



HAZEL'S STORY

“You may never be able to go to a park with her”

Those were the words of Monika as we left for home with Fleetfoot (to be renamed Hazel), a 2-year-old female Jack Russell cross. As we completed the adoption documentation formalities, we understood the reason for Monika's rather guarded forecast as Hazel was classified as and was demonstrating the behaviour of an extremely reactive dog. She was also stressed despite the enormous efforts made by the team at Doggie Rescue to keep her mentally healthy during her time in the unavoidably noisy shelter environs.

After a detailed consultation and the provision of written information (a booklet full of guidelines) we drove home from Doggie Rescue and began our journey of integrating Hazel into our life. Aside from my first mistake Hazel was surprisingly calm once we got her home. My first mistake was to thoughtlessly flick the ceiling fan on in the living room. Poor Hazel flinched, barked and retreated under the dining table. I switched it off but instead of leaving it off I turned the rotations to very low and sat underneath it and also provided a treat when she came to me. During the evening I gradually turned the fan speed up. She never flinched again. I was sorry to have frightened her and resolved to be more cognizant of her needs. We made other mistakes but we learned together and they were less frequent as both her and our confidence grew.

We followed the guidelines provided by Doggie Rescue from day one. Hazel's bed was placed right near our bed that night. She went to bed and slept as if she had always lived with us.

It took Hazel about 3 months to settle in properly. At this point she became more playful. Squeaky toys were obviously her thing and still are. By 6 months she no longer reacted to dogs during our walks and was enjoying playing with other dogs in off leash secure dog parks. Her moments of reactivity were almost gone.

Today just over 18 months later Hazel is by all intents and purposes a 'normal' dog. She charms everyone in her presence and is good with other dogs. We attend the local parks and dog training club. The only limitation is her strong Jack Russell traits; she is highly prey driven and thus we are mindful and prevent any situations when she might follow her instinct and cause herself harm. This means choosing where she goes off leash carefully e.g., well away from major roads (even if fenced) and not visiting friends who have cats or rabbits

How did we get to this point? We are keen to share the 6 main strategies we feel contributed most to Hazel's success so others may also succeed and thus reduce the number of beautiful souls like hers needlessly and sadly euthanased across our country.

- **Follow the instructions/guidelines Doggie Rescue (and most reputable rescues) provide.**
 - The people at Doggie Rescue have over 30 years' experience – why ignore their advice! The guidelines gave us great confidence. We were advised to call if we were concerned but we never needed to.
- **Invest time in the process.**
 - Take time off work, reduce work hours or work from home for at least 6 weeks. Bonding may be encouraged with certain activities and training but they do not replace the need for time. Spending time with the dog is inexpensive and simple. Hazel relished being stroked and held (and still does).
- **Start with a strict routine**
 - Regular meal, walk times and bedtimes appeared to create reassurance especially for Hazel. We think this was key to Hazel's growing confidence as she knew what to expect at each point of the day
- **Start training from day one.**
 - We started by asking Hazel to sit for her meal and giving her a hand signal and verbal cue as to when she could begin (we accepted a 1 second wait at first but now she will wait until we have changed her drinking water!). We also insisted that she lie on her bed (in the same room and within view) while we ate at the dining table. This took some repetition and many treats but now she does it without being asked. Our rationale for this was to set the expectations for a respectful relationship and boundaries she could easily adhere to (another apparent confidence booster).
- **Book some one-on-one sessions with a specialist dog rescue trainer who uses positive reinforcement methods within the first 2 months**
 - We were guided by Howling Success Dog Training and Behaviour during 4 one on one sessions with expert, Naja. We consolidated these sessions by repeating the exercises for literally 5 minutes a day. We all benefited from the knowledge and practical demonstration of how to train effectively using positive reinforcement.
- **Do not socialise the dog too soon but do it at the right time**
 - (we heard of people who ignored the guidelines provided and got bad outcomes). If need be, walk during times of the day when there are fewer people and dogs around. Gradually introduce the dog to other dogs from a distance. This process took some time for Hazel as she was a reactive dog. We had help from two friends who brought their dogs to our house (only one at a time). We did the introduction outside of the property before allowing the dogs to get to know each other in the house and then the garden. Then we progressed to going to the secure off leash park at quiet times of the day.

Of course, we cannot overlook the fact that Hazel is a little champion and her courage and trust in us also contributed to this outcome.

Comparing our experience to others we conclude that bringing an adult rescue dog into the family is no more work than bringing home a brand-new puppy from a breeder.

“Adopt don't shop!”