



OLD DOGS

A Story
Of Hope...
Reflections
Of Love



www.daws.org

OLD DOGS

Several years ago my wife Eileen and I had a Kerry Blue Terrier named Willie. We got him as an eight-week old puppy, and he grew into his terrier-hood acquiring all the characteristics of the group, both good and bad. He was tenacious to a fault, loyal, had laser focus that extended to everything that came into his line of sight - from the yellow rubber balls that he chased until he was dizzy to everything else that came near or through our yard.

He was the quintessential high-energy dog and he could run like a bullet. He'd get so hot that we'd have to hose him down with cool water while he laid on his side drinking from a dish . . . but if you picked up one of those yellow rubber balls while he was drinking, he'd jump to his feet, knock the bowl out of the way, sit halfway up on his haunches with his front feet off the ground, and lock eyes on the ball. He'd be on the verge of heat prostration and ready for more.

Among his other terrier-ist traits Willie was unshakably convinced that he owned the ground on which he walked. Anything he could see, hear, smell or imagine was an intrusion into his space. He would chase - or try to bark into submission -- birds, squirrels, neighbors, falling acorns, and even the occasional wind-blown branch.

Although I had a Chuck-it ball thrower, a fairly good long-distance throwing technique, a reasonably sized yard and an unlimited supply of yellow rubber balls, Willie still needed more activity than we could provide. We decided Willie needed a brother or sister dog he could knock around with, so we started looking in shelters for a playmate for him. We were initially looking for a dog about his size and age but with a lot less amperage. We wanted a dog that could keep up with him, and help him burn off some of his endless supply of energy without contributing to it. What we needed was a very fit one-to-three year old dog.

This was in the dark days before Petfinder.com so we spent the weekend going from shelter to shelter. We covered half the state. We went to city pounds, open houses and even found a 4H adoption event, but didn't see any dogs that were even close to what we needed.

By late Sunday afternoon we'd seen too many dogs that weren't good fits, so we had given up and gone home. It wasn't long afterward that Eileen realized that we missed the New Fairfield/Sherman shelter, so we called and yes, they were open for another couple of hours. We ran out and headed over to see their dogs.

We were introduced to "senior dogs" purely by accident. When we arrived at the shelter we met the manager and explained to her what we were looking for - a small to medium sized dog, about one- to-three years old. The shelter manager was sorry but they didn't have anything like that.

She said that they had a few large dogs and one 9-year-old female Bichon Frise who wound up in the shelter after her owner died. An old Bichon was completely out of the question for us, but we tried to be polite so we looked at her. Despite the decision to see her, I knew we weren't going to adopt a 9-year-old frou-frou powder-puff that I couldn't be seen walking.

The shelter manager brought Missy out to meet us. She looked fine from a distance, but the closer we got the sorer she looked. She had been nicely groomed, courtesy of the shelter, and was presentable enough from the front, but the back end was another story. Her tail was docked from a puppyhood illness and the stress of shelter life caused her to lose all the hair on the remaining stub. It looked like a fat pink finger (or worse, use your imagination) sticking up from her butt. Better still, she was nervously panting and we could see she was missing a bunch of her front teeth. She also had some kind of dark eye goop in the corners of her eyes. Overall she just looked... really old.

In addition to her aesthetic shortcomings, she was like many shelter dogs and unable to engage with us right away. Her mindset was "Get me out of here!" so she paced around, breathing heavily and wanting to head for the door.

Despite all of the obvious considerations that should have prevented us from adopting her – her age, her small size, the potential for high veterinary costs, the physical unsuitability between her and Willie, and the shallower surface concerns of the missing teeth and that wiener-looking tail, we decided to bring her home.



This was a practical decision and no charitable act on our part. We figured it's going to be us or nobody - this dog was a mess. On the other hand she used to be somebody's pet, she was deteriorating in the shelter, and clearly there was nobody waiting in line behind us to snatch her up.

From the minute she entered our house Missy was home. The photo to the right is Missy within 10 minutes of walking into our home. The confused looking dog on her left is Willie.

Over the next eight years Missy was a bright light in our home. She played tug-of-war with Willie, barked into his ear when he offended her, laid on her back and wiggled herself into her bed with all four legs kicking in the air and my personal favorite – she would dig her head into the blanket and bulldoze her way across the bed until she'd settle in beside one of us. She was a great dog and delivered endless smiles and good cheer for the rest of her life.

Missy also showed us that whatever misgivings we had about adopting an older dog were unfounded. If a Bichon Frise is the canine equivalent of a little old lady, then this little old lady would have drank her tequila straight, smoked unfiltered Camels, and would have flicked the butts out the car window so she'd have a free hand to flip off the police while rolling through a stop sign.

We were concerned about how long she would be with us. It turned out to be eight great years but more importantly, it was the rest of her life. We were glad for every day we were lucky enough to spend with her.

We were concerned that she wouldn't be able to keep up with a much younger and more energetic dog. In her own way she kept up and much more. She was a calming influence on Willie, and he became a better dog for it.

We were concerned that she would have age-related health problems and require more veterinary care than a younger dog. Her health was great right up to the last couple of weeks of her life. She required no greater level of care than any other dog we've had.

We worried that we would grieve badly when we lost her, and we did – and though it's been several years now, I think about her fondly and often.

The grief is miserable when you're going through it, but it's no different whether you lose a dog that you got as an eight-week-old puppy, or as one-year old secondhand dog, or as a nine-year old gremlin that's missing a bunch of teeth and has no hair on her tail. When we adopt dogs now we will know that we're going to have some great days together. How many days we get isn't important.

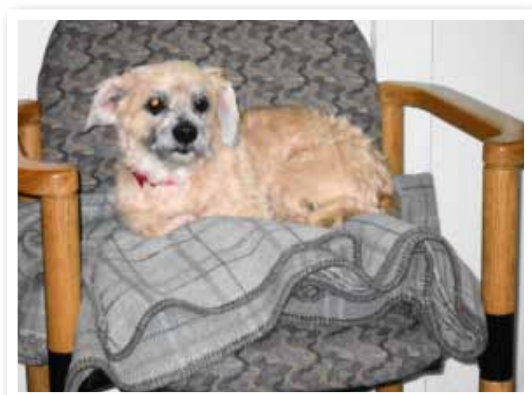
We've brought a few more old dogs into our lives since Missy and have had no regrets.

Goldie was deaf and prone to nipping when surprised - which was often what with her being deaf and all. She had also been dumped twice before we found her. She was sitting in her crate at the shelter, surgical staples from a lumpectomy still visible, and her future very uncertain pending the results of her biopsy. Once again we decided that "better judgment" was an overrated concept and brought her home.



Her tumor proved benign and for several good years she stayed with us and followed her simple routine of lying in her bed (which she preferred to be inside my bedroom closet), getting up for meals, shuffling outside and then going right back to bed. The photo above shows Goldie in one of her four positions – sitting in her bed. The other three were laying in bed, eating at her bowl, and "going outside." Like a Zen master, she had perfected motion by avoiding it whenever possible.

After Goldie passed we decided to foster dogs that were either poorly suited to the shelter environment, or would either benefit more from being in a house while making the transition from stray to adoptee and these are often seniors.



Little old Louis was one of our favorites. He was a 10-year-old stray when he wound up in the care of a local shelter. He was boney, matted, and sad-eyed. He got a good clipping to remove the mats, a couple of weeks of R & R at our house, and then he was taken to his forever home by a wonderful family. Louis and his new dad make quite a pair. Ronnie is a big, bearded guy with a gravelly voice who looks suited to a big dog. Something like a Lab or a Shepherd, the kind of dog you could call “Duke” and really mean it. Louis is a 7-lbs. munchkin, and Ronnie dotes on him. His new family went on vacation recently and let us babysit Louis. We couldn’t believe how much

he had changed. Above is Louis before adoption; to the right is him after. He’s a new man - feeling frisky and looking swell with a fine coat and big bright eyes.

After Louis came Orphan Annie, another old lady Bichon, and another senior dog either lost or abandoned and found wandering when she got her big break and wound up in a humane shelter. Annie was something special. She had it all - bad teeth, cataracts, a heart murmur, bladder stones, and a urinary tract infection just to round things out. Despite her physical problems, she greeted everyone with a big dog grin and wagging tail. It was really easy to fall in love with her.

Her condition improved quickly after a modest amount of good veterinary care, a decent diet and lots of TLC. Annie stayed with us for the 6- week duration of her veterinary care and then she was ready for adoption. Annie was taken to her forever home to meet her new brother, another senior Bichon. The last report on Annie was that her new mother Jennifer thinks she’s the best dog ever (of course).



She describes Annie as a “princess,” a “monster,” and a “diva.” For those unfamiliar with the breed, that means, “She’s settling in just fine.” Jennifer takes Annie’s health very seriously, and will provide her with the best care possible for the rest of her life. She also spoils her dog silly just for good measure. Sadly for her new brother, we heard that Annie has taken over his crate and occasionally gives him “what for” when he gets out of line (if I spoke Dog I would’ve told him not to tangle with those old lady Bichons).

Walking dogs at DAWS has been a great way to see senior success stories unfold. I think everyone who works with shelter animals will wind up with their own favorites, and while we have plenty of great dogs moving through our shelter, my favorites have mostly been the older dogs.

The Big Lesson is this: These are astonishingly resilient creatures. They'll take the worst that life throws at them and casually shake it off in exchange for a gentle hand, good food, clean water and a safe, warm place to sleep.



Senior success stories are repeated over and over at animal shelters throughout the country. Shelter dogs are something special and seniors even more so. Any adopter who's willing to see the dog and not just their age will be rewarded for their vision. The return on investment is disproportionately large – we get so much more than we give, and our part is so easy.

Following this story are some photos of senior adoptees and comments from their adopters. You'll see a lot of widely varied observations but not a single regret. If you open your door to a senior dog you'll understand. Here's to grey muzzles everywhere and the people who love them.

Christopher Rohland

Danbury Animal Welfare Society (DAWS)

Volunteer, September 2010

OLD DOGS – Adopter's Stories

CALI – by Barb

I am delighted to talk about one of my favorite dogs of all time. If you had the pleasure of knowing her, I'm sure you understand how I feel. Cali is special. Cali is the fourth dog I have adopted and the third senior. Currently, we have three dogs including Cali, a senior Boxer we got from a Boxer rescue who needed major surgery and lots of recovery care to save his life and his leg from cancer, and Maggie, our "autistic" hound we also adopted from DAWS.

My family and I adopted Cali from our heroes at DAWS in February of this year. We already had two dogs but knew we had room for one more in our home. Since our other two dogs were large,

we were looking for a smaller dog. That thought went right out the window when we saw Cali. Cali was 91 pounds when she was surrendered in November 2009. She also had an untreated thyroid condition, poor baby. The folks at DAWS took her in and gave her the security, stability and medical treatment she needed. By the time I met her in February, she was down to 76 pounds and had captured the hearts of all of the volunteers. Choosing Cali was the best decision we ever made. Period.



From the moment Cali entered our home, I knew she was special. I love dogs and love having them around so I get joy out of all dogs. However, Cali is different. She is a wise soul in the body of a pup. She is very intelligent and very loving. With Cali, I have a true companion with whom I communicate. She is my friend and I love her dearly. She is also a “dog’s dog”. She loves playing with and hanging out with other dogs, she digs and makes big messes, she barks and chasing squirrels, she “talks” to our neighbor’s dog who talks right back, she dances and prances around our yard. I love when she stands on our big

rock and surveys her kingdom. I get such a feeling of happiness knowing that she has us and we have her. She is so full of exuberance and joy. It is absolutely contagious. My other dogs are happier and more joyful since Cali joined our family. It was the best decision we ever made.

We chose to adopt a senior dog for several reasons. Like people, dogs accumulate “baggage”. Seniors understand the difference between shelter life and home life. They are so grateful to their humans for taking them and they are so generous with their love and devotion. In addition, senior dogs are usually quieter and gentler companions which works for our lifestyle. Finally, the feeling we get from knowing that we saved the life of a loving creature is such a good one. We love knowing that Cali is safe and fiercely loved. We love knowing that she will never feel scared or lonely or hungry again. My daughter has learned so many valuable lessons from our dogs. We get so much from having Cali in our lives. I honestly don’t understand why every household doesn’t have a dog. The world would certainly be a better place, in my opinion.



I’m enclosing pictures of our happy, beloved Cali. I’m so happy to help DAWS with their cause.

LUKE and ROXIE – by Nancy

I don't know if our story will relate to most senior dogs adoptions, but feel free to use it get some more senior dogs adopted!

I have always loved dogs. Growing up we had a dog from when I was about 7 till my second year in college. After college I never lived anywhere that allowed dogs, but I did find some time to volunteer at a dog shelter, to get my dog fix :). I would walk the dogs and I would foster the puppies for a night here or there, so they did not have to sleep in the cages at the shelter and possibly get sick from the other dogs.

When I moved in with my boyfriend, in upstate NY, I still didn't think we could get a dog, because I work very long hours, so my boyfriend would have had to do most of the work. I never even

brought it up. One day, my boyfriend said to me, do you want to get a dog? I said, really? You know they are a lot of work and you would have to do most of it, since I am commuting to the city every day? He said yes, and off started the search.

I looked at tons of websites including DAWS. We were looking for the perfect dog for us. A dog that was housebroken, a bit older, and mellow so that they wouldn't mind being alone for part of the day till Dennis got home from work. I wanted to rescue a dog, because one, I don't believe in getting a dog from a pet store when there are so many to be rescued and two, that is really the only way I know of to get a non-puppy, which we did not have the time for.

We found one dog on a website that we thought would have been perfect for us. He was 4 years old, totally mellow, beautiful, sounded perfect. But the shelter turned us down because we would be gone 8 hours a day. We were very disappointed, because we thought isn't it better that the dog has a home then living in a shelter?

At this point we thought we might get turned down by most shelters. Then I came up with the idea of getting two dogs. Knowing taking on two dogs would be a huge responsibility, but also knowing that they could keep each other company during the day. And I remembered seeing Roxie and Luke



on the DAWS website and I thought, well, if we are going to get two dogs and see how that goes, why not get these senior dogs. One, no one else will probably adopt them, so we might be their last chance, and two they are probably really mellow and just want some love and a home, and we have that. So we thought it was a win win, where maybe if we got some younger more energetic dogs, we might be taking them away from a more suitable living situation, because they could be more easily adopted.

So off we went to meet Luke and Roxie. When the folders came out with their medical history, I was blown away. These two were going to be a lot of work. But having met them, there was no way I could just leave them at the shelter now. So we decide to adopt Luke and Roxie and give it a whirl.

The biggest challenges have been Luke being extremely dependent. He has a hard time sleeping through the night because he wants to be with us all the time. Even when someone leaves the room, he follows them where ever they go. Roxie has been super easy. She loves her crate and is super easy going.

I think the issue with Luke is that he is a Beagle, which I hear are very dependent normally. Add being abandoned and you have our Luke! If I had any advice for someone looking to adopt a senior dog from a shelter, I would say be prepared for an adjustment period and lots of medical issues. But know that you are giving a dog a new lease on life that most people would not be willing to do.

I think that is our story so far! I will send you more pictures soon.

CAMILLA – by Annette



We've always championed the 'under' dog and cat - older or disabled as they are harder to place. But they are generally house-trained, not 2 am criers, no more challenging to re-train than to initially train a pup. Call us crazy, call us saints, or just too lazy to deal with a more energetic puppy. As for Miss C., we got very lucky, not all surrendered dogs have problems as people think. She no doubt lost her home to owner illness, job loss or death, because she has obviously lived in a good home, been loved and trained. To think she was slated to die in Ohio, as others surely have, is too sad to contemplate. To know her is to love her.

TOBY, BAILEY, CUSTER and ROWDY – by Donna



Toby was adopted at 11-years-old due to a divorce. He was a golden, adopted 2003 and passed in 2007. Toby was one of the best dogs overall we EVER had. He was perfectly obedience trained and collected our paper from the end of the driveway every day. He was majestic, proud, he immediately came in and took over the house in a good way. He was the king and any other dog that came in he had to let them know.

Bailey (left) is female Lab currently 13 years old and adopted from DAWS in 2005. She was quite the challenge with counter surfing, however we worked with her and she learned very fast. Another housebroken dog that is really a bonus!!

Custer and Rowdy (below) are Golden Retrievers and brothers adopted in 2009 through Sunshine Golden Rescue. They are from Alabama where they lived outside in a chicken coop and had every parasite, heartworm, mange etc. They are now the most beautiful boys.

Seniors are wonderful for lots of the obvious reasons: housebroken, obedience trained in some fashion, calm in the house, ok in the car, no chewing, understand that the human is in charge, take cues from other dogs in the household, get quickly into a routine - they just need to know what is expected of them.

While they are seniors that does not necessarily mean they don't need exercise. I think folks mistakenly think they are then just couch potatoes. However, if you have medium or low exercise households you shouldn't overlook a senior. Walking, swimming, hiking is on the list of keeping them in shape.

The next thing people say is that "oh they are only with a short time, then things happen." Doesn't this wonderful dog that's homeless through no fault of their own deserve a happy ending to their life where they are loved? For me, it is the knowledge that I take the cast offs that folks overlook, it gives lots of good feelings that you are really making a difference in the life of this dog, but you have also just expanded your outlook on life by doing that. Just their general demeanor shows you how grateful they are. All of our seniors somehow knew we took them from a less than good place and they hit the jackpot!

It always touches my heart to tears at how quickly they become attached to you. I often wonder what they think and if they know they are safe and here forever. They trust so easily or do they? How do they know this is a safe place after all they have been through.



The Advantages of Adopting A Senior Dog

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Most people envision bringing home a fluffy, brand new puppy to “grow up” with their children. It is a pretty picture, but a lot of people don’t think about the work that goes into training a new puppy. Raising a puppy is a BIG commitment. Puppies need training, socialization, lots of exercise and almost constant activity. Without this, things won’t turn out the way you envisioned.

If you don’t have the time or don’t want to do much training, remember that adult dogs need homes, too. An adult dog is often a much more laidback roommate, without all the energy, and just as cute and affectionate. Plus, dogs can live well into their teen years – so don’t let their age stand in your way!

Here are some great reasons to adopt an adult dog...

- Adult dogs are the hardest to be adopted from shelters.
- They are often already house-trained, obedience trained, and through the entire puppy and adolescence stages.
- They have learned many of life’s lessons – they know shoes are for walking and bones are for chewing.
- Most don’t need the same exercise regimen that a puppy needs and would rather cuddle up with you on the couch and take a nap.
- They are already mellowed, so they can focus on life and anything you may want to teach them.
- They settle into a new home easily – they’ve already learned what it takes to get along with others and become part of their “pack.”
- They have learned that if they give lots of love, they will get lots of love and praise back.
- Adult dogs have grown into their size, shape, and personality. Therefore, there is no guessing - What you see is what you get.
- They are not as time-consuming as a puppy – you have more time to enjoy each other.
- They are accustomed to human schedules – that means no nighttime feedings, potty breaks, or comforting.

Adopting an adult dog is a great way to save a life. People forget that they need homes just as much as puppies do. More often than not, these dogs are not turned into a shelter because they have problems, but because their human parents have problems.

Adopt an older dog from the Animal Protective Association and you will have a best friend for many years to come!



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