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# The Middle (or the End)

*Bringing a Lab into your home after its puppy days are over.*

by Jillian LaCross

**L**ast issue, we discussed the considerations to have in mind when getting a Labrador pup straight from a breeder, focused on what to look for in a breeder – and what a breeder looks for in a potential owner.

There are more than puppies who need homes, though. Labs of all ages, but commonly post-puppy, are sitting in shelters or being fostered by rescue organizations, all filled with the longing for a happy forever home and a human to call their own because, for many reasons, it just didn't happen the way it should have the first time around. Many of the considerations and questions discussed in the last issue are the same, but they are now cast in a different light.

## The Organization

### Research a Rescue Organization or Shelter Before You Visit

You can find your new family member at your local shelter or through a rescue organization. Some rescue organizations only adopt out locally while others do so on a regional or national scale. The Labrador Retriever Club, the parent club for the Labrador retriever breed through the AKC, has a rescue branch with a complete up to date listing of recommended rescue organizations and individuals. The LRC Rescue does not adopt out dogs, but it has stood as a valuable resource for placing Labs into rescues and matching interested owners with a rescue on their list. In other words, rescue support.

This is done a couple ways. "We help fund the rescue organization operations through the Rescue Fund, and we help owners place their Labs if they are given up or refer them to a specific organization such as the Senior Lab Project or Lab Lifeline for other needs," explains Terri



McFadden, LRC National Rescue Coordinator. "We want to make sure they go to a reliable organization."

Some organizations are not reputable, which is where the Rescue Fund comes in. McFadden gave one example of a Midwest rescue that placed sick dogs all over the country, and the LRC Rescue, though it did not vet for this particular rescue, got complaints. The county ended up seizing 65 Labs who were in bad shape and got them to a reputable rescue, which then got the Labs the treatment they needed and redistributed them. The LRC Rescue donated money – also acquired through donations – to help cover food, boarding, and medical expenses. "The fund helps us assist organizations that need funds in an emergency where there are a large number of Labradors," says McFadden. These funds are also used in natural disaster situations, such as in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy.

For individuals who want to find a reputable organization, McFadden recommends using the list available in "Rescue" on the LRC website [www.thelabradorclub.com](http://www.thelabradorclub.com). People can also contact one of the rescue's coordinators for advice. "We tell people to do their homework, to know the kinds of questions to ask, to consider whether they have the time and finances," says McFadden. "A lot of people don't know what they want to find out. We help them with that."

The LRC Rescue list isn't the only resource on the Internet, though it is one of the most reliable. There are sites with comprehensive listings for the entire United States, and you can refine these lists to find sources closer to your home or region. One example is [Petfinder.com](http://Petfinder.com),

which has adoptable dogs and cats from more than 13,000 rescues or shelters. (Just make sure to do research on the organization itself before inquiring about a Lab.) There is also [adoptapet.com](http://adoptapet.com) and [rescueme.org](http://rescueme.org). Several Lab rescues are listed on the *Just Labs* website at [www.justlabsmagazine.com/links](http://www.justlabsmagazine.com/links), though there are many more (contact us if you would like one listed). Then of course, keep an eye on your local shelter. Labradors, especially Lab mixes, often find their way there, too.

Make sure to review a rescue's website to see if you are comfortable with how they operate and how they fulfill their mission before contacting them. McFadden gives some tips on what to watch out for during your search: "One thing to look at is the price. Usually the price is to cover the cost of a spay/neuter and a minor adoption fee. Some charge \$500-\$700, which is way too much. If you're considering a rescue, check with the local shelter to find out if the rescue is using the shelter to find Labs, and whether they are getting complaints. Go to a local Lab specialty club to see if the rescue or shelter is listed; they can provide local insight into the reputability of an organization. See if the rescue is a registered charitable organization, and take note on whether the Labs are in foster homes or in one place. Most rescues use foster homes," says McFadden.

Labs4Rescue out of Killingworth, Connecticut, is an example of a rescue that uses foster homes. The rescue, which is included on the LRC Rescue list, has considerable experience with saving and relocating Labs – and interviewing potential owners. It's placed more than 11,000

Labs nationwide since its installment in 2002, mainly through volunteer efforts and as many as 20 a week through efforts in the eastern U.S. When asked what potential owners should look for in a rescue, Cathy Mahle responds with four main pieces of advice: "The adopter must be contractually obligated to only return the Lab to the rescue if for any reason it cannot stay with the adopter. The rescue should only adopt out spayed or neutered pets. All Labs should be heartworm tested and treated if needed and all other known vet work done prior to adoption. The rescue should abide by all USDA and state Department of Agriculture regulations." These are some of Labs4Rescue's own policies.

### The Visit and the Adoption Process

Once you've decided on where you consider the best place to find your new Lab, the interview process begins. To reiterate last issue's article, this is the time for an organization to make sure you are a fit for one of their Labs, but it's also the time for you to evaluate the organization further and make sure they are everything







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they say they are. Most rescues have applications available on their websites and a listing of Labs up for adoption. On the application, or by other ways of contact such as using a *Petfinder.com* listing, potential owners can name the Lab(s) they are most interested in adopting.

When Labs4Rescue receives an application, “We look for someone who loves Labs and wants to treat them like a true family member,” says Mahle. During the phone interview portion, “We ask for information on vets they have used to verify their history, and look for all current pets to be up to date on vet work and spayed or neutered.” The next part of Labs4Rescue’s process is calling a potential owner’s veterinarian for a reference, as well as the landlord if living in an apartment or condo complex.

Next is the home visit, conducted by volunteers. “When we visit the home, we make sure all family members are on board with the adoption, and that the environment is safe for the Labs. We strive very hard to make the appropriate match, so that the Lab will not have to be rehomed again,” says Mahle. During the home visit, an organization’s representative will want to examine the yard, learn where the Lab will be kept in the house and how many hours the Lab will be alone, how a potential owner will introduce the new addition to cats and dogs that are already in the house, and discuss veterinary care and exercise plans.

Remember, a rescue will also be expecting questions from you regarding the dog, their adoption process, what their fees support, and if they have any references. Rescued or displaced Labradors are usually placed into private homes or sponsored by a shelter volunteer while they get the treatment they need and wait for the right people to come along, so also remember to ask about how the Labs are being cared for and about the foster family or individual.

Not all rescues operate this way, but many of them do because the individuals and volunteers running them want to ensure that Labs find the best possible homes.

A shelter is a little different in that there is usually a mixture of breeds, not just Labradors. When visiting a shelter, learn about its policies, such as whether the dog needs to be checked by a vet within a certain timeframe after adoption and what happens if the dog needs to be returned. Make sure to ask about the dog’s history or if you see anything that concerns you. Also, observe how a dog reacts to the volunteers or personnel around the shelter: Happy? Afraid? Check out the cleanliness of the shelter spaces, including the run area.

The adoption process can happen rather quickly, in three weeks or fewer, if the right match is made and depending on the organization. Oftentimes, especially for shelters, it can be the same day. Then, congratulations are in order, and life will never be the same.

## The Dog

### Personality: A Known Factor

With pups, it’s an educated guess what their personalities will develop into. With a shelter or rescue Lab, personality is a known and important consideration.

Adolescent Labs or young adult Labs might be a little more... sprightly. This could also be the reason behind their landing in a rescue situation in the first place: The former owners couldn’t handle them or were naïve about the time and energy it takes to own a Labrador retriever – a large sporting breed that has energy genetically coded into its DNA. Senior Labs can end up in rescues and shelters for all sorts of reasons, such as not being able



to be used for breeding or because their owner passed away and the heirs don't want the dog. Other common reasons are that the family has to move and cannot bring the dog along, or a child develops allergies.

Spend time with a Lab you're considering adopting and talk with the people who have cared for him. Caretakers have come to know a dog's personality over time and may be able to relay the dog's history. Sometimes a dog's personality doesn't show well in certain settings. Such as, a public setting with lots of noise. It might be better to meet in a private room with less commotion.

Just as breeders are dedicated to helping new owners find the pup that best fits in with the owner's lifestyle, experience, and family life, so are good rescue organizations that adopt out Labs. Sometimes, Labs4Rescue finds itself making recommendations if they feel a certain Lab isn't right for a family or individual. This is an important part of their mission to promote responsible dog ownership. "This isn't a mail order business," states Mahle. "Just because an applicant applies for a Lab doesn't mean they are the appropriate home. We tell applicants if the Lab isn't a match, but we suggest others that might be a better fit." If the right match is found, and personality is an essential part of the matching process, everyone will be happier in the long run.

### Age & Health

An adult or young Lab's health is much like an iceberg in the sense that sometimes only part of their health history is visible above the surface; the rest is hidden, unknown, only to show up years later. The animal may not show signs of anything right now, but genetically they could be predisposed to a health ailment down the road. Other problems may have stemmed from being in a bad situation, such as abuse or mistreatment in which a Lab's physical or mental health is permanently altered.

Senior dogs, on the other hand, often also show signs of health problems and may already be diagnosed. Problems include cataracts, hip dysplasia, or seizures. This could have been the reason the dog was given up or abandoned in the first place. Adopting a senior Lab, however, is more short

term, so potential owners need to be prepared that much of their time will be spent making the dog comfortable and to give it the experience of a wonderful life in its final days.

Health is not always a deciding or inhibiting factor, however. Mahle has found that most Labs – apart from the aggressive ones – are adoptable. "We have adopted seniors, blind Labs, three-legged Labs, and Labs with epilepsy and diabetes, and even Labs with cancer. While each Lab is adoptable, each Lab may not work in every situation. We urge applicants not to fall in love with a photo or color, but to really work with us on finding the right Lab for their situation." It might be the most adorable, gentlest Lab, but if the health issues cannot be managed properly, then that Lab might not be the right choice. For many owners though, based on Labs4Rescue's experience, health issues are not a detriment – they are another opportunity to care.

**W**hy are rescue and adoption efforts important? "We want to stand behind the Labrador breed," says McFadden of the Labrador Retriever Club. "People can get good homes for their Labs if they have to give them up, and the parent club [AKC] is proactive in making sure the breed is supported through rescue and advice."

For Mahle at Labs4Rescue, it's about making a difference for the individual Labs who are deserving of a happy home. "These Labs were homeless through no fault of their own. They are the most gentle and devoted companions, and they seem to know they have been given a chance at a new life," says Mahle. "However, while we make a difference to the Lab, it is also equally gratifying knowing that you have made the difference to the life of the adopter. Some of our adopters are first-time dog owners, so knowing you play a small role in establishing one of the most important relationships they will ever have is so heartwarming. And seeing the look on the face of children getting their first Lab is priceless."

Labs4Rescue's motto is "Save a Lab, have a friend for life!" Anyone who has ever owned a Lab knows this to be a guarantee, and it's certainly a guarantee for any adoptive owner.



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# Letters

Dear *Just Labs*,

I recently received my November/December 2014 issue and after reading the article, "The Middle," my heart skipped a beat.

I have been a dog owner my entire life but had never adopted a rescue dog. Five years ago, that changed after the loss of my 15-year-old chocolate Lab. By chance I stumbled upon the Labs4Rescue website. Hesitant at first, I decided to investigate further in order to exhaust all available resources in my pursuit to bring home a new addition to the family. After numerous telephone conversations, e-mails, and questions, on their behalf and mine, I was the proud owner of a one-year-old black Lab, Marty.

Marty is everything I could have hoped for and more. There is a true sense of gratification knowing



I was able to give this amazing Lab a second chance. Labs4Rescue's thorough adoption process and concern for their Labs and adopters alike are the reasons I have, as their motto says, "A Friend For Life."

Thank you, *Just Labs* for doing your due diligence and accrediting and highlighting this incredible organization in your article. Labs4Rescue's volunteers are caring and compassionate people who work endlessly in the attempt to give their

labs another chance at life. They pride themselves on proper placement for each Lab, which is of the utmost importance. Finally, they are receiving their deserved recognition for all their hard work and efforts.

Hopefully, your article will bring public awareness that rescues are an option for finding your "best friend," particularly when an organization like Labs4Rescue is only a click away.

*Erin  
Livingston, New Jersey*

## Stiff Dog?

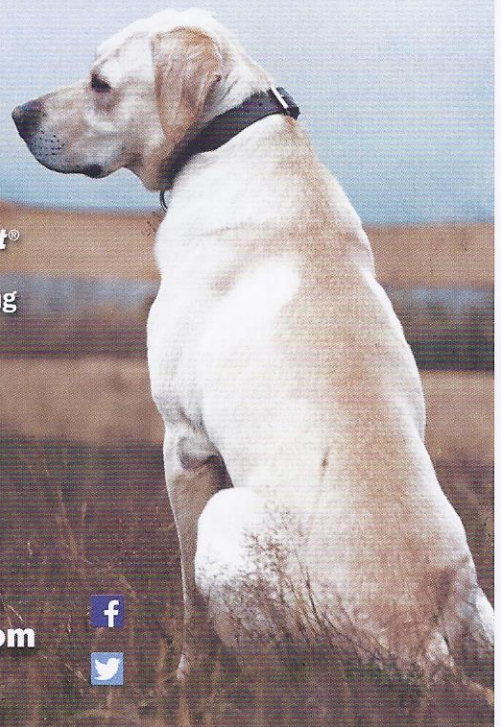


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