

More than 70,000 dogs live in America's research laboratories. Now there are seven fewer.

# Freeing Alexander Hamilton (and the DC7)

BY MELANIE D. G. KAPLAN FROM *WASHINGTONIAN*

**I**N THE SUMMER of 2013, a four-year-old beagle with a blue tattoo in his left ear dropped into my home as if from another planet. He was underweight, and when I lowered him onto a dog bed, it was clear that he'd never, in his four years of life, encountered anything so squishy and soft. He clung to that bed as if it were a life raft.

Among the few things I knew about

him: His vocal cords had been cut, and he had probably never seen stairs, so I didn't bother blocking off the second level of my house. When he dared to go outside, he did so guardedly. Catching his reflection in the side of a car was enough to send him pulling me home, frantically. His anxiety drove him to several escape attempts, once maneuvering through my balcony railing and onto a neighbor's roof.

In a way, he did arrive from another



world—one in which breeders send their puppies to labs to become testing animals, each identified by a tattooed tracking number. My beagle was rescued with six others from a lab by a nonprofit group called the Beagle Freedom Project. On the day these hounds left the only life they'd

known, it was clear that the most basic canine experiences—walking on grass and being stroked by humans—were alien.

Each of the DC7, as they became known, was named after a Founding Father. Six weeks after I began fostering Alexander Hamilton, his personality was still clouded by fear, and I didn't

know how much he would change. After all, laboratories claim that these dogs—with their lack of exposure to the world—don't make suitable pets. Freeing them only draws public attention to the 74,000 canines (many of which are beagles because they're docile) still in testing facilities. According to the Beagle Freedom Project, this is how labs justify killing them as standard practice, discarding Hamiltons as if they were test tubes. I told Hammy that if I adopted him, every day would be an adventure. "You'll have to be very brave," I said. He looked at me with quiet brown eyes.

As summer turned to fall, Hammy relaxed enough to walk around the

block. I remember the first time I saw his tail wag in his sleep, and I imagined that he dreamed about running free. His veterinarian told me that his vocal cords—which had been cut so lab technicians wouldn't be disturbed by howling—could grow back. Before long, he was barking at the



***I run my hand over Hammy's soft face and floppy ears and wonder what the researchers did to him.***

mailman. My neighbor quipped, "He's like Pinocchio! He's turning into a real dog."

Hammy wasn't the only one who'd been transformed. Sitting with him for hours, trying to fill his silences with comforting words, had changed me too. I boycotted products tested on animals, buying

detergent and mascara from "cruelty-free" companies such as Method and Lush. And I told his story to all who would listen, showing off the tattoo in his ear. There has been hopeful news for his kind: In spring 2014, Minnesota became the first state to require that dogs and cats in taxpayer-funded laboratories be available for adoption after testing rather than be euthanized. Around the same time, Hammy joined me for a 50-mile bike ride (in a trailer), camped, balanced on a stand-up paddleboard with me, and visited his 16th state.

Last summer, the DC7 returned to Washington to celebrate their freedom. As the families and their



*Meet the beagles: The author (in black, holding leash) and Hamilton mingled with other rescues last year. The dogs (from left): Maggie, Ginger, George Washington, Hamilton, John Adams, Frida, James Madison, Ben Franklin.*

dogs—along with a few other Beagle Freedom Project rescues—walked around the Capitol grounds, tourists asked us if a beagle convention were under way. I looked at all the wagging tails and marveled at the difference that love and patience can make.

These days, Hammy's need for

human touch is profound. When he's sleeping, I watch little *pffts* of breath leak out of his cheeks. I run my hand over his soft face and floppy ears and wonder what they did to him on the other planet. He wakes, stretches, and looks at me with sleepy eyes. Then he paws me insistently, wanting affection. And I oblige. **R**

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**BEE-ING PRESENT**

I'm capable of living in the moment ... especially the moment of sitting on my sofa and watching other people's moments.

SAMANTHA BEE, comedian/reporter

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