

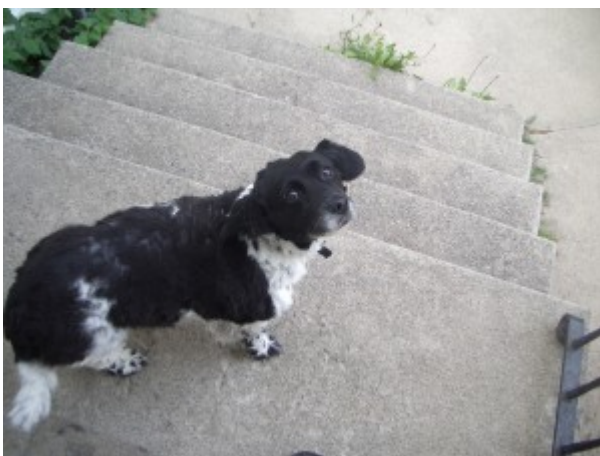
Before And After – Chapter 3 – Beesly

Our dog Beesly (named for the character Pam Beesly on the awesome NBC show The Office, which you should really watch (end of shameless plug)) can grow to be very fluffy. From people who have seen her, we've had comments ranging from "That dog is more round than she is tall!" to "there is more fur than dog there" and then there are the people who would just laugh after they saw her. She ~~is~~ was a very fluffy dog. Since it's summertime where Beesly lives, we figured it was time to shear her like a sheep, which ended up being a surprise doggie makeover because she had SO much fur. Check this out:

BEFORE:



AFTER:



After we sheared Beesly, we looked forward to showing her to

our 9-year-old daughter, Taylor, who is Beesly's main caregiver. We told the kids we had a surprise for them, and we let Beesly in from the back yard and my daughter's friend cried out that the surprise was that we got a new dog. Well, thanks for giving the kids expectations about the surprise (hehe), but she **was** half-right. The surprise was a "new" dog. The kids can now pet Beesly since before the haircut you would only be petting a thick mat of fur. Beesly herself appreciates this makeover a lot too! She is much more cool when she lays outside, she is less thirsty, and she even has lots more energy! She IS like a new dog! And by the way, the kids all liked the surprise. Taylor saw Beesly and laughed and laughed; it was adorable. And as a finale to this blog post, THIS is how much fur we got off of Beesly – the pen is sitting on top of the bag to reference the volume of the fur contained inside:



I know they make clothes out of alpaca fur and sheep's wool; does anyone know about the harvesting of dog fur? And I'm not talking about Burlington Coat Factory, YUCK!

I Smell A Rat...

Make that 4 rats. We now have 4 pet rats. How did that happen, you ask? A bit of mistaken identity when they were picked out at the pet store resulted in rat babies? No, all 4 are male – I don't think there's any mistaking that. What happened is this...

We got our two pet rats, and the kids' friends decided they wanted pet rats. This family has a history of obtaining and disposing of pets at a record rate. It bugs the heck out of me, but I don't want to say anything to them and step over the boundary of telling people how to raise their kids. We took a cat they decided they didn't want anymore, but we had to give it back because our dog was constantly trying to eat her and I was more allergic to that cat than I am to most cats. So anyway, this family is notorious for getting pets and then "getting rid" of them when they're tired of them, want new pets, or just plain can't take care of them anymore. To a degree, circumstances like these are understandable. We had to "get rid" of a dog because she bit my daughter in the face – understandable that we can't have a dog in the house who bites kids when we have 4 kids. Getting "rid of her" upset me at the time, but I also knew there was no choice. I'm putting "get rid" in quotes because it's a term I don't like to use about pets. I don't like to think that this is something people should regularly do with animals. I'm a firm believer in pets being commitments – you must keep them until they pass away (extenuating circumstances don't count – stuff happens sometimes, but not to EVERY pet, as in the case with this family). You need to do all the research about care before you obtain the pet; such as cleaning up after it and how much it will cost to feed it – which is why our daughter's friend's family needed to "get rid" of their rats.

It was a fine line to walk. I don't want to encourage these people to get more pets by taking their leftovers, but on the

other hand, I'm an animal lover, and I can only imagine what would happen to unwanted rats (snake food, turned loose in a field = hawk or cat or coyote food, etc). Besides, my kids have been just GREAT about caring for their pet rats. I barely know the rats are in the house, except when I actually have time to play with them, which is exactly how I wanted it. The girls feed and water their rats, clean the cage weekly, and play with them and give them exercise daily. So how could I say no to getting their friends' rats and yes to sending them to certain doom?

So, yes, we now have 4 rats in the house. Please don't start calling me 'crazy rat lady'; it wasn't entirely my fault; I was just trying to help! Here are the new additions – Buckeye and well, I can't remember his name, so here is Buckeye and what's his name (his head is barely visible underneath Buckeye – he looks just like Oreo, one of our original rats).



And while I'm at it, here are our original rats, Oreo and Bobby Jack:



My Bookshelf 0' Rats – just what I've always wanted ☐

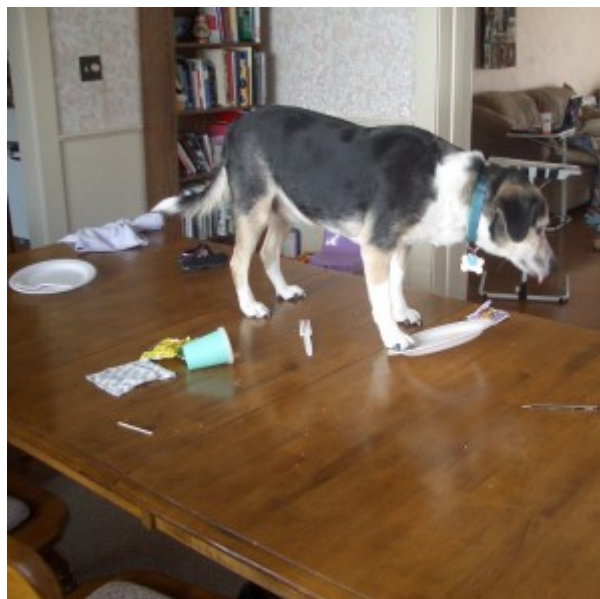


My Dog Is Not A Cat

... but she thinks she is! We used to have a cat, but she passed away last year. We got our dog as a puppy just 4 months after we got the cat as a kitten, and they lived together for 10 years, so it's no wonder my dog thinks she's a cat. Despite her old age, she will jump on the furniture, and even walk on the top of the couch – very cat-like behavior. She is also more independent like a cat, and she'll only come when called to snuggle if she wants to, like a cat.

The other day, she decided she was done waiting for the kids

to eat their lunch. We had left it out because the kids hadn't eaten well, and we thought they could come back later and have a bite – WRONG! Our dog Charity (the cat in disguise) took it upon herself to climb **UP ON** the dining room table and get their lunches. She is our spoiled rotten baby; what were we going to do, yell at the old lady? So we took a picture instead, note how she uses her feet to tip up the plates and hold them in place so they don't slide away while she's licking:



And Charity has such a personality; she hates being laughed at, so I think she learned her lesson. Besides, once the motivation to get the food was gone (eaten), she was stuck up on the table. We wrestled with the decision to help her down; she is 11 years old and I didn't want her breaking bones or worse, but in the end she got herself down successfully. First she kind of growled and grunted around up there while we giggled at her from the living room, then she used her new vantage point as a barking stool, but just as I got sick of it and went to help her down, she got down herself. She is such a jerk but what a personality that dog has... We love you Charity!

And now you need to see how cute she really is, one blue eye

and all. So here is one of my favorite pictures of her in a Chicago Cubs shirt – opening day is on Monday, so GO CUBBIES!!!



What Sets Him Off?

What sets him off? Everything under the sun and even the sun itself. I'm talking about our lovely scarlet macaw parrot. I would not recommend these things as pets for ANYONE – it's true when they say that wild animals cannot be tamed! Why we have our bird is a long story, and it's not important now because we're stuck with him. I'm not one to just "get rid" of pets unless the circumstances are extreme. It's a pet peeve (pun intended) of mine when people get animals and then discard them just because they're sick of taking responsibility for them. And in a way (though I can't dwell on this right now because I'm extremely upset with Squawky – who really lives up to his name), I love our parrot and wouldn't want to ~~curse~~ see him go to another home.

So that brings me to the point of this post – parrots scream constantly. They might be beautiful to look at, but their ear-splitting screams are beyond annoying. They're

unstoppable and headache-producing, and more than once, our parrot's screams have made our kids cry. We've adjusted our lifestyle to avoid his upsetting the kids, and for the most part that works; it seems to be me who feels the brunt of the negative parrot side effects. Thank goodness we were able to move into a bigger house a few years ago where Squawky was given his own room. Unfortunately, he shares the laundry room, and since somehow I was voted the family laundry-doer (gender?), it seems that Squawky's screaming affects me the most. I cannot do laundry during the day because I can't bring my young children in the laundry room with me. I do have a basket of toys in there, and they enjoy playing in there because there's lots of light and a nice soft carpet to lay on. But we get screamed at by the parrot. By nighttime, I'm too tired to do all the laundry, so much of the time, I'm left to worry about when to do it. Ideally, I'd do some here and there in between kids' lunches, naps, diaper changes and my errands, but then the parrot gets all riled up and screams me right out of the laundry room.

I looked to the Internet for advice, and one site suggested noting his "triggers". What sets him off and makes him scream? Making the list of his triggers hasn't helped, however. It's only made me see that getting screamed out of the laundry room seems unavoidable. Here are his triggers (if you're thinking about getting a pet parrot, use this list as reasons on why you should NOT):

the sunrise or light of any kind – it's a parrot's natural instinct to be quiet in the dark so predators won't find them. But heavy drapes and a sheet over his cage do not block out all the light during the day, and it's really difficult to do laundry at night in the dark – believe me I've tried more than once!

yelling – any yelling in the house gets him going – kids fighting, kids having fun, just raising our voices to hear each other when we're in separate parts of the house. He

especially likes it when I yell at him for yelling!

singing – if my husband is in a show and needs to practice, everyone has to leave. And not because my husband is a bad singer – he's actually very talented. But the bird will join in, and HE is a BAD singer!

talking on the phone – any time anyone is on the phone, the bird thinks we're calling out for him I guess, but he takes it upon himself to yell. So I can forget folding laundry while talking on the phone, which was a great way to pass the time while doing this boring task.

having his door open – closing his door not only muffles his screaming, but it makes him scream less for some reason

something he likes on tv – he has a tv in his room, which was put in there for me to watch while doing laundry. But I can forget about hearing anything on the tv while I'm in there, thanks to the parrot. Sometimes Animal Planet or his favorite show, The Price Is Right makes him scream along with the audience.

happiness – if he's happy, he will get rowdy and play and scream.

anger – if he's upset about not getting enough attention, he will scream.

hunger – if he's hungry, he will scream.

thirst – if he's thirsty, he will scream.

dogs barking – if our 2 dogs bark, which they do at least 4 times per day, the bird will join right in and scream.

So, I guess for now I've decided that the laundry must be a family affair. I've gotten upset several times about this same issue and came to this conclusion before, but it's never worked. My husband works during the day, and at night, we're

usually busy or the kids have their own chores or homework to do, so my getting help with the laundry has not been a consistent solution. The other thing we've thought of is to move the parrot out of the laundry room, but if you look at my list of Squawky's triggers, you'll see that he must be in a room with a door, which eliminates the other spare room we have on the first floor because it's doorless. I can't imagine that he'd do any better on the second floor closer to the bedrooms either. The laundry room is right below my bedroom so once he gets going in the morning, I can usually forget about sleeping in anyway.

Well, I guess I'm done venting for now. I have a good hour to catch up on laundry since we have a meeting tonight and we took the kids to the babysitters early, so I have to make it productive. I guess I will have to blast my ipod and leave my husband to fend for himself on his business call... Well, it is HIS bird after all!

Here's a picture of the jerk:



Don't let his cuteness fool you. This is actually a "baby" picture. He's much more obnoxious looking now!

Three Blind Mice... Err, Rats

Our new pet rats are great, and Oreo is becoming a real friend. Bobby Jack, however, seems very nervous all the time. He squeaks and sneezes a lot, and he uses his nose to try to burrow into my hand when I hold him. We are thinking he might be blind. I don't know that much about rat behavior; these are my first pet rats. But it just seems like Bobby Jack can't see. Are there vision tests for rats? I guess I have some research to do about rat blindness, squeaking, and sneezing...

Pet Roll Call

Once again, we have a bit of a food chain residing as pets in our home. When my cat passed away a year ago now, it left a hole in our household food chain. Although it's not quite as balanced as it was when the cat was here, today we find ourselves with a small zoo nonetheless. Here is the roll call of pets in our house:

Charity – almost 11-year-old female Jack (Jerk) Russell Terrier / Australian Shepard mix with one blue eye and one brown eye. An extremely feisty but lovable loudmouth who doesn't hesitate to let you know what she wants, when she wants it. Will even growl for petting! World's worst puppy = World's best family dog.

Beesly – nearly 7-year-old cocker spaniel mix with extremely thick fur. We once shaved her and to our astonishment, she became a much smaller dog because her fur is so thick! She really likes it outdoors, and we call her nordic (of or pertaining to the north, where it's cold) because she doesn't

seem to mind the cold at all – probably can't feel it through that blanket of fur! We adopted her from the humane society in March 2008, and we're SO glad! GREAT with kids and an extreme snuggler. The only problem we have with her is her nasty dog breath! Oh, and her uncanny ability to escape. She can open doors and can somehow (repeatedly, not just a fluke!) unhook her way off of 2 dog chains at the same time! Luckily for us, she always comes back.

Squawky – an 8-year-old Scarlet Macaw parrot. After living with him for 7 years, I do not recommend parrots as pets! He screams (and I mean ear-splitting) constantly – a repairman once asked us if we had a pterodactyl behind the door after hearing him scream. But he is beautiful and drops gorgeous feathers all the time. And having him has been an awesome learning experience for us and the kids. He can talk and is very curious about everything. His vocabulary includes: hi, here kitty kitty, hi bird, and sometimes he just mumbles nonsense that sounds like human words. In his spare time, Squawky likes to watch The Price is Right and Animal Planet.

Oreo – one of our new rat additions. He is gray and white and smaller than Bobby Jack. He seems a little more curious and less picky about food than Bobby Jack. Had a close call with Charity this morning.

Bobby Jack – off-white colored rat who doesn't like his rat food. He enjoys many of the treats we've given him, especially junk food. Just after we got them, he was the snugglier of the two, but I think he was just tired from his journey home from the pet store because now he's as hyper and curious as his brother Oreo. They are 5 weeks old, and so far, we would agree that rats make great pets! They don't bite like gerbils and hamsters, and they don't scurry like mice. They are fairly clean animals who groom a lot, are very intelligent and easily trainable. I think one of the reasons they're not popular pets to have is because of their super-short lifespans, about 1.5-3 years only. □

Francis – the ladybug I found that became my new pet before I had the rats. I put him in a bug catcher, and then he went MIA. Good news – today I found him. Turns out, there was a little pocket in the bug catcher where he was hiding. I would check the bug catcher every now and then, and today I saw that he had re-emerged from hiding!

No Name – another ladybug I found in the house. I won't kill any bugs I find unless they're mosquitos – and how I enjoy killing those things! But any other bug I try to set free, and I just can't send ladybugs out into the Ohio wilderness to freeze to death. No Name is in a little container in the kitchen... I wonder what would happen if I put him in with Francis?

Mally – Ok, she's no longer part of our family physically, but we will always remember her. Since I mentioned her earlier, I thought I'd put her on the list. She was a 10-year-old inbred farm cat. My husband and I were in college, and we drove all the way out to a farm to get a kitten after reading an ad in the newspaper. By the time we got there, we wanted a cat so badly that we got one even though the owners said the mother cat had mated with a boy from a previous litter, which is how Mally came to be. Because of this, she was never 'quite right', and was always the size of a kitten. We named her Malice as a joke, but we always called her Mally. I was her world, and she hid from everyone else, prompting family and friends alike to joke about our "invisible cat". But she existed, I swear, and she was very sweet, at least with me. She liked to lie on my pregnant belly and would 'groom' my hair. I miss her a lot and wish I could get another cat, but I'm allergic. I was allergic to Mally, but there was no way I was going to get rid of her. I got her before any of my kids were born, and so I doted upon her and spoiled her while my husband was working in the wee beginning of our days together. For those of you who never saw her, here is my little cat:



You Dirty Rat(s)

According to Wikipedia.com, James Cagney never actually said the line, "*You Dirty Rat*". The closest he got was saying "Come out and take it, you dirty, yellow-bellied rat, or I'll give it to you through the door!" in *Taxi*. But *rats*! That's not the point of this post.

Seems I couldn't resist adding to the Food Chain Gang – we've added two pet rats to our family, Bobby and Oreo – the kids chose the names. It was kind of an impulsive activity to do today, pet shopping, but it was not an impulsive decision, the type that should never accompany a new pet. We've been talking about getting a rat for some time now, but if it ended up being the wrong decision for our family, we didn't want to *be like rats leaving a sinking ship* and ditch the responsibility. So we've been thinking about it a lot, and today just seemed like the right day to do it.

Rats are friendly, intelligent, non-biting rodents who make great pets. Rat owners compare their companionship to that of dogs, believe it or not, and from what I've seen so far, I see what they're talking about. I think rats haven't caught on as pets because many people don't like the way their tails look,

and they still have a negative stigma from a few incidents of centuries past, namely the Black Death outbreak and the legend of the Pied Piper of Hamelin. I did some research about both of these historical tales – not that they influenced my decision to get the rats as pets; the research was just for fun. But I found that the Bubonic Plague, aka the Black Death was most likely transmitted by fleas rather than rats. True the fleas would travel on the rats, but they more commonly preferred larger hosts such as dogs or cats and used rats when larger animals were unavailable. The Bubonic Plague was attributed to causing the demise of one quarter of the Earth's population of human beings at that time, it's hard to blame people for taking it out on rats. And the Pied Piper story is basically a legend that tries to explain the disappearance of over 100 children from the town of Hamelin in Germany just before the year 1300. Most likely, the children were recruited to newer European settlements, possibly by a man in "pied" clothing. In the legend, there is a rat infestation in Hamelin, and the Pied Piper leads the rats out of the town to a body of water where they all drown. The townspeople neglect to pay the Piper for his rat removal services, and he returns and leads their children out of town. Some versions claim they went to a cave, some say another village, and there are even a few versions that say the Piper had ill intentions toward the children – in one they meet a fate similar to the rats. I enjoyed some of the rat research I read and wanted to share it. If you want to continue the research on your own, I've added to the level of the cheesiness (and length) of this post by putting some common sayings involving rats in *italics* – try looking them up; the origins are interesting. But anyway, back to our new little friends.

When we were at the pet store, I didn't want any part of picking out the rat. I felt like they are only in pet stores to become snake food (which is why I won't join the *rat race* and work in a pet store, as much as I'd like to do the other work in the store), and I didn't want to have to see the ones

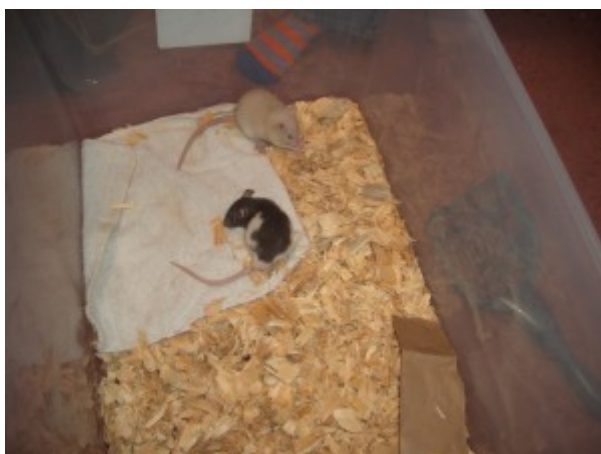
that wouldn't get saved. As it is, I went over there to take a glance, saw little Bobby, who was about to be put back in the snake food tank, and that's what prompted me to say, "Maybe we should get two." The pet store sent the rats home to us like this, a brown bag lunch for snakes, thus proving my point:



The rats my family chose for us are 4 week old brothers. They are adorable, incredibly tame, and I've already really bonded with Bobby. He cuddles me and sits on me and grooms himself – rats are actually very clean animals. The entire start-up for this type of pet set us back about \$25.

\$2.99 per rat + \$3 for bedding + \$9 cage + \$3 food (for about 3 weeks worth) + \$2 water bottle + tax. We are going to be resourceful about toys and use my kids' toys for the rats – we've already found that they like to crawl through these foam tunnel blocks they have. And we were very resourceful when making their cage as well. Instead of trying to decide between the \$19 glass aquarium and the \$24 hamster cage (I was concerned about the heaviness and the breakable glass of the aquarium and worried the rats would escape the cage), we opted for secret option #3 – a large \$9 transparent Rubbermaid bin with a lid in which we poked air holes. Overall, I'm very happy so far with the new pet decision, and my major concerns have not come to fruition which were: 1. that our Jack (Jerk) Russell Terrier mix would try to hunt the rats, and 2. that the kids would unwittingly hurt the rats. But our dog has not even noticed that the rats are here yet (she's almost 11 and

her sense of smell is failing faster than I thought – that makes me a little sad), and we laid down strict rules for the kids about handling the rats. I was also worried about having yet another chore to do around the house, but I was promised help from both of the enthusiastic new pet owners (there's a sucker born every minute). Here are the cuties – Bobby is the beige one and Oreo is the gray and white one:



That Darn Cat

I love animals... all animals, even ones I'm afraid of like frogs. I can honestly say I would not want to see harm come to a frog even though I don't like them. I really love cats, even though I'm allergic to them. When I was growing up, I always wanted a cat, so as soon as I moved out of my parents' house I got one. I had her for over 10 years, her name was Mally, and she was a sweetheart. She passed away last January, and I miss her very much. While she was alive, I couldn't pet her as much as I wanted to because of my allergies, and that's the only reason why I haven't gotten another cat – I really like them. Except for my neighbor's cat.

When we moved in 2 years ago, we saw Phoebe the neighbor's cat

roaming around and we thought it was kind of cool to have a neighborhood cat. That was before we saw how mischievous she can be. Phoebe likes to sit on our window sill because she knows it makes the dogs crazy. She also sits on the kids' slide in the backyard which is just out of the dogs reach, further aggravating them. One day, our dog Charity got loose and treed the cat. I felt a little badly although part of me enjoyed the surprised (and pissed) look on that cat's face when she was in the tree because she wasn't expecting the dog to get loose and chase her. One time, I noticed the front door was open and she was peeking in our house! Don't know how she managed that one; maybe one of the kids left the door open or something. I used to have a bird house and a bird feeder in the tree in our side yard. I would go out there and sprinkle seed, and we had a nice menagerie of creatures that would visit, giving our parrot some friends to look at out his window. But then I saw Phoebe out there stalking the squirrels and birds that frequented the tree, and I stopped putting seed out because I no longer wanted to lure animals into her lair. One day, I saw her playing with a baby bunny. The bunny was alive, but not moving, so we scooped it up and took it to this lady who rehabs wildlife nearby. Her place is really neat; she has raccoons, bandicoots, squirrels, rabbits, geese, ducks, and even a few bears! Anyway, she said the bunny looked to be in bad shape and she didn't expect it to survive. Hopefully it defied the odds...

Being an animal lover, I was really sad when Phoebe hurt the baby bunny. I was even more sad when I saw what she did the other day. I was outside with my daughter, and Phoebe started to climb the tree in the front of our house. I thought it was really cute, so I pointed to her and showed my daughter the cat. But then I saw what she was doing – there were 2 doves sitting silently in the tree, and she was stalking them. Suddenly one of the doves flew off the branch or at least tried to. He flapped to the ground; I don't know if he hit his wing on a branch or if he was hurt before he tried to fly

away, but he landed on the ground, and Phoebe chased him. He got lift a few more times, but he couldn't fly. Phoebe was chasing him until they both disappeared around the side of the neighbor's house. I grabbed my daughter and followed them, but I didn't see anything. When I got back to the front of the house, I saw the other dove in the tree, just sitting there waiting for her mate to come back. She was there all day, just waiting, and it was the saddest thing because I didn't think he'd be coming back. The next day, she was gone, so I don't know if she just gave up or what. Maybe he survived the cat attack and they found each other again... doubtful, but I am hopeful that's the case because I don't know what happened. What I do know is that I don't like Phoebe the cat. She's not even friendly; she never lets my kids pet her. I've considered leaving a note on the neighbor's door asking them to please corral their cat a little better... but I don't want to be one of *those* people. For now, I just hold onto the hope the neighbors will move and take Phoebe with them, and when that day comes, I will promptly set up my wildlife area once again.

Scooby Update

I would like to thank everyone who offered help to us when we recently had to face the unplanned decision to find another home for one of our beloved pets. Our dog Scooby, had bitten one of our kids in the face. I sent out a plea via email to everyone I knew looking for a new home for Scooby since she was not a vicious animal, just so overwhelmed by fear and tension all the time that a house with kids was not a good home for her. Lots of people wrote back to me offering support and great tips to help find her a home, and I'd like to thank everyone. I'd also like to let you know that there

is now a very happy ending to the story. Scooby was adopted by a board member of the humane society where we took her. She was taken home, and the board member just fell in love with her. She has a fenced in yard and some other dogs to play with, which is just perfect because Scooby LOVES to run and she also LOVES other dogs – it was just kids that made her nervous.

My 8-year-old daughter is a little upset, only because we told her we could go visit Scooby and we never did. We just didn't want Scooby to smell us and get excited about coming with us until she had found a happy home of her own. Now that she has, we don't know who it is that adopted her, and my daughter is sad because she really wanted to see Scooby. It's gotten better for her though, and it's tough for an 8-year-old to understand, but we've explained how Scooby is truly better off where she is now.

So thanks again to everyone who offered their help. It was a heartbreaking decision, and I am certainly not one who is in favor of "getting rid" of animals... but I think anyone in my position with 4 kids would understand how a dog with a history of biting cannot be a part of our household. Thanks goodness she was able to find another forever home!

Pet Day

What a frenzied way to start off the shortened week after a 3 day weekend – it was Pet Day at my oldest daughter's school today. So this morning saw us trying to unload a parrot, a 19-month-old little girl and a dog from the car, all while trying to get the other dog to stay in the car – it must've made for a funny scene. We had to bring our "veteran" dog

with in the car since the other pets got to go out, but she was not invited into the classroom because of her nervousness around kids. So while she stayed in the car, Squawky the parrot and Beesley the dog visited a classroom full of 2nd graders.

It went surprisingly well! And we were very impressed with our normally shy daughter, who got up in front of her whole class to tell about her pets. She shared information about them, and patiently called on individuals from her class and answered their questions. Neither pet had any accidents in the classroom, and the kids seemed to really enjoy seeing and learning about the animals. Squawky got shy and wouldn't talk for the kids of course, he never does, though he did yell out "HI!" when we entered the school – wonder if anyone heard that or what they thought it was? He enjoyed himself, didn't bite any of my husband's fingers off, and returned home in time for a relaxing perch in front of The Price is Right. Beesley loved being around all those kids, I think her only problem was being on a leash so she couldn't be let loose to turn onto her back and let them all pet her at once.

Now, should we try Pet Day at the preschool with my younger daughter? I wonder how a roomful of 3-5 year olds would handle the parrot and vice-versa... I will let you know if I get brave enough to attempt that one!