able to place them both quickly and easily. I also took in a chocolate colored **Pitbull** mix puppy whose owners could not keep her, and placed her in a good family within a few days.

We have saved far more cats and kittens than dogs...so many, in fact, that as I sit here trying to remember them all, I find I keep coming up with more and more! I'll just mention a few...during the summer I found two tiny, orange, long-haired kittens in the woods near a friend's house. With them tucked in the front of my jacket I went talking to neighbors to ask if anyone knew about them. Finally I found a woman who said the mother of the kittens was "hers" – she didn't bother to spay or vaccinate this cat, but did put out food for it. Every year, the woman said, the cat would have a litter or two of kittens which her kids enjoyed playing with...which is why the kittens were friendly rather than wild. I talked to her about getting the cat spayed, and offered that we would pay for it, but she said the cat had disappeared a few days before. Since it is unlikely the cat would have abandoned her kittens, my guess is that she was killed by a car, or a coyote. A sad end for her...but at least I took the kittens home. Since one had two extra toes and one had three extras, we called them **Two-Toes** and **Three-Toes**. They were loaded with several kinds of intestinal parasites and fleas, but we took care of that. After a short while they were ready for adoption, and their new owners prepaid to have them neutered when they were old enough.

While driving to a client's for dog training, I passed a "free kittens" sign, and stopped, as I always do. I try to educate the owners about spaying and neutering, vaccinating, and charging at least a small amount of money for kittens or puppies to help prevent "impulse adoptions"...usually it ends up with me taking the entire litter home with me, and making arrangements to get the adults spayed, neutered and vaccinated. This time, I ended up with **four kittens, two mother cats, an adult feral male** and the promise that I would make arrangements for the neutering and vaccinating of two other cats the family kept. Sadly, the feral male, who was completely wild, had Leukemia, which meant he could not be released after neutering, so I had him euthanized. The mothers and kittens, however, did well and all went to new homes.

“Feral” means a cat or dog is born in the wild and therefore not socialized to humans. If they are found and tamed when they are young enough, they turn into normal, friendly pets, but the window of opportunity to tame them is very brief. For both dogs and cats, if they are not socialized by 16 weeks old, it is too late. If the mother animal is not friendly to humans then the babies should be separated from her by about 4 weeks old, so they do not continue to learn from her to fear humans. Of course, separating the babies from the mother creates its own set of problems, but it is the lesser of two bad situations.

We frequently take in and tame feral kittens, with mixed results depending not only on their age at the time we get them, but also on their individual genetic temperaments. We currently have a litter of four that arrived at about 12 weeks of age. **George** and **Simon** have become very friendly with us, although still jumpy around anything new or startling, **Simone** is shy but gentle, and **Gracie** is still too nervous to enjoy being patted, although she will tolerate being touched while she eats. They are all currently up for adoption, and you can see their pictures on my website [www.alexandramorgan.com](http://www.alexandramorgan.com) on the Rescue page, or at [www.petfinder.com](http://www.petfinder.com). Since it is hard to find good homes for cats who are not friendly, I suspect Gracie will end up staying with us forever, as one of our feral cat population.

Last year we took in **two feral kittens** whom I felt were so wild that there was little hope for them, but my husband proved me wrong! After a week of slow, patient work, he had them both turned into purring furballs, and both found wonderful homes!

I want to give you an update on two dogs I have written about before. First **Liam**, a greyhound I took in as a puppy, who was exceptionally hard to housetrain. He finally found a home with a client of mine who had another rescue dog who had issues of fear aggression with strangers. Liam, who loved everybody he ever met, helped this dog to become more outgoing, relaxed and confident when meeting people.

Secondly, **Pujo**, the Lhasa Apso abandoned to me by uncaring owners, is still healthy and happy at about 12 years old. Her loving “mom” brings her to be groomed by me every few weeks, since she still won’t tolerate grooming by anyone else.

For those of you with internet access, the stories (and photos) of our rescued pig, Quentin, and of the elderly Sheltie rescued during the days I ran Animal School are both on the website now: “The Fortunate Pig & the Amorous Duck” and “Letters from Bonnie”.

As another anniversary of Colleen O’Neill’s untimely death approaches, I find myself thinking often of her. She was so young – she would have changed and grown in these intervening years. Would she still be so passionately involved with animal rescue? I like to think so, and I imagine she would be pleased with the work we continue to do in her name.

I hope this letter finds both you and your four-legged friends healthy and happy,

Sincerely yours,  
**Alexandra Morgan**

## **A Brief Explanation about Colleen's Fund for Animals**

I have been a professional animal trainer since 1984, and since childhood I have been deeply involved in the policy of Rescue-Train-Rehome...and, of course, get any necessary veterinary work done! I have always done private, in-home dog training lessons, and from 1998-2001 I also ran Alexandra Morgan's Animal School in East Providence, Rhode Island, where I taught both private and group dog training lessons, had boarding, grooming and doggie daycare. I also expanded my rescue efforts for dogs and cats.

In the fall of 2000, one of my dog daycare employees, a young woman named Colleen O'Neill, died suddenly. Because of Colleen's warm heart and great interest in helping animals in need, the O'Neill family asked that in lieu of funeral bouquets, monetary donations be sent to Animal School for the strays. Because of this, I was able to open a Rescue bank account with a starting balance of \$980!! Since then, despite the closing of Animal School (although I still train dogs) the rescue work continues. Most owner-surrendered animals come in with a donation, and every person adopting an animal makes a donation. Additionally, some money comes in from Colleen's friends and family who continue to support us in her memory, and sometimes a Good Samaritan sends us a check out of the blue!

I send out this news letter to everyone who has adopted animals from me since 2001, to everyone who has asked to receive it or made a donation to Colleen's Fund, and to all of the people who so generously started the Fund through their donations at the time of Colleen's passing. I hope you enjoy reading it and, to be quite honest...I hope you will send us a donation to help us continue this work!! All of your money goes directly to pay for food, litter and veterinary expenses for the animals, and the yearly vet bill is usually around \$2000. All care, training and interviews for re-homing are done by myself and my husband Dave, and all other related expenses are paid for by us. It is our gift to the animals.

*"I want **Colleen's Fund for Animals** to stand as a lasting tribute to Colleen O'Neill's memory, I want it to be a source of pride and pleasure to her family and friends. For those people who receive this newsletter but never had the good fortune to know Colleen, I hope it allows some of her kindness and compassion to enter your lives."*

—Excerpt from the first newsletter, April 16, 2001

*please send donations to:*

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