

## Finding a Forever Home: The True Story of Ellie Bleu's Rescue

**Jan Hagle**

**Susan Lavalley Weaver, Illustrator**

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*In the hopeful children's parable Finding a Forever Home, the cruelty of human prejudice finds a parallel in the plight of overlooked animals.*

In Jan Hagle's *Finding a Forever Home*, a rescue dog shows that prejudice comes in more than one form.

In 2050, the world has transformed into a much nicer place. People are unfamiliar with acts of negativity and discrimination. But after watching a film in school, Bella learns what society used to be like: full of hate, violence, and prejudice. When Bella asks her mother what changed people's hearts, her mother declares that it all started with Ellie Bleu.

Ellie Bleu was an American pit bull who was separated from her mother and siblings at an early age. Kept in a cage, Ellie Bleu dealt with ill treatment, limited food, and very little time outside. Worse, she was berated by those around her for being what she was: a pit bull. When her cruel owner, Bootzman, finally had enough of her whining, he took her out into the middle of nowhere during the winter and abandoned her.

Ellie Bleu was rescued by a dog catcher and ended up warm and dry in a shelter, but the employees placed her on the put-down schedule and warned prospective rescuers about her "dangerous" pit bull nature. Ellie Bleu was spared from a horrid fate by a network of loving individuals, but still had to overcome her past traumas.

*Finding a Forever Home* shows how harmful prejudice can be for living beings, whether they walk on two legs or four. Ellie Bleu, as a pit bull, becomes a perfect representation of this perspective. From birth, she is subjected to an undeserved animosity just because of her breed. Her story is both an effective vehicle for explaining how harmful harboring prejudice can be and a relatable anecdote for those who've experienced discrimination.

The book's art represents an amalgamation of styles, realistic, impressionistic, and cartoon among them. The styles are employed in an inconsistent manner and are sometimes mixed on the same page. The text is customized to the characters speaking; the humans have more complex dialogues, and Ellie Bleu's thoughts are childlike and incomplete.

The book's futuristic setting, wherein ethics are so directed by Ellie Bleu's rescue story, is not built up enough. The story's conclusion omits the human connection; Bella and her mom are left behind in favor of a call to action with rescuing pets. Overarching themes come to take a back seat to Ellie Bleu's point of view.

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IAN DAILEY (February 12, 2020)

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