

Kris Larson – North Bay Canine Rescue



**Making a Difference: North Bay Canine Rescue is saving smart dogs  
by Kris Larson  
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Hollie Lama and her partner-in-rescue, Janice Theller, have saved more than 500 herding breed dogs through their rescue group, North Bay Canine Rescue & Placement. Since Theller passed away, Lama has been trying to keep the group running while holding her own full-time job. She talked to FETCH about her love of herding breeds and dogs who outsmart their people.

How did North Bay Canine get started?

[Janice and I] have both always been around animals. I worked at Marin Humane, and she had done various work with cats and finding feral cats. I think if you look around and you're an animal person, you see there are problems. We both thought we could make a dent, and we both really liked herding dogs, so we focused on the herding breeds.

When I wanted to [adopt a new] dog, I went to a shelter and someone said "have you thought of rescue?" My initial instinct was: I don't have time to train a dog to do rescue! I was picturing Saint Bernards in the snow, you know. But they said "no, we mean dog rescue, not rescue dogs!" That was my first intro into the rescue network. [Laughs.] Even today, a lot of people still don't know what the heck you're talking about.

What are the dogs being rescued from?

Mostly shelters, but over the years we've rescued dogs from crisis situations and neglect [at home]. Maybe the dogs are living their life on a chain. We try to convince their owners, telling them that that the dogs are barking, the neighbors are complaining, how about we help you out. When we first started we saw someone whose dogs kept being bred and there were puppies running around. Dogs kept having puppies, getting hit by cars – [in that case] the neighbor convinced the owners to give them up.

How do you convince someone to give up his or her dog?

It's not necessarily their pet. Sometimes they're glad to get rid of them. But lots of times you do get tired of trying to convince people. Also, some of us are a little holier-than-thou and "we know what's best for your dog." [Laughs.] We have to temper that with tactfulness and communication skills. It's a fine line between marketing skills and salesmanship, and the other extreme, saying the dogs are more important than people.

Do you ever encounter situations where it's hard to say what's mistreatment and what's not?

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That's the hard one to call. Everybody has their own standards of good dog care. For instance, in our adoption contract it says [dogs] will not be chained up or used for fighting. But some people think they're keeping the dog safe on a chain. It's a tough call. There's a fine line between an animal being a family member or a commodity or a working tool.

What happens to the dogs once you take them in?

Some of them are underweight or stressed, if they come from a shelter. It takes a while to figure out what you've got. They're depressed, they're wound up, so you've got to give them some time to come back to earth. So they go in a foster home, and they go to the vet for a basic checkup, heartworm, microchip, spay/neuter and worming.

Then you've got to find just the right home. People come and meet the dog, and then we send them away to really think about it – so many adoptions are done on impulse. Then we try to work out any bugs through conversations, and we deliver the dog and do a home check when the whole family's there. With herding dogs, we've learned if you bring them in when only part of the family is there, they bond with just those people and don't want to share with the rest. You also try to have [the family] plan as much downtime as they can.

What are the requirements to foster dogs?

You should be willing to learn about herding dogs. They're high-energy and intelligent, not a dog that can be left 8 or 10 hours a day. Also, the dogs aren't always housebroken or obedience-trained. The home needs an enclosed area, especially if you're in a country setting where they're bored and they see the neighbor's sheep. A lot of them do fine in the city with exercise.

What do you love about herding breeds?

They're really keyed in on their people. So when you go places, you don't have to worry as much about them wandering. They keep you in sight and pay attention to where you are. And they're intelligent. Well, everyone says their breed is smart, but I think if you looked at a list of the most intelligent breeds, they're up there. You know, after *Babe* came out, everyone had to have a border collie, [but] most of the people were not as bright as the dogs they were getting.

Can I quote you on that?

[Laughs.] Absolutely. You have to be a bright owner to have a bright dog!

*North Bay Canine needs foster homes, and volunteers to help with administrative tasks such as web work and phone calls. They're also looking for help in becoming a 501c3. For more information, visit their website at <http://www.northbay-canine.org> or call (707) 763-7603.*

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