

LILA'S STORY



PATRICIA GALLINGER-GIAO



FOUR PAWS
PRESS

LILA'S STORY



TUESDAY, OCTOBER 28, 2025

Sky, my little my little Parson Russell Terrier, was gone.



Early spring of 2025, I came to the heart-breaking decision that living, for her, was becoming unbearable. At almost 19, she'd been suffering from severe dementia, and nothing I tried brought her any relief. She was blind and almost deaf, and when I left the house, she would cry inconsolably. The nights were worse, even when I was there. I stayed down on the couch with her, sleeping with my hand on her side as she lay with her head on my shoe. I think the scent of them comforted her. Outside toileting was out of the question as she'd fall on the steps while trying to reach the grass. I was back to large, washable puppy pads. Then the seizures started. There was an evening when my husband and I went out to do some shopping, and when we returned, we found her crying with her head stuck between two couches. As soon as I rescued her, she had a seizure, and it was a long one. I thought, well, that's it, but it wasn't. She slept that evening and most of the next day, then got up and resumed her normal routine. There were more after that. Yes, I knew it was time, maybe long past the time. In March, I finally took her in.

The profoundness of that sorrow... to this day I cannot find the words to describe it, and I vowed I would never go through that again. How could I? But eight months later, that hole in my life, the one that only a dog can fill, was still there. Subconsciously, I began to think about adopting another. As a dog trainer, working with all the new puppies and the pet parents bringing their new rescues to my classroom, yes, I began to think about another gentle furry companion.

Fall of 2025, a little dog named Cookie and her owner signed up for training. Cookie was a small poodle mix, maybe sixteen pounds. She was reserved but not overtly shy, and she trained well, as do all poodle crosses.

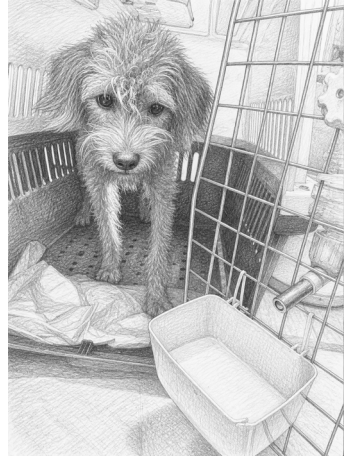
I learned that she'd come to Canada from a rescue organization in China and that she had two siblings currently up for adoption. They were eleven months old and ready to go. Cookie's owner spoke to the organization and gave me a great reference. It seemed a very long distance away to find and adopt a dog but none of the local rescues had poodle crosses at that time, which was what I had my heart set on. I contacted the Toronto coordinator for the Chinese rescue and asked to be notified when Cookie's siblings would be shipped over, bound for their respective foster homes.



October 28, the coordinator called to let me know that one of Cookie's siblings had arrived in Canada and her foster family was ready for us to go see her. My husband and I were on the road within an hour. The dog had come in on a 22-hour flight from Huangpu. Her name was Lila, and she looked very much like Cookie, a little caramel coloured dog with poodle curls and a flag of a tail, just 14.5 pounds. I fell in love the moment I saw her. After reviewing her papers (vaccination records, clearance

for disease, date of spaying, paying fees, etc.) we thanked the foster parents, loaded her into the car and brought her home. However, getting her used to life on this side of the planet was a real education in rescue acclimation.

As soon as we opened the door to her crate, Lila headed for the first safe place she could find. A six-inch space beneath our wooden aquarium stand in the back room. She watched our every move. There she remained for the rest of that night. I put one of Sky's old beds underneath a low table the next morning. Eventually Lila scrambled over to it and there she remained for the next week.



Food aversion was the first problem. Over the course of her first four days with us, she neither ate nor drank. She turned away when I offered something in my hand. She ignored food left out for her, even when alone. She would lick a bit of butter and coconut milk, offered on a long Tupperware lid, but ignore everything else. No poo or pee. She tolerated being touched, even picked up, but did not respond to it. She continued to watch our every move, her head rotating like a satellite dish, earning the nickname of Radar by my husband.

By day five, she would accept runny, soft-boiled eggs served on that long plastic container lid, tipped in her direction. She was still spending all her time under the table. The next strategy I tried was tossing her pieces of beef and walking away. This was more successful. Water was provided, but I didn't know if she was drinking. It was maybe six days before she would come out from beneath the table to explore the room when she was by herself and wander as far as the hallway where I'd set up puppy pads. Her table was close to the couch, and I noticed that when we were not in the room, she would trot down the hall to see where we were. I wasn't sure if she preferred us close by or felt more secure when she knew we were not there.

November 1, Poo! Finally. For a while, I was worried that she would explode! That night I went upstairs to sleep so she could have some alone time exploring. Confined to the back room and hallway, she could move about freely, maybe spend some time away from the table and the bed underneath where she could usually be found. I heard a small dog bark at three o'clock in the morning. I was sure it was Lila.

The next morning there was evidence that she'd been on the move. My glasses were on the floor and a frayed paper napkin had been taken to her bed. I began to drop small towels and pieces of cloth near her, which she pulled under the table. She was beginning to accept me. I moved my laptop to the other room so she could be on her own a little more. Soon she started looking around for my location. I also started moving her table incrementally, removing her roof inch by inch. Her sense of what was happening around her was acute, even a little creepy. Every time I tried to sneak a peek at what she is doing, she was already very aware of my actions, studying me. That night, my husband came down to watch a movie while I was in the back room. He sat down. Lila sniffed his foot, walked around, and... just like that, jumped up on the couch between us, digging in circles as she tried to make a bed.

By November 3, Lila's appetite had dropped off again. She would take food and bury it under her towels but would not eat it, not the chicken or beef or egg.

By November 4, I moved Lila's table across the room. She didn't seem to need it anymore, settling on her bed without hesitating. She ate about a half-cup of chicken baked in watery pumpkin, which was a relief. She'd begun to look at me when I spoke to her. When I came home from work, my husband reported that she'd jumped on top of the chest beneath the front window and spilled my ripening tomatoes. We decided she needed to stay in the back room when there was no one downstairs. I'd installed a mesh gate across the door, but she found her way either over or under it. Poodles are amazing jumpers after all. It was good news, though. Mishaps like that meant she was

coming out of her shell. I sensed a small change in her: less stress, more curiosity.

November 5, we found her sleeping upside down on her bed. A true sign she finally felt safe. She was still burying food but there was less of this behaviour and more of her eating it. Her weight was down a half pound, concerning but not dire. The gate to the backyard had finally been installed. The fencing was finished. It was time to try to get her outside again.

Her visit to the vet went better than expected. She was a bit skitish when I slipped her harness on but I was able to carry her to the car with no problem. She sat on my lap nicely and looked out the window. At the vet's she wandered around and did not seem to mind the other dogs barking. The vet checked heart, lungs and stomach. All good but he wanted her on three meals a day. He suggested *Hilary Watson's Complete & Balanced cookbook, home-made meals for dogs*, nutritionally balanced recipes you can make at home. I already owned the book which I used to address Sky's food sensitivities, earlier in her life. I started making some of the recipes for Lila.

Morning of November 6, I managed to get her to eat a small meal, then I took her for a short walk around the backyard. Midday she had a larger meal (all chicken) which she ate. She had a good pee on her puppy pad as well. And... poop, under my living room table! She did this while I was out of the room. She did not yet feel secure enough to poo and pee while we were around. This behaviour is a common issue with new rescues, I was to learn.

That night I came home from work to find that Lila had been on a treasure hunt again. She seemed to love the new toys we'd given her. Not to play with but to pull onto her bed. I found her halter and leash among the other items she claimed which she'd stolen from a table beside the couch. I started putting my foot on her bed and at first she would get up and move away but then got used to it. Physical proximity was becoming less of an issue.

By November 8th Lila was eating closer to the proper quantity of food for a dog her size. I could put her harness and coat on and walk her

around the complex with few issues though strangers approaching her, still caused her to bolt. I made a point of stepping to one side so they could pass and she began to accept new people and there activities around her. Other than passing strangers she loved being outside and quickly equated seeing her harness and leash with going for a walk. Later, I left her unattended while I went to work. When I came home I found the baby wipes container on the floor with the lid chewed away. More treasures. No big deal but she could reach a great number of objects by standing on her hind legs. She also liked to jump, I discovered. Even a four or five foot high retaining wall outside, was no barrier. She would spring to the top when she could, as we passed them, and if wasn't paying attention.

November 9, she came into the kitchen, licked my leg then trotted over to the back door and scratched on it. A clear sign that she was ready to move potty activities outside. She waited at the back door while I put her harness on. We got four walks in on that day and she did well, as she got more comfortable with the neighbourhood. We spent time in the backyard and the area through our townhouse complex. Lila was eating regularly and she ate a meal while we were still in the room. It was the first time.

Over the next few days Lila was enjoying her walks and doing all her business outside. She regularly scratched at the door and waited for me to put her in her harness and attach her leash. One day my husband and I were upstairs for a few hours and she spent her time climbing the stairs going up and down, checking on what we were doing. She'd grown confident enough to leave the safety of her bed for more distant explorations. I was still working on expanding her palette to some vegetables and meats other than chicken. As of November 10 she'd been with us for about fifteen days and I was pleased. We were ahead of the curve.

First walk of the next morning went well. And... a poop outside! First one outside. Walks were the highlight of her day but Lila remained fearful of other people if they bent to pet her. By this point she was moving throughout the main level and climbing up and down the stairs periodically. I picked her up and put her on my lap on the

couch to take measurements for a coat. I also combed out her ears. It was time to take a more rigorous approach to grooming.

Wednesday November 12, as I write this passage, Lila is laying down beside me on the couch, in front of the fire. She's begun to use the bed in my upstairs office, which is bitter-sweet in a way as it was Sky's favorite bed. She also continually finds her way over or under the downstairs gates. I've clearly underestimated her intelligence. At any rate, since she's doing her business outside, there is less of a need to use it. I was still trying to get her used to eating kibble, versus cooked chicken but we weren't yet there. She also wouldn't take food from my hand. I had to put it down and walk away.

Lila was now leaning against me when we were preparing for a walk. She was getting used to cars, and other people. I still couldn't get her to touch commercial food so I bit the bullet and went full raw. Big success. I started combining raw with some of the home cooked muffins I'd made her. Around that time she found the old ottoman in the living room which she preferred to lay, on, by the window, in the cold weak November sun.

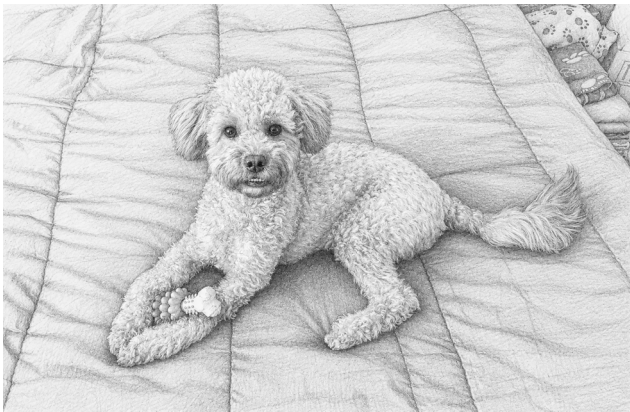
Without really being able to pinpoint when, Lila had begun to follow me everywhere, looking and listening when I talked to her, coming when I called her. She still shied away when I offered a reward but progress never runs in a straight line. Baby steps.

November 14, a friend came over later in the afternoon and brought Lila a toy dragon. She spent all her time out of sight, upstairs. It was the first time someone new had come into the house but my friend didn't mind. She had two rescues of the own, one with a similar temperament as mine. I took photos of Lila and her new toy, which she chewed with relish.

On November 19, Lila took food from my hand for the first time. This meant I could start training for recall in earnest. I also tried working with a 'sit' signal but she found the hand gesture too unnerving. There were more tail wags though and she began to steal socks in earnest, for her bed.

November 21, I heard her bark for only the second time. Walking her became the favourite part of my day and hers. With the leash

attached at my waist she had about ten feet to fan out in front of me, sniffing, leaving pee-mail for other dogs in the neighbourhood, and to poke her nose down deep holes in the snow. Working with a long line on a dog means the emphasis is more on managing the leash and less about restricting the dog's movements. In my opinion it's more natural and more humane. We worked on stopping at curbs automatically, and recalls. Later that day I got a quote from the salon where I work, to tidy her coat up a bit. She'd been with us for a month and was meeting her acclimation timelines ahead of schedule.



November 28, Lila is completely at ease in the house. When I come home from work she runs down the stairs, the flag of her tail waving furiously. She lets me comb out her fur when it gets too unruly. There are still occasional accidents in the house but it's late November, the sidewalks are icy and the snow is deep. It the coldest November we've had in a very long time. Her eating is now pretty routine as she enjoys a mixture of raw foods, my home-baked puppy muffins and some high quality canned food.

EPILOGUE

It's early June of 2026 and Lila's been with us for seven months. She is now a lively, playful, affectionate addition to my home. No more acci-

dents in the house. She indicates consistently when she needs to go out, usually at about five-thirty in the morning, and since the backyard is now completely sealed, I can open the back door and watch her while I make my coffee. Her elimination routine is pretty predictable. There's lots of sniffing, exploring the far corners of the yard. After a few minutes, the sniffing and circling intensifies, almost like a spinning top, then she makes her deposit to good mother earth while I sip my coffee. Shortly after, we strap on the walking gear and head out for world beyond.

I've taken my time with formal training, lately though she seems motivated to learn new skills. For her, tapping into existing behaviours while adding a hand gesture, now works well. Her recall is good and snappy when I use the clicker on our walks. And so far she's learned sit, shake a paw, spin, and very recently, lay down. Next up will be stay and on your bed.

We'll continue to work together, learning from each other, becoming true partners as the months go by, until that old saying feels true...*we were meant to be together.*