

# Homeless Senior Dogs Get a New Leash on Life

Shelter dogs over the age of seven are among the last to find homes. Too often, these dogs are euthanized after passing their 'sell by' date. Sherri Franklin founded an organization a dozen years ago to address this heartbreaking situation.

Analysis by [Dr. Karen Shaw Becker](#)

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## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Sherri Franklin founded Muttville Senior Dog Rescue in 2007 after the painful realization that many older shelter dogs never find new homes
- Muttville's mission, in addition to saving and rehoming seniors, is to spread the word around the world about the specialness of older dogs
- Sherri and her team make it a point to always speak of seniors in positive terms to increase awareness and acceptance of older dogs as desirable pets
- People are beginning to step up in larger numbers to adopt older dogs, realizing how rewarding the experience can be

**Editor's Note: This article is a reprint. It was originally published February 28, 2019.**

Today, my wonderful guest is Sherri Franklin, founder of Muttville Senior Dog Rescue in San Francisco. Some of you may have read a recent article here at Mercola Healthy Pets in which I mentioned the amazing work Sherri is doing. I was so inspired by what I learned that I contacted her and asked if she'd be willing to sit down for a chat with me. I'm very excited she did!

"Thank you for having me," Sherri replies. "And for helping me spread the word and the gospel of senior dogs. It makes me very happy!"

Sherri's love for older dogs started about 25 years ago when she began volunteering as a dog walker at the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA), where she fell for an 8-year-old female Beagle mix with a wagging tail and a sense of fun. She went to the shelter every day before work to make sure the dog got out for a walk.

*"One day I came in and she wasn't there," Sherri explains. "I thought, 'That's so great. She got adopted!' I asked about her and was told she'd been euthanized because she'd been there too long and kept being passed over for younger dogs. I was devastated. On that day, I vowed I would do something about the situation."*

Sherri began taking senior dogs home with her every week and finding homes for them. Once she knew she could do it, she decided to start a nonprofit. It was an uphill battle and lots of hard work, but in 2007, she opened Muttville Senior Dog Rescue, and there was no turning back. As of this writing, Sherri's rescue has saved over 6,000 senior dogs

and found them all great homes.

## **‘With an Older Dog, Every Moment Is Precious’**

I’ve always thought senior dogs are an obvious choice for, say, people who work outside the home as well as older people, because they’re generally calmer, and their personalities are set. What you see is what you get, as opposed to all the work and surprises that come along with raising a puppy. I asked Sherri why so many people don’t seem to want to adopt senior dogs.

*“I hear things like, ‘I don’t want to get an older dog because I just lost my dog and I don’t want to go through that pain again so soon,’”* Sherri explains. *“But the truth is that when you adopt an older dog, you know going in that your time is limited. And people tell me all the time how rewarding it is to feel as though every moment counts.”*

*“With an older dog, every moment is precious. You learn to live in the moment. And I personally feel very grateful to be able to give an older dog a second chance at happiness.”*

Muttville has lots of return customers — adopters who come back time and again because they love the soulfulness of older dogs and the relief they seem to feel the moment they arrive in their new home. It’s as if they know they’ve been rescued, and they reward their rescuers every day.

## **How Dogs Wind Up Homeless in Their Senior Years**

All the reasons senior dogs end up homeless are sad, but some are sadder than others. Often, an elderly pet parent must move into a nursing home and can’t take their beloved dog with them, or an owner dies and his or her family can’t care for the pet left behind.

There are people who move and can’t or don’t want to take their dog to the new place, or the new landlord won’t allow it. Some new parents decide they no longer want to also care for a dog. And believe it or not, there are people who decide to get a new puppy and get rid of their older dog.

Some of the dogs Sherri rescues come from extremely loving homes and have never known anything else, while others have lived their entire lives in the backyard. All these dogs need lots of love, and fortunately, there are adopters looking for well-loved dogs, and others looking for the saddest, worst-case scenario, so there’s plenty of love to go around no matter a dog’s background.

The Muttville shelter is a home-like environment, Sherri explains. There are no kennels. Most new dogs take from 24 to 48 hours to warm up to their surroundings. Some come in ready to hide or run from anything that moves, but 48 hours later, they’re crawling into someone’s lap, begging to be loved.

*“I think dogs know when they’re safe,”* says Sherri. *“At Muttville, we really try to create a place that feels very safe to the dogs, as well as the humans who come to visit them.”*

## Shelter Dogs Age 7 and Older Are Often Passed By

Muttville's minimum age for dogs is 7. Sherri picked that age because in her experience volunteering at shelters, dogs 7 and older are the ones who are passed by. Exceptions would be a giant breed such as a Great Dane or Mastiff who is a little younger, say, 5 years old, because they age faster and don't live as long as smaller breeds. Believe it or not, one of the oldest dogs at Muttville was a 19-year-old Jack Russell!

*"His name was Goofy," says Sherri, "and was he ever goofy! He was so fun. I loved taking him to the beach. We get some 17- and 18-year-old dogs, but our average age is 10. We don't have a cutoff on age, but we definitely want to look at quality of life. We do believe in euthanasia as a gift to an animal who's suffering."*

*If we have an elderly dog who is really not having a good time in life anymore, we aren't afraid to have that discussion, sometimes with the owner who's surrendering the dog, or within our team. It just depends on the individual dog and his or her quality of life. If we have a 17-year-old dog who's happy and interacting with other dogs and people, he'll find a home."*

I asked Sherri how big the demand is for shelter space for senior dogs. She explained that as word about Muttville has spread, she's received more and more requests. They take in from 20 to 25 dogs a week and adopt out about the same number. So while the need for new homes for these dogs is great, fortunately, more people are stepping up to adopt these days.

## Making Senior Dogs Sexy

Sherri isn't interested in opening more Muttvilles — her goal is to spread the word about how her shelter operates and the value of senior dogs. She speaks at animal welfare events about how to market older adoptable dogs and how to "make senior dogs sexy," as she puts it.

*"We learn from our mistakes," says Sherri. "We learn from our successes. We're developing a lot of different programs. We have a **hospice program** that has really taken off and been extremely successful in finding homes for dogs who maybe don't have as long to live or are suffering from an inoperable condition. We also have interns who visit Muttville to learn what we're doing and take it back to their shelters."*

Not only is Sherri changing hearts and minds about senior dogs, but also seniors with special needs. These are the dogs who were automatically euthanized back when I volunteered at shelters, because they required too much care.

*"I believe there's a person out there for every dog," says Sherri. "Sometimes it takes a little longer to find them. For example, my favorite dog to this day is Spanky. He came to us dragging his back legs, with urine burns all over his body. He couldn't urinate on his own and his bladder had to be manually expressed."*

*We got him wheels and nicknamed him Spanky Hotwheels because he ran with his new wheels. He was so full of joy just to be able to finally get around."*

Part of Sherri's marketing strategy in making a dog like Spanky sexy to prospective adopters is to, for example, talk about how easy it is to meet new people when your dog is running around on wheels! For the bladder expression situation, she explains that Spanky is perfectly housetrained because he literally can't pee until his human takes him to

his potty spot and helps him urinate.

*"We always talk about how positive the experience can be," Sherri explains. "It doesn't have to be a hardship. It can be something really fun and rewarding and enjoyable. We always put a positive spin on the story. We want to be hopeful. Hope sells. Positive stories sell. From our first day we've talked about these animals in a very positive way, instead of in a negative way. I think that's what attracts so many adopters to us."*

Sherri and her team try very hard to make great matches, but if an adopter brings a dog back, he or she isn't judged. They want to make Muttville accessible and comfortable for everyone who visits. Each visitor is treated with respect, and someone is always there to answer their questions and concerns and help them find the right animal.

## **Guess What? We All Get Old**

One of the keys to Muttville's success is Sherri's team of shelter staff plus about 300 volunteers and 75 foster homes, 50 of which are active at all times. There's an adoption manager and a foster care/volunteer manager. Without these people, says Sherri, Muttville wouldn't exist.

Each dog is walked at least two to three times a day by volunteers who are devoted to seniors. "We really struck a chord with the general population," says Sherri, "because guess what? We all get old."

If you want to learn more about Sherri's rescue, check out the **Muttville** website, or visit them on **Facebook**, **Instagram** or **Twitter**. I asked Sherri for some final words of wisdom for everyone watching or reading here today who is involved with senior dogs in some way or is considering adopting an older dog.

*"Never say never," she replied. "Don't ever say, 'That dog is never going to find a good home.' Don't say, 'I could never do that.' Never say never, because things change, and people step up and help. Also, don't be afraid to ask for help. You'll get a lot more 'yes' answers than you would if you never asked at all."*

Sherri is doing inspiring, amazing work bringing public awareness to the plight of senior homeless dogs and helping them find special humans to spend the remainder of their lives with. People the world over are opening their hearts and homes to dogs over 7 thanks to Sherri and Muttville Senior Dog Rescue.

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