

Calgary Herald

Pets Come Home For The Holidays, Too; If it's time for a creature to join your family, shelters can be a great source of information and animals

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Spotlight

In Calgary, the Meow Foundation is participating in the Iams Homes 4 the Holidays program until Jan. 1, 2009 (meowfoundation.com; 403-230-6033).

The Calgary Humane Society isn't part of the program, but has a vast array of information to help you with the adoption process and with behavioural problems you might be having with existing pets (calgaryhumane.ca; 403-205-4455).

You can also adopt dogs and cats through the City of Calgary, where you'll also find information about licensing requirements (calgary.ca; 311).

In July 2008, my blogworld friend Tara lost her gorgeous retriever Bailey to pancreatic disease. All Tara's friends, real-and virtual-world, rallied around her. Most of us had ourselves been touched by both the love and loss of animals.

In her blog (cowgirlyougotthatsomething.blogspot.com), Tara described her relationship with Bailey in a way that brought tears to my eyes, and I'm sure many others too.

"We adopted Bailey from the pound when he was already nine years old. From the second we took the leash, he was our dog and the best dog we ever could have hoped for. He slept on our bed the first night home with us and it seemed there was zero period of adjustment. To this day, I'm in disbelief that anyone could have ever given him up.

"It was like sharing the house with a really old teddy bear--his neck was made for burying your face in and the bridge of his honey snout was a perfect fit for my forehead. I don't know what I'm going to do without his furry face around to keep me company . . . Our hearts are truly broken."

While you can never replace a particular pet, most animal-lovers love for life. Once you've let pets into your home, it's hard to imagine life without them. Tara and husband Marc took their time. They generously dog-sat and fostered a few dogs. And then finally, a few weekends ago, they found their new family member.

Sadie, a Bernese Mountain Dog, was owned by a

family who, for various reasons, found her overwhelming to care for. This is a situation too many people find themselves in and a reminder to do your homework before you settle on a particular species or breed.

The decision to give a pup like Sadie up for adoption could not have been an easy one, and the fact that they took their time to look for the right adoptive parents is to this family's credit. In Tara and Marc, Sadie has found the perfect loving home she deserves.

While not ideal, Sadie's story is a dream compared to some animals who are homeless, mistreated or injured. With millions of orphaned animals worldwide and limited space in under-funded and over-worked animal shelters, it doesn't take long to figure out that Sadie is one of the lucky ones.

To help the less fortunate animals, this year Iams Home 4 the Holidays is again running its annual adoption program with the goal of finding loving homes for at least 1 million animals, from dogs and cats to rabbits, reptiles and birds, between Oct. 1, 2008 and Jan. 5, 2009.

This program has placed more than 2 million pets into homes since it began in 1999. Working with nearly 3,000 animal organizations, the global effort focuses on raising awareness about pet adoptions.

Actress Felicity Huffman was motivated by her own animal adoption experience to become the North American Ambassador for the Iams Home 4 The Holidays drive. Her black Labrador, Tucker, was adopted as a puppy from an L. A. rescue group in 2006. Animals like Tucker and Sadie are just waiting for love from the right, committed owners.

Whether you're considering adopting or purchasing an animal, the same rules apply: do your homework. Research the species and breed and make sure the entire family is engaged in this important decision. We all know how irresistible those yearning eyes can be. Don't ever underestimate the time and financial investment pet-ownership entails.

Also, remember that animals are available for adoption for many reasons. There are some with behavioural problems or medical issues their owners could not manage. Such special needs animals require owners with more experience, energy and

even time and space.

However, there are also many animals in shelters who simply have not found the right owner. Or perhaps their owner has passed away. Indeed, there are myriad reasons why animals end up in shelters and if you're considering an addition to the family, you should never rule out the possibility of adoption.

Anyone who adopts a dog, puppy, cat or kitten through the Iams pet adoption campaign will receive an adoption starter kit, which includes a care guide chock-full of tips and information about pet care, behaviour, training and nutrition. The kit also includes your new pet's first meal as well as coupons for great savings on additional pet food, supplies and animal health insurance. (Other adoption plans often offer similar programs.)

I'm busy living vicariously through Tara and Sadie right now, but that's not my only option. If, like me, you are not in a position to give an animal a home, consider volunteering or making a donation to support your lo-cal animal organization. It's just one way to give some love back to our four-legged, feathered or scaled friends.