

Canine Redemption

By Jennifer Sienes

Guilt, shame, and a measure of frustration arrowed its way into my heart with her unwavering, brown-eyed stare. She was judging me, and who could blame her? She spent much of her day in a large kennel, pacing back and forth, waiting for the attention she deserved. A pathetic whine reached my ears—begging wasn't beneath her. It was with the best of intentions that we took in Cheyenne, a German shepherd mix, eighteen months before. But I didn't know then that I'd have to go back to work full-time, and she was now paying the price.

"We *have* to find her a new home," I told my husband Chris as we turned our backs on Cheyenne and escaped into the house. "It's not fair that she's locked up all day."

"Have you seen how many dogs need homes?" He led me to his office and, with a couple clicks of the mouse, opened up the California Dog Rescue site with which we'd recently listed her after other avenues had failed. With each page of dog pictures he scrolled through, my heart sank a little deeper.

Someone suggested the animal shelter, but even if we could be assured the she'd find a home, we had no way of knowing if it was the *right* home. And nothing less would do.

Please, God. Find Cheyenne the perfect home. This had been my mantra for weeks, but my prayers were colored with shame. Didn't Chris tell me eighteen months ago that it wasn't the right time to get a dog? Did I listen? No. Instead, I regaled him with

pictures of Cheyenne as a new puppy until he caved. This situation was a consequence of our sin—mine for not submitting to my husband’s decision, and his for allowing me to sway him. It was Adam and Eve all over again. *Yes, God, we brought this on ourselves, but it isn’t Cheyenne’s fault. She shouldn’t be punished.*

Chris turned from his computer and gave me a hug. “It’ll all work out.”

The eternal optimist.

“Sure.” I shrugged. If God could raise the dead, He certainly could find a home for one neglected dog... Hadn’t He always provided before?

A few weeks later, we were heading out the door, a list of errands in hand, when the phone rang.

“Hello?”

“Hi. My name is Erica. Vicki, from California Dog Rescue, gave me your number. Is your dog still available?”

It wasn’t the first time someone had shown interest in Cheyenne. The last person who called wanted to know how Cheyenne would react with chickens (seriously?) and would she stay in an unfenced yard and guard the house. They didn’t want a rescue dog, they wanted a highly trained police dog! But I sensed Erica was different. Could this be the home I’d been praying for?

Erica and her family lived three hours away, but rather than meet in the middle, Chris and I offered to drive Cheyenne to their home. What better way to see how

Cheyenne would react—and for us to see where she might be living? My prayer had been for the *perfect* home. Not just *any* home.

The following weekend, we packed up Cheyenne, her crate, and a container of dog food—just in case. If they decided to keep her, we didn't want the transition to be any more difficult on her than possible. We stopped at a park near Erica's house to let the dog out for a while. It was important to Erica that Cheyenne be fairly easy for her daughters to walk. Best to get some of the spunk out of her system before we showed up.

We lived in the country, so a “walk” for Cheyenne was to let her loose to run ahead of us. We expected the concept of a leash to be less than appealing, so we were pleasantly surprised when she heeled next to us like a pro. She wasn't distracted by children or other dogs. I guess the twelve weeks of dog training she'd had when we first brought her home paid off. It wasn't the first time we saw her potential, if only we had enough time to invest.

Erica's house was in a busy town, but much to our relief, it was situated at the end of a quiet cul-de-sac. Cheyenne wasn't used to traffic, so she wasn't what Chris called “car smart.” A home isolated from traffic was the first plus. The second was Erica herself. A broad smile illuminated her face as she came out to greet us. “We're so excited to meet Cheyenne.”

Erica's husband, Ben, wasn't home from work yet, but he was on his way. I knew from our conversation on the phone that Ben would be the hard sell. However, her

daughters, Cordelia (thirteen) and Juliette (ten) were both waiting to see if they had a new member of the family.

They *oohed* and *ahhed* over Cheyenne, as she dashed from smell to smell in their backyard, her half-mast shepherd ears twitching every time her name was called.

“She’s beautiful,” Erica said, her eyes taking in the dog like a kid at her first circus. “So many colors.”

“Her mother was a very small German shepherd.” I stroked Cheyenne’s soft ear as she passed by me. “And we believe her dad was an Australian shepherd, which explains her unique coloring.” Cheyenne’s coat was an odd mix of black, brown, and gray. Her thick gray-and-black-striped tail looked like it would be more at home on a raccoon than a dog.

Within minutes, Ben appeared with a welcoming smile and a pocket full of dog treats. It took only moments for Cheyenne to discern who she needed to impress. Nobody would accuse her of being stupid. As Ben reached into his pocket, she plopped down in front of him in a perfect sit position, laser-focused.

For nearly an hour, we watched as Cheyenne was given a tour of her new home. She sniffed out the rabbit cage and checked out the backyard pond. Then they took her inside and introduced her to each room of the house. She had never been an indoor dog, so I wasn’t quite sure what she’d do. But with excitement and curiosity she pranced from the living room to the kitchen to the bedrooms and back again.

“I think she likes it here.”

Eric beamed.

Ben retrieved another doggie treat.

Cordelia dropped a kiss on Cheyenne's head.

Juliette smiled shyly from the corner of the living room.

Leaving her behind was harder than I'd anticipated. I'd wanted a new home for her—a *perfect* home—and that's what this was. So, why was it so hard? It didn't help that as we got ready to leave, Cheyenne attached herself to us, as if she had no intention of being left behind.

"No, no, Cheyenne." Erica took hold of Cheyenne's collar and held her in place.

We passed through the sliding glass door and shut it behind us. I looked back once more—Cheyenne stood there, her wet nose pressed to the glass and confusion in her eyes and stance.

"She'll be happy here." Chris took my hand and led me to the truck. "She just needs some time to adjust."

In the days that followed, Erica sent me update texts along with pictures. Cheyenne with her new collar and bling-bling name tag. Cheyenne being hugged by Juliette. Cordelia teaching Cheyenne to shake and roll over. Cheyenne and Cordelia, asleep, side by side, on the living room floor. With each text and picture, my heart swelled.

It is because of this joy that I know God hand-chose this family for Cheyenne. I am amazed at how He is so concerned with each and every aspect of our lives, that He'd

care where one neglected dog would end up. He blessed us, He blessed Erica's family, and I have no doubt He blessed Cheyenne, as well.

As Chris and I navigate through the seasons of our life together, we will always remember God's faithfulness in even the smallest details. I picture Cheyenne in my mind's eye and my heart overflows. I know she is loved beyond what we could have given her, and she in turn brings joy to Erica and her sweet family.

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Romans 15:13)