

## **A story for & about Foster Parents ... Dedicated to IKE whose heart I knew.**

By Sherry Pelley, ARK Volunteer

She sat on the floor, unable to sit straight and tall like her mother had always admonished her to do when she was a child. Today, it would be impossible. And tomorrow ... it probably wouldn't be possible then either. Her mind was too busy thinking about the dog who laid still across her lap.

When he came to be with her, he had no name. She remembered that day very well. The first sight of him was enough to break her heart into little pieces.

A real estate agent, who had taken him from the empty house where he 'lived', to the Rescue, had saved him because she was unable to watch the old dog being taken by Animal Control to the County 'shelter', where she knew he would be 'put down' due to his advanced age.

His elderly owner had passed away. The relatives came & went, taking what they wanted from the house, pushing him out of the way. They turned off the utilities, closed the door & left him there all alone, no food, no water, nobody cared what would happen to him. So, he grieved alone, in the hot, dark empty Florida house, hungry, thirsty, the toilet's water was now gone ... slowly dying. Until he heard the click of the front door lock & that Real Estate Agent entered, shocked to see him, knowing he needed Rescued immediately! Then she took him to 'her'.

His fur was very thick; so thick that she had to wriggle her fingers down in to feel his bony body. As she pulled her fingers away, they were coated in old greasy dirt. White with brown, he was supposed to be. But on that day he was just dirt, dirt & fleas, so many fleas.

He sat there panting continuously, ears laid outward for he had lost his courage and couldn't keep them proud and tall. He sat motionless, waiting and limp ... starved. But the thing that was the most disturbing was the look in his eyes. They were quiet eyes, sunken into his head and they watched her. They were alive with thought. He was waiting for her to do something 'to' him. Little did he know at the time, that instead, she would 'give' something to him. She gave him one of the little broken pieces of her heart. She reached out gently to stroke his head and he instinctively squinted his eyes and dropped his head quickly, waiting to be pushed aside! With that little bit of movement, she gave him another one of the broken pieces of her heart.

She gently took him and gave him a bath. She toweled him dry and brushed some order back into his coat. For that, he was grateful and even though his own heart was loaded with worms, he accepted yet another piece of her heart, for it would help to heal.

"Would you like some water, sweet boy?" She whispered to him as she set down a bowl of cool water. He drank it up eagerly. He had been dehydrated for a long time and she knew it would take him most of the week to re-hydrate. He wanted more water but it was gone. Ah ... that's how it is, he thought to himself but he was grateful for what he had been given. "Would you like some more?" She gave him another bowl, along with another little piece of her heart. "I know that you're hungry, but you don't have to live that way anymore. Here's a bowl of food for you. I've added some warm water to make it easier for you to eat and a little piece of my heart."

Over the months that he stayed with her, his health improved. His heart full of worms was replaced, piece by piece with little bits of her loving heart. Each little piece worked a very special kind of magic. When the warmth of love and gentle caresses are added, the little broken pieces start knitting together to heal the vessel it resides in, until it becomes whole again. She watched each little broken piece fill a gap in the gentle dog, until his quiet eyes radiated the light from those little pieces. You see, kind words gently spoken turn those little pieces into illumination for the spirit that thrives within.

He rested beside her, happy to be with her always. Such kindness, such gentle caresses ... such love. His health had returned, his spirit was playful as a young dog's and he had basked in her love. Now his heart was full. The healing was complete but it was time to go.

So, she sat shapeless on the floor because all the broken pieces of her heart were with the dog. It is difficult to sit tall when your heart is not with you. She wrapped her arms around the dog, burying her face in his now soft and shiny coat. The dog who now sat beside her, with tall, proud ears for her. Lean on me, he said. Then she gave him one last thing that would keep him strong; that would also keep the pieces of her heart together long after he had gone on to cross the Rainbow Bridge. She gave him her tears and bound

them to those little pieces with a simple statement made from the ribbons of her heart, "I love you, Ike, be at peace." Then Ike lived happily ever after in her heart!

She again sat on the floor, straight and tall like her mother had always admonished her to do when she was a child. Today, it would be possible and tomorrow it would be possible, as well. Because now her mind was busy thinking about this one, the sad new dog who laid across her lap. Where did she get the heart to help yet another dog, you ask? Ah, it came with this dog. You see, they always bring a little piece of heart with them and when the Foster Parent breathes in that little bit of heart, it quickly grows and fills the void left by the last dog.

