



## *Leslie Tilander:* **One Dog at A Time**

**/// My profound respect and appreciation for all living creatures was encouraged and nurtured from a very early age by my parents.**

“From the time I was a small child, I knew animals would play an integral role in my life, but I could never have imagined where that love would lead me.”

It took Leslie Tilander a while to find her niche. She volunteered at her local SPCA to dog-walk, fundraise, and do adoption follow-up and fostering.

She was especially fond of small-breed dogs, but she wasn't seeing many at the shelter. Small-breed dogs were always quickly adopted. “That's a good thing,” says Leslie, “but I noticed that many people going to the shelter to adopt little dogs would leave discouraged when they couldn't find any. Often, these people would end up going to pet stores and backyard breeders to purchase small-breed dogs. In so doing, they were unknowingly supporting puppy mills and unscrupulous breeders—people who breed solely for profit with no regard whatsoever for the well-being of the animals.”

A local puppy mill had been recently closed down and Leslie heard that some of the dogs were in the care of a rescue group. She was interested in adopting two of the adult “breeder” dogs.

“I was amazed and impressed by the screening process involved in adopting a dog from that group, as well as the post-adoption follow-up. I learned that many rescuers pay for the majority of their expenses out of their own pockets. I wanted to know more about this special breed of people.”

There are rescue groups for almost every type of animal—from hamsters and rabbits to lizards and snakes and of course

cats and dogs. Leslie discovered that small-breed dogs were being euthanized by the thousands after a mere four days in Los Angeles city shelters because of critical overcrowding, while people in BC were buying pups from pet stores and backyard breeders. She knew she had to get involved to help bridge that gap.

So in September 2002, Forever After Small Dog Rescue was born. “I contacted various rescue groups in the Los Angeles area to see how I could help. It took a lot of communication and dialogue back and forth to finally establish trust and find an LA rescue group willing to work with me but, over time, I formed a wonderful working relationship with a group called

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Life 4 Paws in the West Valley area of Los Angeles.”

With their help, to date, Furever After Small Dog Rescue has played an integral role in the rescuing and re-homing of 30 dogs, dogs who were otherwise destined for euthanasia. Although the majority came from LA, a few were local dogs. Leslie has been asked to help with a few BC dogs with high medical needs or who have been extremely stressed in the shelter environment.

Even though the concept seems simple, the organization necessary to rescue small, abandoned dogs is intense. Leslie says most rescuers spend half their lives on the computer, organizing transportation and foster care as well as screening potential adopters. Thank goodness for email! The phone bills would be staggering.

Once in the care of Life 4 Paws, the dogs go to foster homes in LA for one to two weeks. The foster homes assess their temperaments and identify any immediate medical needs.

Prior to leaving Los Angeles, the dogs are vet-checked, spayed/neutered, microchipped for permanent identification, and vaccinated. Then they are flown to Vancouver. Furever After Small Dog Rescue places them in interim foster homes where any behavioral issues and further medical conditions can be addressed.

She says, “Because small-breed dogs are particularly susceptible to gum disease and tooth decay—which is painful and can lead to other health problems—I make it a priority to take care of their dental health, which has generally been ignored or neglected in their past.”

The foster parents in BC have the opportunity to get to know a dog’s individual personality. The dogs are listed for adoption online at **www.fureverafter.petfinder.com**. Every effort is made to find the best possible match between dog and family. Adoption support and follow-up via telephone, email, or home visits—depending on the situation—ensures a successful transition of the new family member into the home.

The cost of transporting each dog from LA to Vancouver is generally over \$100 and it is not uncommon to spend \$500 to \$600 per dog in medical costs. Although adopters pay a small adoption fee to help cover some of the costs, the majority of the expenses are paid from Leslie’s pocket. “Fortunately, I work as a registered nurse and often work overtime to help pay the bills.”

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The process of rescuing and re-homing abused and neglected dogs is physically, emotionally, and financially demanding, but the rewards are so worthwhile, she says! Occasionally, when the bills seem overwhelming, small fundraisers such as garage sales or bake sales are organized to help offset costs. Leslie is currently exploring the option of applying for official non-profit charity status, to provide tax receipts for people who would like to donate funds to help the dogs.

In addition to finding homes for abandoned dogs, she cares for her own brood! Several of her dogs, deemed unadoptable for behavioral and/or medical reasons, are now thriving in a loving home environment. “Many dogs are surrendered to shelters because their guardians fail to seek veterinary care for them; they simply believe their problems are behavioral in nature,” says Leslie.

Leslie is always looking for reliable volunteers to help with fostering, fundraising, and transporting dogs within BC. “The problem of pet overpopulation is extensive and ongoing, but I am committed to making a difference, one dog at a time.” ▲

**If you would like to help, please email [fureverafter@hotmail.com](mailto:fureverafter@hotmail.com).**