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Karen Palmer

(231) 343-1142

[www.BalancedCanineTraining.com](http://www.BalancedCanineTraining.com)

**Statement from the Backyard Dog**

By Karen Palmer

I remember when you first brought me home. I played all day with the kids. It was a blast! The next day, you went to work, they went to school, and I stayed home with Mom. When I had to go potty, I looked around for the right place. She was too busy for me to ask, so I chose the fuzzy floor. I felt a sudden swat on my rear and found myself outside alone. When the kids came home, they let me in and we played again. This time, when I had to potty, I chose a corner of the shiny floor where Mom couldn't see me. But you did. You yelled at me and tossed me outside. I waited and then barked in case you forgot me. Even the kids didn't open the door. I was outside and on my own all night.

The next day you put the doghouse in the yard, slapped a collar on my neck, and attached the chain on the house. At first, the boy and girl came out to play sometimes, and they fed me and gave me fresh water. But when I barked because I was lonely, I got yelled at and no one came. Even the kids stopped coming.

All I wanted was to be part of the family! All I wanted was to share happy times with you and work with you and be acknowledged and loved! How was I supposed to know about your house rules without being taught? Why didn't you teach me? Why won't you ever let me out of this yard? Why won't you let your kids play with me?

When was the last time you looked in my doghouse? You would notice the hole in the corner of the roof and how the floor is rotted away. When was the last time you cleaned my water pail and actually put fresh water in it instead of the scummy rain water I have to drink? Don't you know that it takes more food to keep a dog warm in the winter? This crummy stuff you dump in or near my dish isn't enough! Why won't you listen to me?

Well, let me tell you something, Mister. I'm a big dog now! I can fend for myself. Just you try and come near my backyard. Yeah, I said MY backyard. This is MY terror-torial circle of suffering now! This is MY dog house! This is MY stupid greenish water pail and MY dented, filthy food bowl. This is MY collar and chain! I see that there is some grass growing too tall in the corner. Let's just see you TRY to get back there with your smoking, loud cutting machine. I'd LOVE to get just one chance to sink my teeth into those skinny little pathetic things you call legs. Let your kids come back here and try to pet me now. This is MY fur! Let them come! I'll give you all a taste of MY backyard rules.

I just wanted to be a part of the family.