

## Niko: A Dog Adoption Success Story

### **A Bichon goes from matted to model-perfect dog.**

*Jennifer Quasha*

The week before Thanksgiving in 2001, Kelly Lively responded to an SOS e-mail from Small Paws Rescue, a Bichon Frise Rescue organization with over 6,000 e-mail members. A Bichon was about to be sold to a puppy mill because the family couldn't afford to take care of him. "I had 24 hours to get the dog," Lively says.

In the SOS e-mail, Robin Pressnall, executive director and founder of Small Paws Rescue, asked a member who lived in the nearby area to pick up the dog and keep him through the holidays until he could be sent to a foster home. Lively drove to Geneva-St. Charles, Ill., a suburb of Chicago. She found the Bichon Frise, now named Niko, locked in a kennel in a dark, unfinished basement. "He hadn't been groomed," she says. "He was matted to the skin." Lively had a hard time finding Niko's eyes. She took the dog and got him to a veterinarian the following day. There, the emaciated Bichon was treated for eye, ear, and bladder infections, rotten teeth, and maggots. He was also neutered.

Niko's most recent "home" was his fourth. Lively had a hard time sending him off to his fifth. "I failed Fostering 101," says Lively, who ended up keeping Niko. "We fell in love with him," she says about their time together over the Thanksgiving holidays. "He's one of the most loving dogs you have ever seen."

Niko fit right in with Lively's other Bichons, Nikki and Monty. Once his white, fluffy coat had been groomed, Niko turned into quite a looker. "My husband is a commercial photographer," says Lively, and Niko turns up in his advertisements, especially those for washers and dryers. To date he has appeared in at least 10 ads, often with Nikki and Monty. From matted to model-perfect, Niko has found his forever home.

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