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Paws from Israel

Reunion held for rescued dogs

by Eric Fingerhut, Staff Writer

These dogs just don't know how lucky they are, says Ariel Greenlee.

They came from a war zone and found these great homes in Greater Washington.

The Arlington resident is referring to some 20 dogs who, with their owners, got together on Sunday in Falls Church for the first time since they were rescued, as puppies, from Israel during the Lebanon War last summer.

For Greenlee's dog, Sabra, it was a chance to see her sister, Shayna, for the first time in a year, even though it didn't seem like the two mutts really recalled one another.

And for Greenlee, 22, and her 18-year-old sister, Dana, it was an opportunity to get together with the owners of other dogs like theirs puppies who lived through a traumatic experience and are now grown up, happy and healthy in the United States.

"We love telling the story at the dog park," said Dana Greenlee. "Everyone knows she's famous."

The dogs made it to the States due to the efforts of Nina Natelson, the founding director of the Alexandria-based nonprofit Concern for Helping Animals in Israel. With the help of Hakol Chai, its sister organization in Israel, CHAI flew 39 puppies to the Washington area last summer.


The dogs had been found, she said, as "strays on the streets," left behind when residents of northern Israel fled their homes or entered bomb shelters to escape the missiles coming from Lebanon.

All of the puppies eventually found homes some were claimed through Northern Virginia shelters, while others were adopted after Natelson held programs at Temple Rodef Shalom in Falls Church and the Jewish Community Center of Northern Virginia in Fairfax.

"We weren't in the market for a dog ... but we fell in love [and] thought it was a mitzvah," said Lesli Glick of Vienna, who was at the reunion with her daughters, Dani, 11, and Eva, 9, and their dog, Bella.

Dani was so inspired by CHAI's efforts that instead of presents for her last birthday party, she asked for donations to the organization and raised \$600.




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Karis Graham bonded with her dog, Liora, through their shared experiences. A retired Air Force chaplain and Lutheran pastor who served in the Middle East, the District resident, 45, adopted the Saluki-Afghan hound mix from the Alexandria Animal Welfare League after hearing how the puppy had "been subjected to war."

"[We] have a bond," Graham said. "We've both seen humanity at its worst, we've both seen humanity as its best."

Graham said Liora initially suffered from bad nightmares and other signs of trauma, but has improved considerably once Natelson helped Graham reunite Liora with her brother, Sabra, who lived in the District with his owner, Nina Halper.

"They're inseparable," Graham said Sunday as the two handsome dogs frolicked. Halper, who noted that Sabra also showed signs of the war through his reactions to loud noises and sirens, said that she and Graham now frequently drop their dogs off at each other's houses for an afternoon to play.

As someone who has done a lot of international traveling, Halper found it "really fitting" that she now has a dog who came with a "passport." The documents were issued by Israeli veterinary services and contain the animals' history of shots and other medical treatments.

All the owners said their dogs seemed to be settling in well to their new homes.

"He barks without much of an accent," Vienna's Barry Altman, 62, quipped about his dog, Latke.

And many said their dogs, because of their backgrounds, have become conversation starters wherever they go.

"It's a special thing to take a dog in from Israel," said Shayna's owner, Andrea Choobineh of Monrovia, Md. "How often can you say that?"

