

Strummer—Purpose

When I first met Strummer, he was skin and bones, covered in ticks, and exhausted from the stress of being in a shelter. I snapped some photos of him for our rescue's website. He was so weak that he leaned into his handler's leg for support. I saw him from time to time at adoption events but never formed a serious bond with him although he seemed like a sweet boy.

When he was adopted several weeks later, I assumed his happy ending was cemented. I almost overlooked an email from his new mom that had landed in my junk folder. When I found it, I thought it was an update from someone at our rescue. Not a plea for help. I opened the email and read.

Can you help me? I would like to know more about my dog. I adopted him about a year ago from the rescue you volunteer with. One of the other volunteers, the woman who was our adoption counselor at the rescue, told me you can communicate with animals. She gave me your email. I need to know how he survived. I need to know how he stayed alive with all that he'd endured before he came to me. This dog saved my life.

I emailed back, apologizing for my delayed response, and promised to do a reading within a few days. Three days later, I sat in front of my computer, quieted myself, and tuned into

Strummer, scribbling notes as I asked questions and recorded his answers. Then I typed a response to Brooke.

The first thing he told me is that he has a complete connection to you. His desire is to live...to live with you, for you, and for himself. He told me that he loves everyone in his family, but he is your dog. He said the phrase three times. That he is your dog.

You were brought into each other's lives to reform something. There is destiny at work here as you were meant to find one another, and this is part of your life's plan. This was reinforced by a card that I drew to understand your purpose, which is the refinement of a system here on earth. You don't need to consciously know what it is. Just trust that you and he will do the work. Apply anything you learn, and it will just happen.

The two of you have been together before. Probably three to five lifetimes. When you first met, did you feel a sense of something familiar or a sense of recognition? Because he probably did.

When I was reading my notes and typing this email, I realized something profound. You told me that this dog saved your life. You asked me how he could have survived his early abuse and distemper, and I was told that this dog has an iron will. It's that will that allowed him to live. He battled back from neglect and then illness for you. He hadn't even met you yet, but he knew he had a purpose. A purpose to help someone in the most profound ways. Since he hadn't accomplished his purpose, he wasn't ready to let go.

He was put on this earth to save you, and you were put on this earth to save him. He held on to his will to live and survived so that he could find you and save you. Although you saved him first.

I've not been this deeply in touch with such an amazing story. This is true love. True destiny. True fate.

You need to know that he is completely light-hearted and happy and he doesn't carry any of the past with him.

I finished typing and hit Send. Brooke responded back within minutes.

Oh my God. This is the most powerful and amazing thing I've ever heard. I'm at dinner with some girlfriends, and I read this aloud. Everyone at the table is weeping. This is such a gift you've given me. Everything you said feels so right. Hopefully, one day we can meet and I'll tell you the whole story.

Three days later, I had another email from Brooke. It said simply...

Can you ask Strummer to stop eating his poop?

I laughed, but I realized how devastating this could be for the humans in his life. Strummer would poop, eat his poop, throw up, eat the vomit, throw up again, and then eat the waste. It was a maddening cycle.

The obvious solution was to bag the poop immediately and dispose of it. But that would work only when Brooke and her husband, Joe, were present. So I meditated, searching for an answer, and then sent my response.

I'm being told that his eating his poop is partly congenital. I'm not even sure how to interpret that, so I looked it up. It means a condition he was born with. He doesn't eat his poop because he thinks he is a bad dog when he poops. So he's not eating it to hide it. When I first read your email, what popped into my head is that he has food issues because he was starved.

But that assumption wasn't confirmed. It may be a past-life issue, hence the word congenital. It's sort of a compulsion. Like he can't help it.

You can help him. I went into his energy and told him that I understood why he was eating his poop but that it made him sick so please to try to stop doing this and that he was harming himself. But it will take more than that. He has to hear that message over and over. Every day and night. Sit with him, put your arms around him, and focus your thoughts. Close your eyes, and focus your mind on him, and tell him that you love him (think it, don't say it), and ask him not to eat his poop, and tell him that the reason is that you want him to be healthy and only do things that are good for him. Tell him that he is making himself sick by eating his feces. It will take time, maybe even a year or two, but I was told that he can change this behavior in time. I asked if he was absorbing his food properly and was told yes and that shifting foods wouldn't make a difference. You can also try adding pineapple to his feed. It makes the poop taste awful. Vets also have an enzyme you can add to his food. It will do the same thing.

She wrote back quickly. They'd tried everything I'd suggested. Everything but trying to talk to him.

Two days later, she sent another email. She was communicating with him constantly, and it seemed to be working. She asked if we could meet. She wanted to tell me the rest of Strummer's story. We made plans to meet at the kennel that houses the rescue's dogs.

Brooke and Strummer stood waiting by her car when I pulled in. I hugged Brooke and then stooped to hug Strummer. He looked nothing like I remembered. The gaunt, lifeless boy had blossomed into a strapping, healthy, classic black-and-tan German Shepherd. I hugged the thick scruff that protected his neck. He licked my face heartily, like it was covered in gravy.

“What a sweet boy,” I said. “So affectionate.”

“Not really,” Brooke said, looking perplexed. “He’s usually a little aloof with strangers.”

“Maybe he recognizes my energy. That happens sometimes when I meet a dog I’ve connected with.” I fingered a white, heart-shaped spot on his blond chest. It almost whispered, *This dog is all heart.*

Brooke noticed and asked me about it.

“I think he has so much heart that he wears it on his chest,” I said. “He’s a stunning boy.”

And he *was* a stunning boy. At 100 pounds, he was a classic, commanding black-and-tan. In the canine world, Strummer was a hunk.

It was a warm fall day, and we started our walk toward the park at the top of the hill. Six lanes of road choked with cars were to our left. The noise of rushing traffic set Strummer off. He looked nervously from side to side and began to pant. His panting escalated, so we took a side route, and soon the din from the traffic dulled to a faraway drone. He seemed to settle a little. We sat in the shade of a sprawling oak. The grass beneath us was slightly moist.

“I told you this dog saved my life,” Brooke said. “Now I’ll tell you how he did it.”

She and her husband had moved to the West Coast to relocate for his new station with the Marines. Their new home in military housing didn’t allow for dogs, so Brooke’s beloved Rottweiler, Lily, had remained with her parents in New Jersey.

Displaced, homesick, jobless, and devastated by the loss of her dog, Brooke spent her days in isolation, crying. Her husband, Joe, thought they should get a dog. A companion and ally to comfort her while she settled into her new life.

“Every time he mentioned getting a dog, I’d tear up and tell him that I had a dog. I wasn’t about to replace her.”

But after a few weeks, something compelled her to start looking. They put themselves on a wait list for dog-friendly housing, and Brooke started checking out websites. Joe had always wanted a German Shepherd. He was smitten with the regal beauty and devotion that characterized the breed. Brooke was not.

“I was a Rottie gal. I’d always had Rotties. They were the breed for me. And German Shepherds had a reputation of being hard to handle. One day, though, I was searching websites and I found the German Shepherd rescue you’re affiliated with. One dog caught my eye. We went to meet him the next day.”

They walked into the rescue event. About twenty wire crates lined the walkway, about half housed a dog. Whites. Blacks. Black-and-tans. Several dogs threaded their way through parked cars in the parking lot, exercised by volunteers.

Then Brooke locked eyes with Strummer. Still rail thin, he had a slight cough. He wore a blue bandana around his neck, stenciled with his name. His ears hung at 10 and 2 o’clock, and his furrowed brow seemed to signal his resignation. And as she looked at the pathetic boy, she was smitten.

“I knelt to meet him and placed my palm flat on his crate door. He stretched his nose to the thatched wires and licked my palm. And in that moment, he stole my heart.”

As her story unraveled, Strummer rose, stepped closer, and plunked down beside us. Alternating back and forth between Brook and me, showering us with affection. He settled next to Brooke first and then rose, walked to me, and crashed into my lap, flopping upside down on his back. I fumbled to cradle his massive sprawl and balance him, and then I giggled. “What a clown you are. And what a lovebug.”

Brooke cocked her head and said, “No. This isn’t who he is. He doesn’t do this. He’s in love with you.”

“He can probably feel how much I adore him. I really do. He’s irresistible!” What I didn’t tell her is that it had been three years since I lost my German Shepherd to cancer. Cuddling any dog, but especially one who reminded me so much of Blitz, still fed some part of my heart that hadn’t yet healed.

“It’s interesting that after all we’ve been through, he and I... I mean, now that we’re through it, I kind of feel like chopped liver. He’s so into my husband or anyone new.”

“I think that’s because he knows he has your love. He doesn’t need to win you over, or impress you, or work for your love. It’s unconditional.”

She was silent for a moment, and then she continued.

“So, back to the adoption event... I have my heart set on Strummer, and Joe wants to look around. So we did, but I kept returning to Strummer. I knew he had to become our dog.”

But several obstacles threatened to thwart her plan. They were still on the waiting list for a dog-friendly home. Additionally, they were a military family, and their nomadic lifestyle made them a red flag for most rescues because some military families don't take their dogs with them when they're asked to relocate. Additionally, Joe and Brooke had very little experience with the German Shepherd breed. Nor had their current home been checked out and approved by the rescue.

“So we couldn't take him immediately. We didn't have a yard. We weren't cleared to get a dog, and I was frantic that we would lose Strummer. For the next few weeks, I attended every adoption event that the rescue hosted. I'd barricade myself in front of Strummer's crate and fend off interested parties. I lied and said he was already adopted. The more time I spent with him, the more I fell in love with him. I'd never met such a handsome, gentle dog.”

Finally, they couldn't stand being separated from him. They spent hours talking to their adoption counselor and searching for solutions.

“When she finally approved us, we were ecstatic. She defiantly followed her intuition rather than the rule book. She made this decision with her heart.”

So they adopted him and planned to sneak him into their current apartment and lay low until they could get into dog-approved quarters. And stealth was something they'd need to have on their side. They'd need a system to get him in and out of the neighborhood undetected. So Brooke lay in the back seat, covering Strummer with a blanket to keep him hidden. Later, they taught Strummer to duck down low in their SUV. The code words “Strummie hide” were his cue to flatten himself in the back seat and stay until he heard “Strummie free.”

I started laughing. I could just imagine this massive dog trying to make himself invisible. As if on cue, Strummer rose from the grass, jogged up, and tackled me.

“Oh my God, he’s such a dork,” Brooke said, calling him off. He trotted casually back to her and sank to the ground with a groan.

“It was days before we’d learn that his upper respiratory infection was something far worse. He had horrible diarrhea, and the first time I left him in the house alone, he had accident after accident. By the time I returned, the living room looked like a war zone covered in liquid landmines.”

As she cleaned the mess, her heart broke. He was so sick, and she didn’t want him to feel guilty. She scrubbed the carpet and looked at Strummer, murmuring, “Poor Strummer.” Scrubbing. “Oh, Strummer.” More scrubbing. “Poor Strummer.” As she watched him, she noticed a slight tremor in his jaw. She thought it was nerves or maybe a nervous tic.

Days passed, and the tremor worsened. Brooke started researching, using the search term “What does it mean when it looks like your dog is chewing gum?” Dozens of sites popped up. All of them yielding a horrific answer. Strummer had distemper. It’s a contagious and serious viral illness with no known cure.

It’s spread through the air and by direct or indirect contact with another infected animal. It initially attacks a dog’s tonsils and lymph nodes and replicates there and then attacks the respiratory, urogenital, gastrointestinal, and nervous systems. Symptoms are fever, coughing, vomiting, and diarrhea.

In the later stages of the disease, the virus starts attacking the other systems of the dog's body, particularly the nervous system. The brain and spinal cord can be affected, causing seizures, paralysis, and attacks of hysteria.

“We rushed him to a vet. We didn't even know where to go because we'd just gotten Strummer and we didn't have a vet. We knew nothing. When we got there, I handed over my credit card and said, 'Save him.' ”

They sedated him, took blood and fluid samples and attempted to diagnose how advanced his condition was. The prognosis: there was nothing medically to be done. His immune system was compromised. Strummer needed to get strong. He needed to eat, and hydrate, and rest. The vet told them to purchase a warm humidifier to manage the discharge from his eyes and nose, and to direct the warm mist into his crate, covering it with blankets to trap the steam.

They couldn't find a warm humidifier. After looking everywhere, they could find only cold ones. So they went home, locked themselves in the bathroom with Strummer, turned the shower on, and sat on the floor while the steam filled the room. Strummer was miserable. His ears were flat, and he swayed from side to side, jaws trembling.

Strummer's condition worsened. His stomach pulsed, and his jaw quivered. It was as if his body was a circuit board and the virus was attacking his body one area at a time, moving from spot to spot and then on to another part of his body. Brooke and Joe continued to manage his situation and research holistic treatments. They found a vet who treated distemper experimentally, using injections of the bird flu virus. But his prognosis wasn't positive. Strummer had a fifty-fifty chance at survival. The injection would either help or have no effect at all. Strummer had been given a death sentence.

Brooke knew she had to boost his immune system. She knew she had to get him eating and drinking. So she hand-fed him. One kibble at a time. And poured water down his throat a quarter cup at a time. She fed him Pedialyte and vitamin C every hour. Night and day, she and Joe fought to save him. Taking turns working and sleeping, they kept the constant hourly vigil. Anything to get him hydrated. Anything to get nourishment into him. His already-loose stools were aggravated by the vitamin C therapy, so Brooke would have to back off the routine and wait for him to rebalance and then start the process over again.

Strummer was so weakened, he could barely walk. Fifteen steps at most. Any more would make him breathless. Joe and Brooke would carry him to the car. Command “Strummie hide.” Drive to a dog-safe area. Carry him from the car and let him walk fifteen steps. All so he could get some fresh air and exercise to pique his appetite and thirst.

“We’d go at night to reduce the chance we’d get caught. We slept in the living room with him so that we could monitor his breathing. It took months, but slowly he got better and better. But he still has a tic,” she said, motioning to his jaw. I could see it. It was hardly noticeable, but it was there. It was like the most subtle stammer. Almost like he was shivering.

“Does it bother him?” she asked.

I closed my eyes and focused on him, asking the question she’d asked of me. “It’s mildly annoying. It’s the equivalent of having a twitch. You know when your eye gets a twitch.”

“God brought me this dog,” she said. Her eyes misted slightly, and she had a faraway look.

Then she told me that in the midst of nursing Strummer back to health, her beloved grandmother became severely ill, falling into a coma and then passing away, all within forty-eight hours. Too quickly for Brooke to travel back east to visit. Too quickly for Brooke to say goodbye. The loss had been devastating for her.

“But I had Strummer. He was my rock. I had to focus on him. It eased some of the pain. In a way, that saved me.”

More months passed, and Strummer became stronger and stronger. His body filled out, and his muscle gained mass. They went for daily walks on the beach. Explored the area, hiking on weekends. Joe and Brooke would take a bucket of tennis balls to the beach, and Strummer would spend hours chasing, retrieving, and playing in the waves.

Then the family was dealt another blow. Brooke’s annual exam revealed abnormal cells in her cervix. Days before Thanksgiving, her Ob-Gyn broke the news. It was cancer.

“What about kids?” Brooke asked. She’d dreamed of having a family her entire life.

The doctor replied, “We won’t know until we get a second opinion with a specialist. But it isn’t promising.”

Brooke hung up the phone, doubled over, and screamed. That night, she cried herself to sleep. Three days later, the family gathered for Thanksgiving in Santa Barbara. Brooke’s sister-in-law announced she was pregnant with twins.

Brooke and Joe left Strummer with family for a few days. To get away. To process the devastating news together. Just hours into their trip, the family called. Strummer had escaped

from the back yard. They turned the car around and headed back. Their cell phone rang again. Strummer had been found. But they headed home anyway.

Brooke scratched Strummer under the chin, looked at me and laughed. “It’s not like we could ever really lose him. He’s got three microchips and a tag.” Then she took his face in her hands. “You’re not going anywhere, buddy.”

When she got back home, Brooke went to a specialist. He confirmed the cancer and suggested a trachelectomy. They would remove the cancerous cells, and the procedure would preserve as much of the uterus as possible, which gave Brooke and Joe a shot at having children. But the procedure was complicated, and the operation took eight hours. And because they scheduled the procedure so quickly after diagnosing her, she had no time to donate blood if it was needed.

“When it was over, I woke up screaming in pain,” she said.

The surgery required her to be inverted during the whole procedure, and the process damaged the nerves in her arms. They’d also accidentally cut the nerves in her inner thigh. Then the catheter punctured her bladder. It was her first time in the hospital.

“I was so alone. I was in so much pain. I was so scared. And I just missed home and Strummer,” she said.

Joe spent his days shuttling between the hospital, home, and Strummer. He’d visit Brooke and bring pictures of Strummer. To be released from the hospital, Brooke had to walk a lap on the hospital floor and pee in a cup. Strummer’s face was a beacon that urged her on. Days later, she walked a lap, peed in a cup, and won her freedom.

“I don’t know how I walked that lap in the hospital because once I got home I couldn’t walk or do anything on my own.”

Instead, Joe took a short leave and became her nursemaid. Feeding, bathing, dressing, and caring for her. She couldn’t sit because of the incision, but if she lay down, she couldn’t get up on her own.

She looked down at Strummer and stroked his fur. He rolled on his back and asked for a belly rub. She laughed. “It is all about him, you know. But one of the miraculous things in all this was how Strummer sensed everything. He’s generally such a rambunctious dog. He bangs into you and jumps on you and knocks you over, but when I came home, he was so gentle and quiet. It was like he knew. He absolutely knew he needed to be different.”

After a week, Joe’s time off ran out. He had to go back to work. But Brooke still wasn’t completely mobile. She still couldn’t get around on her own all that well. And it was just she and Strummer now.

The first day Joe was gone, Brooke lay down to rest. When she woke, she couldn’t get up. She tried grabbing a side table, but it was too far away. And it was far too painful for her to push herself up from the soft bed. Frantic, she called to Strummer. He was at her side in a moment. He stood strong and patient. Brooke grabbed his collar and pulled herself upright. Then she placed her hands on his back and balanced herself as she stood.

“He was my salvation. My only companion during the day. The only way I made it was because of him. I’d balance myself on him, and step by step, I’d get where I needed to go.”

As time passed, Brooke began to heal just as Strummer had. She gained the strength to walk again. Just as Strummer had. When Strummer had been sick, Brooke had carried him and strengthened him one step at a time. Now she turned to Strummer for the same support. They created a routine. Joe would walk Strummer just a few steps ahead of Brooke. Then they'd turn to face her. Joe would call out, "Where's Mom?" Strummer would trot to Brooke and nudge her and back away, beckoning her to walk the few steps to him. Then Joe would call him, and Strummer would run back to him. Then they'd do it again. And again. Strummer was her will to walk.

"I just wanted to hold him so badly that I forced myself to walk. Strummer was my wheelchair, my walker, my crutches. But more than that, he was my inspiration."

She paused and looked at him, lying peacefully beside her in the grass, and continued. "I had to survive for him." Then her voice cracked. And her tears flowed.

"What...I...can't...get...over," she said, forcing the words between her sobs, "is how good he was...so...counter...to who...he really was. That's what...what...will live in my heart forever." She stopped talking. Lost in tears and emotion.

There was a long silence. I was sobbing too. My chest heaved and jerked. Ragged breaths clawed their way from my throat. Brooke threw her arms around Strummer and buried her head in his side. We sat in the grass and the shade of the huge oak and sobbed.

Brooke wiped the tears from her eyes and continued. "As I continued to recover, what struck me most was his gentleness. Before my surgery, our walks were a tug of war. He'd basically pull me around like I was waterskiing behind him. After the surgery, he was so gentle. So patient. He never pulled. He knew he couldn't. He'd walk calmly by my side. My most

precious gift was being able to walk Strummer. After two weeks, I was strong enough to walk him for thirty minutes. It became my salvation. I didn't have a child, but I had Strummer."

More tears. More sobbing. More silence. Strummer rose and gently licked Brooke's face. She embraced him again and took his face in her hands.

"This dog saved me. He saved my life. What you told me when you did that first reading for me...it blew me away. That he would persevere. That he would do that for me. That he would know he was needed for this purpose. "

Strummer has been a godsend to Brooke. Her knight in shining armor. Her protector. Her healer. Her companion. An endearing combination of regal, noble guardian and goofy, funny zealot who loves life and people. Happy-go-lucky. Living life to the fullest. She'll tell you that he inspires her to make a difference in the world. And while her day job was in social work, she had formed a passion for animal rescue. And she told me that, as I had predicted in my first email, this is what she thought she would reform through Strummer's inspiration.

"He's so protective," she said. "I swear this dog doesn't sleep. Every hour, he checks on us. If I'm lying on my side, he walks to the bed and stays nose to nose until I open my eyes."

She stopped and stroked his fur again, and she talked more about his health issues.

Strummer was plagued with problems. It started with the distemper. Then he contracted Lyme disease. Probably due to the fact that he'd come into rescue covered with ticks. It had most likely compromised his immune system and made him more susceptible to future attacks. Later, he was stricken with Pannus, an inflammatory condition that attacks the eyes. It can be managed with drops, but most dogs hate the process. Strummer was no exception, but Brooke trained him

to lie on his side so she could administer the drops. Then she'd say, "Strummie flip." And he'd dutifully roll to the other side.

In 2011, Joe was called back to Afghanistan to serve in the war. Since he was to be stationed in New Jersey after his term, he and Strummer and Brooke relocated there before he left. Brooke and Strummer moved in with her parents, and she was reunited with her Rottweiler, Lily. Before the move, she asked me how I thought Strummer and Lily would integrate. In general, Lily hated other dogs. I told her to handle the transition carefully. I didn't feel that Lily would be receptive. I was wrong. Lily warmed to Strummer like butter to a heated burner. And it wasn't just Lily. Brooke's dad bonded with Strummer immediately.

Brooke found a job with an animal shelter, where she spent her days pairing humans with their new animal companions. Strummer spent his days chilling with Lily and dad, taking walks in the woods and enjoying home-cooked meals. Brooke's parents spent every moment thinking of things to do with the dogs. Hiking. Romps in the park. Swimming. They even bought a Jeep and reconfigured the back seat so Lily and Strummer could go everywhere with them. Pretty idyllic.

As time went on, Strummer bonded deeply with Brooke's dad. She asked me about it again: why Strummer seemed to focus his attention on everyone but her. I told her what I had told her when I first met her. He already had her heart. He goes where he's needed.

I sensed that Strummer was focused on helping her dad and Joe open their hearts at a deeper level. I sensed that he had energetic and spiritual work to do with them, so he sought them out. And I told Brooke that she'd already done this work, so Strummer didn't have to work with

her toward that goal. It was as though he was on a mission, and since he no longer needed to work with Brooke that way, she had given him a gift.

Two years later, Joe returned from his tour of duty. He was stationed in New Jersey two hours from Brooke's parents' home. Too far to commute. They found an apartment and moved Strummer with them. But they could tell he wasn't happy. He missed his daily hikes. He missed Lily. Most of all, he missed Brooke's dad.

They made the painful decision to give Strummer back the life he needed and returned him to live with Brooke's parents. And since he's only a few hours away, they visit him often. But it was a difficult transition for Brooke. And to cope with her aching heart, she threw herself more deeply into animal rescue.

A few months after they moved, she emailed again.

Joe and I spent time with Strummer Saturday night and yesterday. And he's with me in our apartment right now. Strummer just seems miserable with us. He just wants to be with my dad, I think. Can you let him know we love him? Please?

And I emailed back.

Hi, Brooke. He's not miserable with you, but remember that he is on a mission with your dad, and it's spiritual. When you take him away from your dad, you take him away from his mission and his current work. So all he can focus on is that there is work for him to be doing and he was just derailed from that. He's consumed with this, so he can't focus on anything else. He knows you love him. The fact that you released him to be in an environment that serves him better for now is proof of that. Allow him to be with your dad for now. That is proof enough of

your love. I see Strummer coming back to you and Joe at some point. But he's on a different path right now. Remember the old saying: if you love something enough to set it free, do so. Trust that he will come back to you in time. Right now, your dad needs him more than you do. Shepherds need a job. For now, this is his job. But for the record, I did connect with him. I told him that you loved him and that it was hard for you that his focus was elsewhere. His response was "in time."

I'm so sorry. I know it's hard. But this is unconditional love you are both showing Strummer. It's the hardest thing in the world to do. But there is more to this. This is a chance for Joe to experience empathy in regard to what you went through when Strummer's focus went from you to Joe. Now his focus is on your dad and not Joe. Now Joe knows how you felt. The universe is providing him with a chance to truly understand you.

When I first met Brooke, I asked her why she thought she and Strummer were brought together. As if giving each other the will to live wasn't enough. She replied that Strummer had changed not only her life, but her life path.

Brooke told me that before Strummer came into her life, she'd never had to care for another being. Knowing that Strummer had been alone and on his own for months before he came to rescue was life-changing for her. Watching him persevere and come into his own made her want to help other dogs realize the same life-changing transformation. Strummer had opened her eyes to the plight of abandoned animals everywhere. He put her in touch with her true purpose. Rescue, giving back, making a difference—it became her calling. Her passion. It was all she wanted to do. Because of Strummer, Brooke became an advocate for animals, especially for Shepherds.

“Because of him,” she said, “now I rescue dogs. Now I pair people with their forever four-leggeds. Now I help people find their own personal Strummer.”

When Brooke does adoptions, it reconnects her to Strummer’s journey and his story. There are times when she just knows that a particular dog waited all his life to meet the person she’s pairing him with. And she knows that they need that dog as much as the dog needs them.

“They really do rescue us right back,” she said. “It’s the best feeling in the world.”

I continue to stay in touch with Brooke and keep tabs on Strummer. And I miss them both. I’ll never forget the last time I saw them. Just days before they moved to the East Coast, Brooke brought Strummer to my home for one last visit. We hung out and talked while Strummer lolled beside us on the carpet. When we said our final goodbyes, Brooke jogged to the car, Strummer bounding beside her like a stocky deer. Such harmony. Such connection. Such pure joy. They were truly a team. She doesn’t see it.

Brooke will tell you she’s not Strummer’s first love anymore. She’ll tell you he’s no longer *her* dog. But I think it was she who set him free first. I think it was her love that gave him wings. Like any good mother, her unconditional love allowed him to reach his full potential. And like every child who is loved, Strummer knows that Brooke’s love will always be there. Like a well to be tapped that will always replenish him when he needs it. Because of that, her love allows him to be forever happy, forever safe, and forever fulfilled. And because of that, Strummer will *always* be Brooke’s dog.

