

Unchain My Heart

By Sandra Kruczek

We've all seen them; the dogs tied out in front of stores and restaurants down town. Often times the dogs look anxious or worried. Sometimes they sleep. Often they sit or lie down very still, watching the street with eyes scanning and ears swiveling, listening. It doesn't seem to matter whether it's hot or cold or windy or snowing. They are trapped, tethered and their owners are not there to intervene on their behalf.

I see people pass by these dogs and seem to not even notice them. Often I see people stop and pet them. Sometimes people step over them. Too often I see parents encourage their children to walk up and pet these dogs.

I believe that the owners of our "tied out dogs" are comfortable with this arrangement. It's convenient. It's a kind of "friendly small town dogs on the street" mentality. Everybody does it, right?

There's another side of this arrangement. Here are two terms that are used in describing behavior. One is "overt", that's the behavior that can be observed by anyone such as panting, barking and tail wagging. The other is "covert", that's what's inside of the dog. It's what we can't see like increased heart rate, thinking or an adrenaline rush.

The owner can control their dog because he is chained to a post. What they cannot control is what happens when they are inside eating or shopping. Here's what I see.

There are so many dogs, leashed and loose that stroll our fun-filled streets that an owner absent dog hasn't got a chance if an unruly or bully dog harasses him. There's no one there to defend him or move him out of the way. Perhaps the tied out dog wasn't raised with polite children and is just barely keeping it together while several kids try to pet him. What if some happy skate boarders roar by with noise and laughter and he's never experienced that excitement? Who doesn't want to pet a dog that may look a little "sad" because his owner is not there? Lying still with a slowly wagging tail doesn't always mean sweetness. It may mean fear or worry.

Counting on your dog's good behavior and calm response in situations like this depends mostly on your presence. Many dogs are experiencing stress when left alone in this environment. He's basically been left to fend for himself.

He's your buddy, your soul mate, your heart, and he's trusting that you'll be there for him.

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