

# The Forgotten Victims of Meth

Judy Schaap

It was not love at first sight—for either of us. Twice a day for two weeks, I unsuccessfully attempted to connect with this stranger at the end of a Humane Society leash. I'd never seen a dog who didn't love me. This one didn't.

Mabel was a full-grown 23 pounds of skin, bone, and brittle blond hair. Her tail was constantly between her legs in fear and sadness. Her demeanor was one of fear, distrust and trepidation. She was a toxic refugee from a meth house. She had been shipped to a Humane Society, where she was repeatedly turned down by adopters because of her looks.



She was too big for a lap dog, her legs were too gangly for her body, she was too nervous to be in a multiple-dog home, too dejected looking, didn't warm up to people, and on and on. No one wanted to take her home. I'm not sure that I would have had the courage to take her home myself had I known her past—and her probable future.

Yet, my heart shouted that this long-legged, demure critter with the dirty underbite, straggly hair and accusing eyes deserved to be loved just as she was, and I was just the stubborn woman that was going to see to it that she finally got a chance in life.

Yes, Mabel was raised in a meth house. We are familiar, thanks to the disturbingly explicit Montana Meth Project advertisements, with the tragic lives of those who use meth and of those who love them. Newscasters tell of yet another meth baby being detoxed and meth children being abandoned. What we don't hear about are the animals who have lived as pets in these toxic houses. According to Traci Weller, Executive Director of Heart of the Valley Animal Shelter in

Bozeman, many animals coming from meth environments can show indications of neglect—malnourishment, burns, and fear of people. She explains that every animal brought to Heart of the Valley, regardless of its appearance or condition, receives compassionate care and shelter, a medical and behavioral assessment, all with the hope of helping each animal to find its new forever home.

Animals suffer the maladies common to human meth victims. Mabel's teeth are as porous as bits of lava, decay that required several to be pulled. Chemical-caused hair loss rendered her nearly bald. In fact, she was on the fast track to death. Brilliant vets gave me no hope. In desperation, I contacted a respected and gifted animal communicator, Lydia Hiby, who was able to fill in a lot of blanks in my knowledge of Mabel's past and vividly confirm her present. Ms. Hiby felt her decline was accelerating and put me in touch with the world-famous, natural-healthcare veterinarian, Dr. Richard Pitcairn. His office responded immediately with the names of three Montana

## Resources

Dr. Richard Pitcairn  
*Animal Homeopathy & Nutrition*  
[www.drpitcairn.com](http://www.drpitcairn.com)

Stafford Animal Shelter, Park County  
[www.staffordanimalshelter.org](http://www.staffordanimalshelter.org)

Heart of the Valley Animal Shelter, Bzn.  
[www.heartofthevalleyshelter.org](http://www.heartofthevalleyshelter.org)

Dr. Marybeth Minter, DVM  
*Veterinarian, Jackson Hole, WY,*  
[mariposavet@wyoming.com](mailto:mariposavet@wyoming.com)

## Animal Communicators

Lydia Hiby, Escondido, CA  
[www.lydiahiby.com](http://www.lydiahiby.com)

Karen Nowak, Columbus, MT  
[www.freedomreinsllc.com](http://www.freedomreinsllc.com)

Jacque Richey, Bozeman, MT  
[www.enlightenedbytheanimals.com](http://www.enlightenedbytheanimals.com)

## Suggested Trainers, Bozeman

Nancy Tanner, [www.pawsandpeople.com](http://www.pawsandpeople.com)

Nancy Creel, [nmcreel@bresnan.net](mailto:nmcreel@bresnan.net)

Linda Hollenstein, 586-1484

and Wyoming vets educated by Dr. Pitcairn.

The very next morning, we were in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, in the extremely wise and healing hands of Dr. Marybeth Minter. She gently and respectfully assessed Mabel's condition and decided upon a homeopathic remedy that would act as Mabel's personal *anti-meth* (my word, not Dr. Minter's) based on Mabel's symptoms. She strongly suggested a no-grain food, and various supplemental oils and pills to provide a solid foundation for health. Within a couple of months, Mabel sprouted copious quantities of luxurious hair and her eyes sparkled with unimagined vitality.

Animals raised in these situations not only deal with the effects of the poisonous chemicals in meth houses. They also live with erratic, and at times, violent people. They learn to be nervous, wary and sometimes aggressive. In seven years, I have never laid an unkind hand on this sweet dog, and still if I lift a broom or rake, she cowers in fear. Sadly, I have come to understand that my best efforts may not ever completely erase the terrors of her early life.

Vicki Blakeman, Executive Director of the Stafford Animal Shelter, explains the shelter's philosophy of the care-filled transition used when taking in animals who have lived through the traumas of horrible homes. They know that the lives of some of these animals can barely be imagined, but with attention, kindness, renewed health, training and play, these animal will have a chance at a second life. Their strong focus on realistic assessment of both the animal and the adoptive household create a formula for a successful match.

The healthiest dogs I know are those whose people engage their companions in learning, practicing, and achieving new abilities. We are fortunate in SW Montana to have incredible trainers who are gifted at training people how to bring the best out in their dogs. Nancy Tanner, founder of Paws & People, in the simplest of statements says it all, "If you choose not to train your dog, the environment will." Mabel's environment had. Now it was my turn to create a new environment and to seek knowledge and training to ensure this dog a new life.

I was happy to enlist the help of three local trainers to help me learn more about enhancing communication, security and activities. They assisted me in understanding Mabel's health, and the recuperative possibilities created when a person cares enough to work with an animal through fun, positive reward and patience. Their tutelage changed life for Mabel and she hasn't been the same since. Two years ago, she even was awarded the AKC Canine Good Citizenship certification—an incredible feat for a dog with her past.

I strongly suggest that every dog owner reads a fascinating book that was responsible for absolutely turning around Mabel's interaction with other dogs, *On Talking Terms with Dogs: Calming Signals*, by Turid Rugaas. I promise that you will come to understand your dog's common actions and concerns in ways that you never dreamed.

Mabel is now a fit 37 pounds, has the softest flaxen hair

you've ever petted, and deeply intelligent, communicative eyes. Her health, vitality and emotional well-being have evolved past what anyone who knew her seven years ago could have imagined. She fills my heart with love and laughter and is a constant home and trail companion.

I strongly urge people considering adopting a meth dog to have a positive motivational trainer do an assessment of the dog. Know that kindness, patience and fun will be the most effective tools to bring mental health and stability to its life. Chemicals in food, non-essential vaccines, or exposure to cleaning products may be life threatening to an already chemically sensitive dog. Be pro-active and create an atmosphere of health for all who live in your home. Unconditional love will be yours in return as you cheat meth out of one more victim. ■



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