

Walking Him Home

There is a concept in Rescue called Walking Him Home. It means adopting or long term fostering a senior dog who may not have many months or years left to give. Those who choose to give a final forever home to a senior Westie are very special people indeed. They understand that elderly dogs still have love to give, can still relish a tummy rub or an ear scratch, a slow walk to the end of the block, a little dish of ice cream, the warm sun on his tummy, a car ride to the drive-up bank where, hopefully, the treats dispensed are soft ones. They have the compassion to share final months or a few last years caring for a Westie in need.

The reasons senior Westies come into rescue are many. Sometimes an owner has died or entered a nursing home leaving behind a broken-hearted Westie. Sometimes the reasons are not so understandable: the owner simply doesn't want to spend the time or money that an old dog may cost and, in some cases, the Westie may have developed a chronic illness like diabetes, Cushing's disease, or Addison's disease. As a Westie rescue, we have always felt that we need to be here for not just the young, healthy Westies that are easily placed, but also for the older dog or the dog in need of surgery or medication or both, and in turn to offer them the best quality of life.

In past years we have taken into rescue senior Westies ranging in age from 9 to 15 years. They have had Addison's disease or diabetes or Cushing's disease. Some have vision or hearing loss. Some are just a bit stiff and arthritic and need help to get up on the couch. The number of senior Westies and Westies with chronic diseases coming into rescue seems to be increasing each year with many coming to us because either the family was unable to afford treatment or unwilling to make needed accommodations like a mid-day potty break for their aging or ill Westie.

Most new adoption applications we receive are for Westies that are middle-aged at best and under age 3 preferred. Few of them are willing to consider the Westie with some infirmities like hearing or vision loss, or chronic health concerns such as Addison's. The truth is that we are usually the last hope these dogs have and trust us when we say that having to say "no" to a Westie, knowing we are her last chance, is a heartbreaking thing to do.

We know those of you reading this are the compassionate audience we need to reach. Many of you have been through the trials as well as the joys of a senior-age Westie already. We want to actively recruit those of you who would consider adopting a senior Westie. You may never have considered taking a 12 year old Westie into your home. You may have expected to live out your own Westie's golden years with him and never even considered the possibility that every year WWR is confronted with decisions regarding an aging Westie who is suddenly homeless.

This is our appeal: Please help us start a resource bank of people who would consider special needs adoptions. If you would consider adopting a senior Westie, if you have experience with dogs with Cushing's, Addison's, or insulin dependent diabetes and could offer her a forever home, please let us know. We need approved applicants we can call and say: "We have this wonderful Westie who just came in. We need someone to walk him home. Would you be willing to do that?"

- Cheryl Cutsforth