

# Breaking through to Sophie

A 2 year old stray no one had claimed and slated for euthanasia, Sophie made her way with 29 other dogs from Kern County to El Cajon, CA. where she was taken in by a no kill rescue group. A sorry sight , with an ear tattered from flea and fly bites, she acted fearful and nervous. No one had even heard her bark. The first line of the adoption preparedness process established she had whipworm and needed to be spayed. Therefore, her initial encounter with well-intentioned people in the rescue group was painful. Wire(!?) sutures for the spaying, several strong wormer treatments for the parasites and topical treatment for her sore ear.

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Alice and John were ready to adopt again. They had waited three years after their female dog passed to be sure not to compare a new dog to her. John spotted Sophie on a website and was immediately drawn in. They located her at the rescue group and decided to take her home. Flighty and not easy to catch, they watched in dismay as she cried in pain and anguish as she was grabbed and microchipped before she was handed over to their care. At home, they continued and completed her various medical treatments.

After three months of consistent care and love they found she remained very much to herself, and it was getting worse. Everyday, she'd go outside on the hilly part of their back yard and stay there for hours on end, watching into the distance, her back to the house. She came in at dusk and yearned to go back out in the morning. She would have stayed out all night had they let her. No amount of calling or coaxing could bring her to come down for long. As soon as she could, she would make her way back to her lookout. An invisible line separated her life from theirs. They tried

taking her places in the car, but she found no pleasure in the rides and threw up. Alice and John were flummoxed by their new dog's mind-set. She was so different from other dogs adopted in the past. In all ways Sophie was sweet and intelligent. They yearned to develop a proper relationship with her. They couldn't figure out why she was so distant and hoped a consult would enlighten all of us as to what was going on inside Sophie's heart and mind.

Here is Sophie's transcript of our communication last summer:

BN: Hello Sophie,

This is Brigitte, the One Who Listens. Would you like to share with me? I am a translator for dogs. I communicate what you send to me to your people.

Sophie: *I am very happy and safe here. (In BN's office.) Please let them know my primary concern is always, always, always how safe anything or any place is for me. I am very uncertain about "New". "New" hasn't been easy for me. There is a lot of new, new, new, all, all, all the time. I get very tired of sorting out "New".*

BN: Yes, I understand that. John and Alice love and care about you very much. They want to know more about you. They are very curious about who your are and so am I.

BN: What have you come in to do?

Sophie: *I have come in to be loved. I CRAVE, CRAVE, CRAVE LOVE. All I desire is LOVE. I am a very loving dog, very, but I'm UNCERTAIN. I'm NEVER SURE, NEVER, that I won't be hit or pushed back when I reach out for love. All I ever heard was how stupid and dirty I was. "Get out of the way you stupid and dirty dog", is all I heard.*

BN: I see.

BN: What was your life before the shelter/rescue place?

Sophie: *I stayed in a yard. I was the "yard" dog. They had inside dogs, but I was the yard dog.*

BN: Did you get food?

Sophie: *We all got food.*

BN: Were there other dogs (outside)?

Sophie: *No, cats. There were cats. I ate cat food.*

BN: What does Alice need to know she doesn't already know?

Sophie: *I'm okay. I'm okay.*

BN: What does John need to know?

Sophie: *I'm okay.*

(BN: Internal note: this dog's expectations of life very low.)

BN: What can they do to help you adjust?

Sophie: *Just tell me everything. Talk to me, talk to me, talk to me. I LOVE it when they TALK to ME. love, love, love, love, love (it).*

BN: Great. You are very pretty. They so love having you.

BN: How does your body feel?

Sophie: *Fine*

BN: How do you feel about your house?

Sophie: *It's "my" house?*

BN: Yes. It is Alice and John's home and your home too. This is your "forever" home.

Sophie: *Not a temporary home, an in-between home?*

BN: No, this is your “forever” home.

BN: Do you like your home?

Sophie: *Strange, still.*

BN: *You like the yard?*

Sophie: *FAMILIAR, I’ve always been outside.*

BN: Now, you are both an inside and outside dog.

BN: Do you like the car?

Sophie: *Love the car, love the car, love the car.*

This communication is filled with relevant information about why Sophie spent all this time outside—why, after three months, she still hadn’t made a permanent association with her new people and her new home and why she didn’t seek out the love she craved.

As is often the case, contained within the communication is the solution to the problems. Sophie asks is for her people to talk to her to help her adjust. Of course, they had been talking to her all along, but now, the intent behind the talking would be imbued with awareness and knowledge obtained from Sophie herself. They knew why she was doing what she was doing—she knew they knew. At last, Alice and John were confident that she craved their love. Until then, they had given her the emotional and physical space she seemed to prefer. I sensed, until she experienced it on a consistent basis, inclusion in her people’s world would never be self-evident to Sophie. We needed a clear link Sophie could use to join in (if she wished to do so.) That took the form of “invitation/inclusion”. Alice and John were to make a point to invite her to come inside; to invite her to participate in everything all the time. To show and reinforce, beyond a doubt, she was part of the household and their life.

Everyone went home feeling there had been a breakthrough, but would it carry through into a change of behavior? Would Alice and John be able to draw cute Sophie into their life? Would Sophie be able to shed her “baggage” with ease or would it take some time? Would she become more confident about her environment?

After four weeks I made my customary courtesy follow-up call to get an update on Sophie. I was overjoyed by Sophie’s progress. She, Alice and John had come quite far. Alice observed Sophie improve drastically the day after her consult. Her tail relaxed and appeared fluffier. They had wisely chosen not to go on a planned trip to stay home and work with their dog. They talked to her a lot and made a point to invite her to join them. They diligently applied all the suggestions we had come up with and Sophie started to choose to be with them. Alice walked her briefly twice day to broaden her range of experience. Sophie progressed enough to explore her neighborhood in a secure, controlled manner. Soon, she wasn’t returning to her lookout spot on the slope anymore and started to sleep with them on the bed or picked numerous places in the house to nap. Eventually, she became confident enough to visit a friend’s house and explore and enjoy the company of “strangers” in a new environment. Sophie continues to glow with joy and happiness in her new life with Alice and John. And a final update if you wondered, like I did, if Sophie now barks. She does, like an emotionally balanced dog.

\*\*Thanks goes out to all these hard working volunteer rescue groups that make it possible for down and out companion animals like Sophie to get a second chance.\*\*