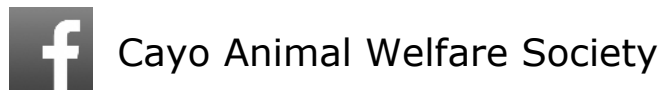


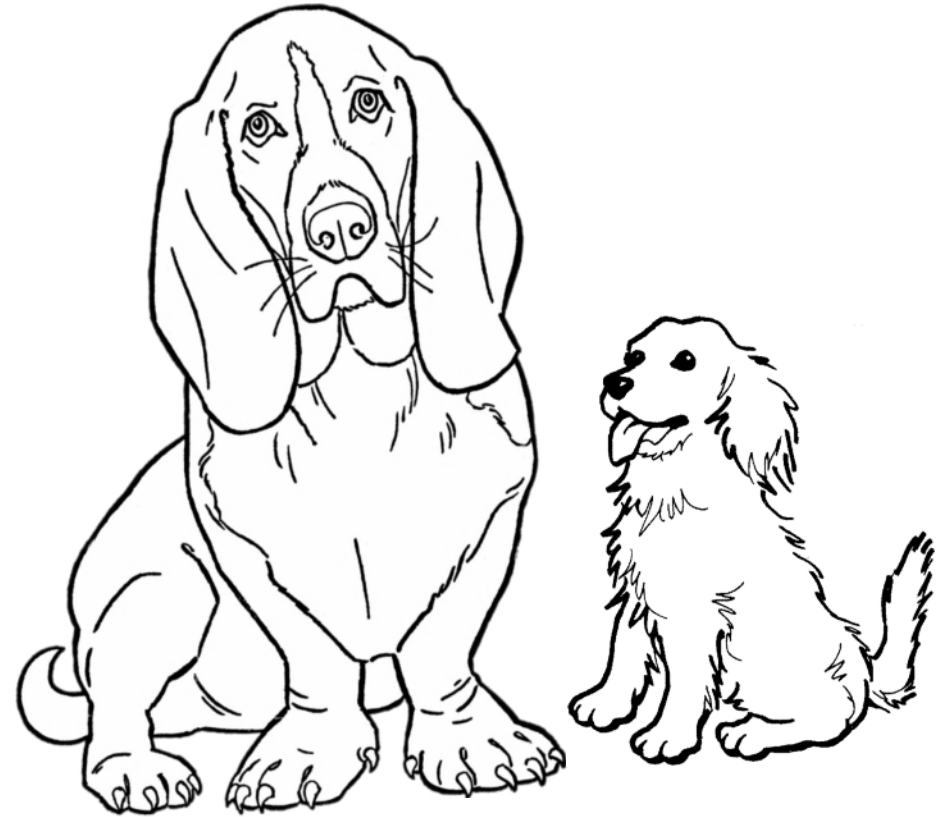
Rover and I



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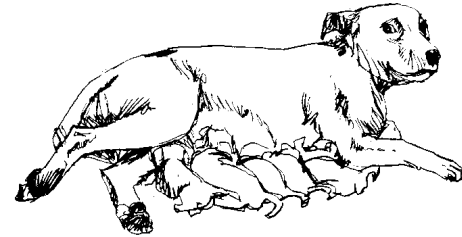
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Rover and I

My Family

I don't know what happened to my Mom.



I was born under the Cayo Welcome Center, me, my two brothers and my two sisters. Our Mom took good care of us. It was hard feeding us when she had so little food herself. We

are what people call "Stray Dogs". We have no home. We would love to have a home but nobody wants us. So people yell at us and throw rocks as if it was our fault we have no home.

We were getting old enough to start going out but Mom had warned us to stay hidden. It's a dangerous world out there. Our Mom was real smart! She warned us about unfriendly people, and she said to never ever play with the big noisy things she called cars and buses. "They will kill you", she said.

And then Mom did not come home one night. We didn't know why, and we were very scared. Very hungry and very scared. But she had told us to stay hidden, so we did. We all snuggled up together, cried a little, and went to sleep.

We waited the whole next day and the whole next night.

The day after that my two bigger brothers decided to go out and see if there was food and water for us some place. And maybe they would find Mom. The rest of us waited. In the afternoon my biggest sister went to go see where our brothers had gone. But she never came back either. Then it got dark again.

My little sister and I were not feeling well anymore. We were so thirsty and hungry! By morning I decided that we also needed to go out to find food and water. Since I was now the "big man" in the family I led my little sister out while it was still dark.

But there were already so many people at the bus stop! Some were pointing at us. So we hurried and went the other way down to the market. Right then a big kid threw a rock, and hit my sister in the head. She screamed and I started running. I ran, and ran and ran. When I finally stopped I was all the way by the river. I had a drink and waited for my sister. But she never came. I feel bad that I got so scared and did not stay with my sister. I did not take good care of her.

Hard Times



So now it was only me. And I could not walk another step. I was so hungry and weak, and all that running had worn me out. I laid down right there and went to sleep. I was so sad and tired.

time getting up. I get the feeling those two understand each other.

I am content. I got my family to watch over. And they take care of me. Life is good.



We are a Family!

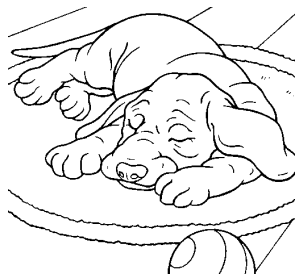
Time passed and then one day that big truck pulled up and out comes Dr. T. He and my family were talking and I heard Mom and Grandma say "No" over and over. I was getting a bit concerned. But Ramon kept saying "Yes. Please!" Finally they all settled on "Giving it a try". Whatever "it" was.

Dr. T went to the back of his truck, opened the door and out came Rover! I started jumping up and down and yipping till he looked my way and he just gave this great big howl of joy! We raced to meet each other. What a happy reunion it was.



"I guess that answers that" said mom. Grandma went back into the house muttering "Great, just great". And Ramon piled in with Rover and me for a great big group hug. "Now I have two dogs!" he said over and over again.

Rover and I were the luckiest dog alive. We both belonged now.



A few years have passed. Rover is getting old, and I'm all grown up. Ramon is still in school. Mom still works on Burns Avenue, and grandma still sleeps a lot. Actually she and Rover sleep a lot more these days. They both have a hard

I woke up when I heard a happy yip and my oldest brother came bouncing down the grass at me. Oh, maybe my whole family was right behind him and life would be all good again! But it was only him, and he did not know where any of the others were. But he had found food. He took me over to the garbage place and we found quite a bit to eat there. I had food and a brother. I felt better already!



About then a bunch of working men showed up and started yelling at us to get away. I was not yet done eating but I started running. Then one of the men grabbed my brother. My brother yelled at me to run, and I did. But this time I did not go so far. Last time I had run I had lost my sister. I was not going to lose my brother! I watched the man lift my brother up and turn him all

over. He was gentle and made nice noises. Maybe he was not going to hurt my brother. Maybe he was going to let him go and we would be alright again. But then he just walked off with my brother. The other men started working and I could not get past them to go after the man who took my brother. So I sat there and waited. And waited. The man and my brother never came back.

Here I was again all alone!

Rover

Maybe everybody was back under the Welcome Center I thought. I decided to go check. It was midday now and hot and very quiet. But crossing the street to get home was the scariest thing I ever did. Mom was so right about cars and buses. Maybe they can't see dogs because they didn't even slow down for me to get out of the way. Or maybe they think I went to traffic school and learned the rules. But I'm just a dog! I don't know car and bus rules!

I ran this way and that way, and I almost got hit. Right there I knew I would NEVER cross a street again.



And then there was nobody under the Welcome Center. I was so tired, and now I was hungry and thirsty again too. So I just laid down to sleep. All alone.

Later it got dark and scary, and strange dogs stuck their noses into my place. But nobody came in and I went back to sleep.

I woke up with a start when a very big dog stuck his nose right into my face. Like my Mom had told us I quickly rolled onto my back to show I was not going to fight. I think I might even have peed myself a little, I was so scared.



But the big dog just grunted, and plopped down next to me. Real close and warm. He even snuggled up a little. Is that what it feels like to have a Dad, I wondered?

my friend. And if I might miss him. I whapped my tail to let him know just how right he was. I missed Rover so much! They all looked at me and started laughing. "That dog is listening to us. And that must be his friend."

That night they put my blankets next to Ramon's bed. Yes, I am a keeper!



I got a little better every day. My family had their routine and I fit right in. Mom got up first, then Ramon and me. Grandma came to drink coffee when we all were eating. Then Ramon went out in the yard with me and made sure I did my business. Then he

and mom left and me and Grandma went back to sleep. Later grandma would wake and put me outside. She kept telling me "You are one lucky dog!" I'm not sure if I would be quite so lucky if I was only with grandma. I got he feeling she thought I was getting spoiled.

In the afternoon Ramon came home and we played outside for a while. Or we just sat and talked. Well, Ramon talked, I listened and made happy sounds.

and some food could not cure. Oh, and the fleas, they needed to go!

Rover is alive!

I was listening to all of it and really perked up when Dr. T. mentioned that I must have been the other dog that got hit. A lady had brought in an older dog in real bad shape yesterday morning that had gotten hit down by the market. They were talking about Rover! And Rover was still alive from what Dr. T. said!! He had a broken leg and some real bad wounds but the lady had insisted they can make him well. So Rover was apparently at the vet clinic recovering.

If only I could talk! I could ask them to take me to see Rover. We both would recover so much sooner if were only together. But I can't talk. And Dr. T. went away, and Mom went to work, and the boy went to school. Grandma looked at me and called me "one lucky dog" and then we both went to sleep. She laid on the couch, and I laid on pile of nice soft blankets. I have never been so comfortable in my life!

That evening mom returned with some canned food for me. I have hardly even ever had kibbles. But I never tasted anything as nice as the canned stuff. After my belly was full I went back to resting. I still hurt a lot but my spirit was soaring. It looked like I really had a home. I belonged!

I heard my people talking about the accident I had with the taxi man. My boy, his name is Ramon, was wondering if that other dog, meaning Rover, might be

My New Best Friend

When it started to get light the big dog nudged me awake and told me to come along. Since my family was all gone and I had no idea what to do, his plan for the day was good enough for me.



First we headed for the river for a drink. I really did not want to cross that road again. But Rover – that is what he said his name was – gave me a lesson on how to cross the road. You just stand there and wait till

no cars are coming. You never run out in front of a car because they will not stop. I had already learned that!

After we had a drink we went over to the garbage. This time of the morning the workers were not yet there and we got to eat. I have to say, my Mom's milk tasted way better than some of that stuff. But I was hungry enough to eat anything. Right about then some bigger dogs showed up, and told us to shove off or get a beating. Rover seems kind of old and I was just a puppy, so we moved on quickly.

Rover said Burns Avenue is good for food once it gets later in the morning. Crossing the street again seemed just a little less scary now that I knew what to do.

Tourists

We were still early and Burns Avenue was still empty and quiet except for a few other dogs who also seemed to wait for the "tourists". Once they started to show up I learned that tourists are mostly kind of pale people, like they don't get enough sun. And they all wear baggy clothes and some carry great big packs. They all seem to like to wear hats too.



But they all eat. And they all seem to have more food than a person can eat.

I was ready to jump in and help myself to some of that good smelling stuff. But Rover grabbed me by the neck and sat me down for one of his lessons. I have gotten many of his lessons in my life, and you know - that guy really knows his stuff!

So anyhow, what you do is not just grab some food and run. You walk up politely and sit down a little distance from the tourist. Then you stare at his food. It gives the tourist the idea that you might want some. When he throws food you act quickly before another dog gets it. If he hands it to you take it slow and gentle. And you move around a bit. You don't ever beg from just one person or they get tired of you. And do wag your tail! A lot!



I woke up because there was a light shining at me. I could not see who was behind the light. "Oh please, Just let me die here in peace. Don't make me move!" I pleaded silently. Then I heard the voice of the little boy and the voice of a woman. The woman was saying that I sure looked dead. I wagged my tail with the last of my strength to show I was not all dead yet. The little boy came to my side and was telling his mom all excited that I was still alive, and could they please take me home.



This time I did not fight getting wrapped in a blanket. I was happy to be carried to where ever they took me. If it was their home, or if I was to heaven, it was all good.

It was very painful to get carried but we did get to the little house the boy had told me about. Grandma looked me over and declared me a loss. But the little boy pleaded with his mom to just give me a chance. Maybe they could call the doctor. Grandma and mom decided that if I was still alive by morning they would call the vet.

All night long I fought to stay alive. So many times I felt myself slipping away. But I was determined, now that finally someone wanted me, I was not going to up and die. I was going to live. And I did.



In the morning a great big man showed up they called Dr. T. He looked me over just like grandma had but he was a bit more optimistic. He said nothing was really broken, just bruises. Nothing that some rest

He sat with me for a while and told me all about his life. His Mom was working at a restaurant on Burns Avenue. They both lived at his grandmother's little house with a nice yard full of big shade trees. He had a big sister, but she was married and had moved away. His mom worked a lot, and his grandmother slept a lot. So he spent his time playing with friend or reading at home after school. Now that his leg was bad, he was alone a lot. And he was sad.



I listened intently to it all. Nobody had ever talked to me. I felt quite proud that the little boy told me so much about himself. So I wagged my tail a lot even though it hurt. I even managed not to yelp in pain. I did not want to make the boy feel bad. He was so nice. He even gave me a bit of something odd to eat that came in a little bag. He said it's call Plantain Chips. I like Plantain Chips.

I have a Home!

Then he left and I went back to sleep. I know I needed to get up and get food and water but I had no strength left. If I was going to die here, at least I had met the nice boy as my last memory on earth.

I like this game. I smiled and wagged, and food came flying. Life was definitely looking good!

After we ate real well we went and laid down in the shade and took a nice long nap. Rover said that the evenings were even better. Even more tourists and they all were happier and eating huge big plates full of food with lots of extra. I dreamed of those huge big plates right next there to Rover, my best friend.



Rover was very happy too with the way the morning had gone. He told me between naps that he wasn't getting so much food anymore now that he had lost so much hair. People did not like the looks of him and did not want him too close. I on the other hand was a cute puppy and people wanted to touch me and talk nice to me.

We made a good team. I got us close to people and food, and Rover kept me safe from all the things little puppies don't know about.

Growing Up

Time went by, and we were doing well. We ate, we found places to sleep. We looked out for each other.

I learned about other dogs. There were the stray dogs like us. Then there were the dogs who belonged. Some of them



were worse off than we strays. They were tied up with little food and water. They couldn't even go to the river or to the garbage to feed themselves. Then there were the ones who had a yard and were taken care of. They are the lucky ones! But they did not like us strays.



And then there were dogs that I was not sure about. They walked around with bows in their hair and sat on laps!

I was growing up. It turned out I would never be a big dog but I was young and strong. Trouble was that my hair was coming out too. I still looked better than Rover but I was no longer cute. And that made it harder to have the tourists want me close.

We Belong!

One Saturday a bunch of people showed up that didn't really look like tourists. They all wore clothes with the same green picture on it. Later in life I learned that those are what humans call letters. There were little



animals crawling all over the letter. I know because I got a real close up look.

Anyway, these people had hot dogs! Lots of hot dogs. We followed them along which seemed to be what they wanted. They gave us juicy bits of hot dogs every time we came close. Easy enough!

School was starting because I saw bunches of kids in uniform walk by. I hunkered down a little further. Children seem to like to throw rocks. I thought about it but I don't know why. Maybe they don't know either. Maybe they just never had a Rover in their life to sit them down and teach them a lesson before they do something dumb.



The morning passes and the same kids came by on their way home. One little boy was all by himself. He was limping and had some sort of brace on his leg. I was just thinking "I know how your feel" when he saw me and pelted me right on my injured side with a big sharp rock. I yelped in pain and fear because he was coming right at me. I looked at him and pleaded with my eyes "Please don't hurt me any more. I can't take anymore pain."

The boy suddenly stood very still. He looked me right in the eyes. Then he surprised me by squatting down in front of me and stretching out his hand so I could sniff it. Did he really not want to hurt me anymore? Did he want to make friends? I looked close and saw that he was crying a little bit. And then he started to talk to me.

He had gotten hurt in a fall and his leg was very painful. Some of the bigger boys at school had given him a hard time about it. He was angry and ashamed that he was not big and strong and could not defend himself. And when he had seen me laying there he took his anger out on me. When I had starting yelping in pain the boy came to see that we were much the same. In pain and helpless to defend ourselves. He, the boy and I, the dog.

parcel in a blanket into a car, and the blanket was all full of blood. The blood of my best friend, Rover! I started to scream, and scream. I just could not take losing any more family. Rover was all I had. The only one who cared. Oh if I only had died too, and the lady had really been an angel.

She was back now by my side. They had another blanket and started to put me on it. This did not feel right. What was she going to do with me? Did she think I was dead too? What if she wrapped me up and put me in the trash right along with Rover?

As much as I wanted to be with Rover, I wanted to live even more. With one great effort I jumped up and ran for the Welcome Center with all the strength I had left. If I just made it under there I could rest.

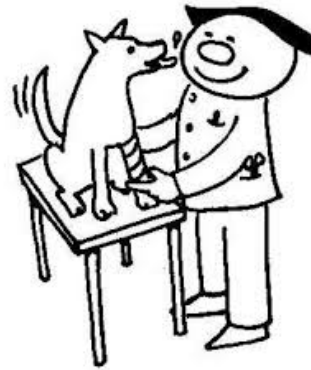
Ramon

I didn't make it under there because the lawn people were working right there and it was too dangerous to go under the building right under their noses. So I limped to the back of the parking lot and laid myself between some bushes.

I laid there a long time. The day turned to night and back to day. I was cold, thirsty and hungry and in a lot of pain. I just laid there waiting to see if I would live or die.



Next thing you know this woman has something around my neck and hangs on to me. This was not good! Or maybe it wasn't all that bad. Because at the same time that she held me she was also hugging me. I could feel love and kindness in that hug. Nobody had ever hugged me! So I decided to hold still and studied these little critters crawling all over the letters in her shirt. Another woman gave me some nice tasting liquid she called vitamins. Yet another stuck something up my butt. Now that was not ok! I squirmed some but the lady up front kept talking nice to me. So I did not fight. The one in the back said that my temperature was good when she took the thing out of me. Apparently I have something called "fleas and ticks". I got something on my fur for that. Overall everybody seemed happy with the shape I was in, and they gave me some more food.



Rover was in for much the same treatment. He just stood there with that big grin on his face and was really enjoying all the attention. They said he also has "mange", something to do with all that loss of hair. Lucky for me they didn't mention mange when they looked me over.

Both of us got brand new collars with little shiny tags on them. We now belonged to these people is what one said. I was not real certain who they were or what belonging to them meant, but it sounded real nice "to belong".

We hung around a while and watched the other dogs getting looked over and getting collars. Then we went back up to our usual spots for a nap.

Mr Bob



There is this man on Burns Avenue who sits in a little chair outside of a shop. His name is Bob and he knows everything. He knows all the people, he knows all the dogs and even those nasty cats. I heard him tell a tourist that those collars and tags we got mean that we belong to "CAWS".

Those must be the hot dog people, as close as I can figure.

Unfortunately the collar thing did not last. One day some kids came up acting friendly. I should have known! No sooner did they get close to me when they snagged the collar and took off.

Now what? Did they belong to CAWS now? Was I just another stray dog again?

Rover got his collar pinched much the same way. So we just decided to go about our way like we always had. We went to the river early, cruised by the trash and then up to Burns for most of the day.

The Bad Day

And then the bad day came.

We were coming back up from the river and crossing the road. We saw a taxi coming and waited for it to pass. And here all of a sudden the taxi driver man aimed right for us. We tried to scramble back on the



sidewalk but it was too late. Rover who was in front got hit square on. He bounced off the front of the car into me, I spun and got hit by the side of the car as it went by.

I don't really remember much after that. Everything got real quiet and dark. I wanted to go over to Rover but I was not able to move. I could not feel my legs anymore. I could not lift my head. And I started to think that I must be dead.

Suddenly a woman's face appeared in front of me. She said sweet things. So I was in heaven then and this was an angel. But the angel started to lift me up and carried me to the safety of the sidewalk. And I heard



another woman yell at the taxi man. She did not sound like I would think an angel sounds. As a matter of fact she was real mad at the taxi man. Real mad!

All that made me realize I had not died and it was time to look after Rover. I managed to lift my head and look over and all I saw was blood, lots of blood in the road. Someone was packing a big