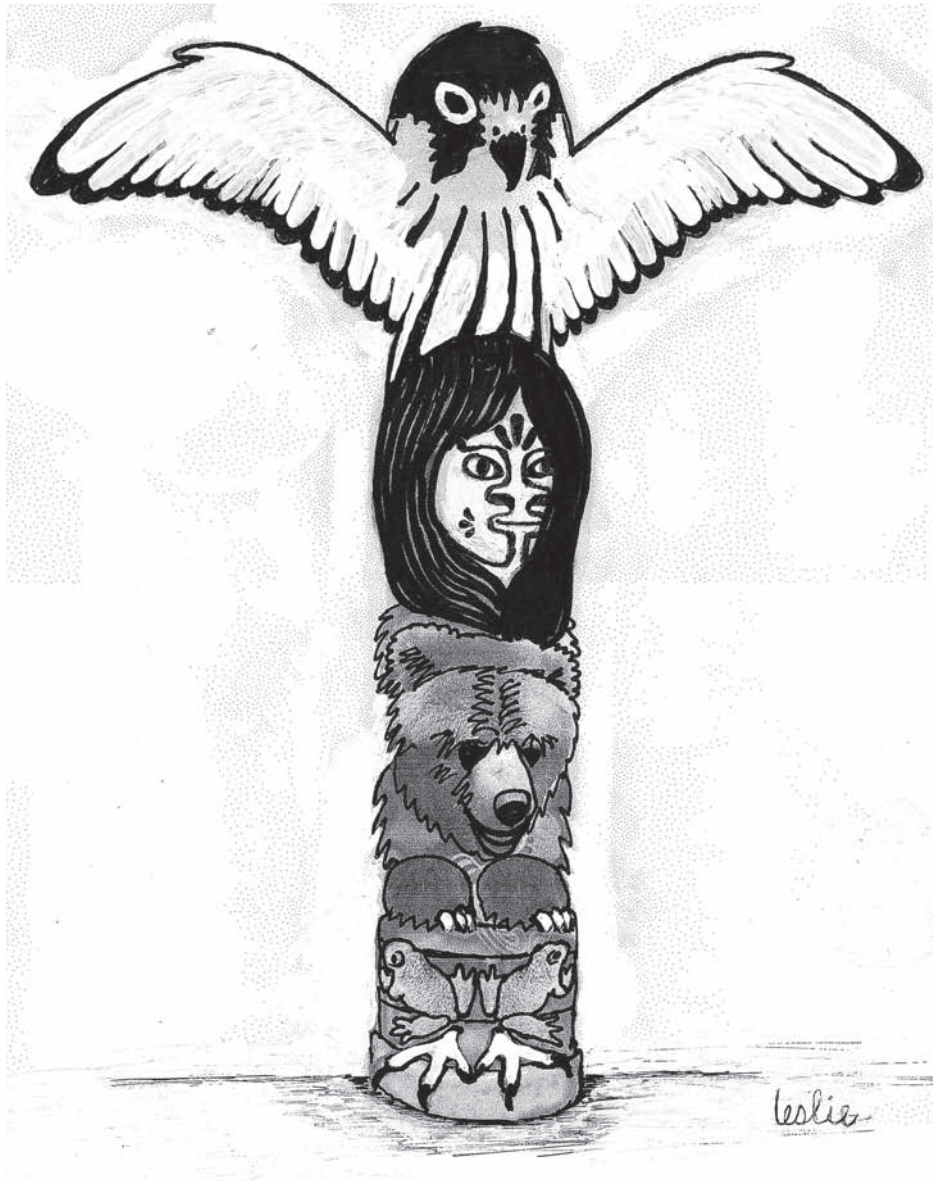


States of Mind

The Publication of the Mental Health Association in Tompkins County

Summer 2012



Kindred Spirits: Animals and Mental Health

To understand and improve the mental health of our community

a d v o c a c y • i n f o r m a t i o n • e d u c a t i o n

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Table of Contents

From the Desk of the Executive Director	3
“Dogs in Therapy” by Cathie Simpson (for further reading...)	4
“Soaring Hawk” and “On Butterfly Wings” by Sharon Chapman	5
“A Lesson from the Heart for Shady” by Leslie Benjamin	6
“New Friends on the Block” by Jemma Macera	7
<i>An Eagle Named Freedom</i> , reviewed by Catherine Wedge; “According to the Manataka Indian Council...”	8
“Therapy with a Tail” by Mary Lauppe	9
“On Eagles’ Wings” by Leslie Benjamin; “Colors of the Wind” adapted from Disney by Ashanti	10
“Puppy Love” by Martha Crowe	11
“Animals, Our Environment and the Human Psyche” by Taylor Beauvais	12
“Tess to the Rescue!” by Linda Getz	13
“Little Boy Blue” by Kathy H. Porter	14
Thanks to Our Donors	15
Bumper sticker by Leslie Benjamin	16



From the Desk of...

The Executive Director

Beth Jenkins

The issue of *States of Mind* you have in front of you has the aura of being “my” issue. Attention has been given by all our contributors to the importance of animals in our lives. This touches my heart as a “recipient,” AKA “owner,” of cats and dogs.

Pets have trained me very well. I know when to feed, bathe, and comb them; when to rise, sleep and eat on their schedules. All of my movements are thanks to them. My awareness of the routine of my days is controlled by them. If I think that I am going to have an extra day of leisure, my animals tell me I have more time to do the important things. That is, I have more time to play with them, see them as they really are and to think of them first and only.

They are my lifeline to the world; I find myself very lost without them. Just because I have only rescued domestic animals, my fear is I might help any animal coming to my door, even a wild one. Animals are the nudge that sends me out of my door to try and be a part of the world that surrounds us all.

Enjoy this issue. Animals are starting to emerge as a real force that makes us as human as we are.



Fairy Dogmother

Dogs in Therapy by Cathie Simpson, PhD

I am a mental health counselor, and I have two large dogs, Standard Poodles. They are usually in the room with me when I see patients. The three reasons for them not being in the room are: 1. the patient doesn't want them there – I always ask before we go into the room where the dogs are, 2. I haven't had time to clean them up from their morning run, or 3. they prefer to be chewing a bone on the porch.



I believe having them in the room is therapeutic, so I like it when they're willing to come along. I believe they have a soothing effect on us (perhaps because they spend 99% of their time asleep?). I also think they know something about what's going on and, at times, are helpful. I remember years ago I was seeing a patient whose mother was very ill. The day after she died, he came in and just talked about this and that as he usually did, because he didn't know how to talk about his mother. All of a sudden, my dog got on the couch next to him (something she had never done before with anyone, and never did again). He burst into tears and started talking about his mother. Who knows how long it would otherwise have taken him to get around to saying something about the big topic in his life?

Freud also liked to have his dogs in the room with him when he saw patients. According to Temple Grandin (Grandin and Johnson, 2005), his favorite dog could tell time and let him know when the time was up. My dogs don't do that. In fact, they hardly move during the hour. They greet new people, then lie down and sleep, with a few significant exceptions. Their calm behavior lends a sense of wellbeing to the atmosphere of the sessions. Many articles have been written about this aspect of animals in therapy, and I lend my voice to the group who believes that there's a lot more going on in the minds of animals than we assume, and it's for the good.

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Two Poems by Sharon Chapman

"Soaring Hawk"

It's a perfect day for soaring—
The hawk is taking advantage
Of every thermal, turning
On a wingtip, rising
In the summer air, searching
For prey down below.
If he hears the crows
Scolding, raging
Trying to work up the nerve
To attack him in a mob
He gives no sign. He hunts
Because he must eat to live.
He moves across the sky
In Lazy circles. But he flies
Because it's a perfect day.
The sun is warm on feathers
Even feathers up so high
The air currents whisper
Past his wings, and clouds
Are few in the sky.

"On Butterfly Wings"

Hope flies on wings
Butterfly wings
Beautiful and Fragile.
A touch of careless finger
Would shred them.
But hope rises
Splendid in sunshine
Radiant in rain
Flying in spite of
Apparent reality.
It is not easy to believe.
It is not easy
For a butterfly
To emerge after winter's sleep
From its cocoon.
It takes hours
For the butterfly
To break free
To spread gossamer wings
In sun to dry.
And the butterfly
Must escape on its own—
Shredding its cocoon
To assist its struggles
Will only kill it.

Each person, too,
Must find her own reason
To believe in hope.
Someone else's reason
Is never enough.
But when hope spreads
Its shining wings
In your sky
Making your life brighter
It's worth the struggle
You must face to believe.

A Lesson from the Heart for Shady

Story and Photo by Leslie Benjamin

Shady lived in a village with a woman named Leslie. She loved to sit in the sunny window on the bed that Leslie made for her. There were two white cats in the village that picked on Shady because she was not all white. It made Shady sad. Shady had an idea.

She would try to wash off her black fur with a soapy bath using Leslie's Spiderman washcloth. That was not much fun, and Shady could see that she still looked the same, so she got out of the tub. Next, Shady spied some paints that Leslie had been using. There was plenty of white paint! Shady was sure that this would work.

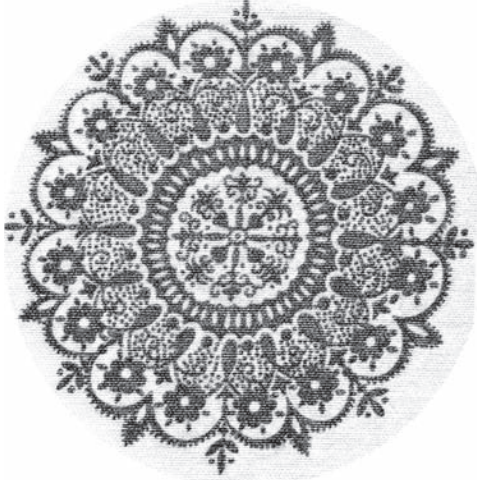


She did hope that Leslie would not mind the mess. Shady decided to go out, even though it was rainy, so that she could show herself to the white cats, but they were not out that day. By the time Shady was ready to come in, the rain had washed all of the paint off and she looked just like herself again.

Once inside again, Shady looked for more white ideas. She found some flour that Leslie had out on the table. The flour made Shady white and fluffy. She hoped that Leslie would not mind the mess. Shady just had to bathe herself. It is something that all cats do. Pretty soon, she was licking all the flour off her fur. Shady was acting so strangely that Leslie asked her what was wrong, so Shady told her about the white cats that were picking on her for being part black. Leslie said that what is on the outside is not important. She said that love is important, and that love is inside the heart. Shady lived peacefully, the rest of her days, loving God and loving others whether they loved her back or not.

“New Friends on the Block”

By Jemma Macera



Having lost
his Fall friend
a monarch butterfly,
Boots was thrilled
one winter morning
on swaggering out
to find his whole world
full of new, white playmates.

from the author: “I see my poem as representing the
opportunity pets give you to be creative which is very important
to mental health.”



“If there are no dogs in Heaven, then when
I die I want to go where they went.”

Will Rogers, 1897-1935

An Eagle Named Freedom, by Jeff Guidry,
William Morrow Paperback Edition, 2011
Reviewed by Catherine Wedge

In this moving and true story of the transformational relationship between a wild bird and a human, an emaciated young eagle with two broken wings is taken in by a wildlife rehabilitation center in the Northwest. The center decides it may have to euthanize the bird, since staff does not expect her to recover enough for release into the wild. Jeff Guidry, a volunteer, bonds with the young eagle; the animal survives and becomes part of the center's educational program. Then Jeff is diagnosed with cancer.

While the book contains some tragic stories of wounded wildlife, Freedom's story (and ultimately Jeff's story, too) is wonderful and even miraculous.

For emotional and psychological inspiration, this short book is more than worth the price; or, ask your public library to purchase it for their shelves and reserve your copy today.

According to...

The Manataka Indian Council, "American Indians see the eagle as a sacred messenger that carries prayers to the Creator and returns with gifts and visions. We use eagle feathers to connect to this majestic and powerful spirit guide as we know the eagle feather holds cleansing and healing powers. The eagle is seen by many cultures as a symbol of courage, vision, strength and endurance. The Eagle is a creature of the air, but has strong legs to walk on the earth and often lives near the water for food. These qualities...teach us to maintain balance in all dimensions to achieve inner-growth. As we soar to spiritual awareness, we remain well grounded in reality as we purify ourselves with the cleansing waters."



Photo taken from jacket of *An Eagle Named Freedom*; photographer Annie Marie Musselman

Therapy With a Tail by Mary Lauppe, LCSW-R

Sammy is a Labrador-Bichon Frise mix. He has those big eyes that look so deeply sad and seem to stare straight into your very soul. From his puppy years until he was four, Sammy had the pleasure and challenge to work with children with severe emotional problems. As the therapist for these children, I had the honor to witness the great healing that can take place between a child and a dog. Sammy would come once a week, and he knew when it was Thursday, his day to go to work. The children also knew that Thursday was Sammy Day, and would book sessions, from lunches with Sammy—which were much coveted and had to be booked in advance—to walks, or just hugs and giving him treats.

Many of these children were suffering greatly from things that had been done to them or around them. As the therapist for one particular little boy, I noticed that the therapeutic interaction would involve gazing into the mournful eyes of Sammy and feeling that he had been seen; his pain acknowledged, witnessed by this accepting and uncomplicated being.

The unconditional love a dog can give is so healing for such a child, a child who normally only gets approval conditional on his behavior, whether at home or at school, and it is always so hard for children to achieve the behavior that will win that conditional approval. With Sammy, the love was just there.

The children were always very happy to give Sammy treats, and he was always more than happy to receive their generosity, especially yummy bits of the school lunches full of juicy meat. This was an experience of giving pleasure to another living being, letting the children feel that they could give, that they were of value and that they were loved.

So many small and natural interactions with a dog take on a much greater meaning in the context of pet therapy. Even the simple act of taking a walk becomes an environment for sharing, intuitive communication and the self-confidence that comes with mastery over an intelligent animal who follows your lead and obeys your commands. Sammy would trot alongside a child holding the leash, sometimes being tugged in confusing ways, or yelled at, and he would just look up, accept and be there for the child.

As a therapist, I saw these walks become an opportunity to talk about the experience of being at the mercy of others, how it must feel to be yelled at, tugged, and pulled. This would allow the talk therapy to happen in a safe and contextually appropriate way, acknowledging the child's history and experience. The children were able to express themselves freely, always with the presence, love and attentions of the dog, a companion who never got ruffled, so long as he was in the vicinity and good graces of his mistress (me).

Then there was the wrestling. This was relished by a couple of boys who would get on the floor and roll around with Sammy, getting a little wild together, watched closely but trustingly by the therapist. This allowed these angry little boys to safely vent their anger, and was also a great game for Sammy! These rambunctious but playful sessions often ended in doggy kisses all over the boys' sweaty faces—such love and sharing between dog and child, healing old wounds and modifying difficult behaviors.

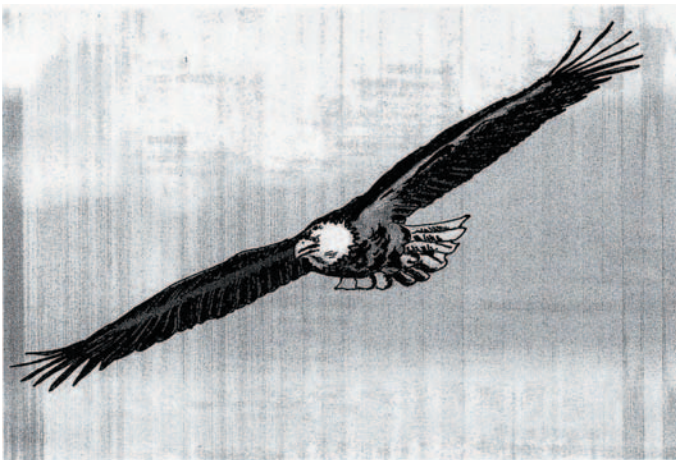
Children and dogs seem to get together, and this lovely connection has the potential for transformation. When therapist, dog, and child are able to be together in a therapeutic setting, healing happens.

On Eagles' Wings

Poem and Illustration by

Leslie Benjamin

To fly like an eagle
Wow, what that must be!
To glide on great wings
high above every tree.
I'm so near to heaven
that I'd like to stay,
And I can see the goal
from far away.
I return to the earth
with strength renewed
rejoicing to know
that the future is good.



“Colors of the Wind,” Adapted from Walt Disney’s
Pocahontas by Ashani

You think you own whatever land you land on
The earth is just a dead thing you can claim
But I know every rock and tree and creature
Has a life, has a spirit, has a name.
You think the only people who are people
Are the people who look and think like you
But if you walk the footsteps of a stranger
You’ll learn things you never knew you never knew

Have you ever heard the wolf cry
To the blue corn moon
Or asked the grinning bobcat why he grins
Can you sing with all the voices of the mountain
Can you paint with all the colors of the wind

Come run the hidden pine trails of the forest
Come taste the sun-sweet berries of the earth
Come roll in all the riches all around you
And for once never wonder what they’re worth
The rainstorm and the river are my brothers
the heron and the otter are my friends
And we are all connected to each other
In a circle of a hoop that never ends

Have you ever heard the wolf cry
To the blue corn moon
or let the eagle tell you where he’s been
Can you sing with all the voices of the mountain
Can you paint with all the colors of the wind

How high does the Sycamore grow
If you cut it down then you’ll never know
And you’ll never hear the wolf cry
To the blue corn moon
For whether we are white or copper skinned
We need to sing with all the voices of the mountain
We need to paint with all the colors of the wind

You can own the earth and still
All you own is earth until
You can paint with all the colors of the wind

Puppy Love by Martha Crowe

Academic year 2009-2010 was a tough one for Cornell students. The mood on campus was pervasively somber, and students were directly distressed by a number of suicides among them. As the spring semester progressed, there was added the increasing stress and tension of approaching final exams. In an attempt to ease the sense of depression, the university decided to set aside a day for “community outreach,” when various campus groups would hold events to socialize on the Arts Quad.

A group of students (who called themselves “Puppy Love” and had organized around the idea that the influence of pets was beneficial in difficult times) decided to participate by asking dog owners who used the Ithaca Dog Park to volunteer to come to campus with their dogs for some patting, play, and tail-wagging—the dogs, that is, although people were welcome to wag too if they so desired. An active supporter of the park, Liz Constable, agreed to recruit the owners of the notably people-friendly dogs that could provide affection and comfort to students.

So, on the appointed day, supplied with our own creature comforts, treats for students to give the dogs to get acquainted, and some tennis balls to fetch, we set ourselves up between Uris and Olin Libraries to see how many passers-by our canine pack could attract. Liz carefully tied a cardboard sign reading, “Pet me. I’m friendly,” around the neck of her gently aging Shetland sheepdog, Skye. Students were already beginning to gather around.

There was no need to advertise my young dog, Shanti, as she still had the energy of her puppy-hood and encouraged people to approach (wag, wag).

Many of the students wanted to just be with the dogs and pet or give them treats...they seemed happy and relieved to have a break from their usual work and scenery and enjoy an outlet for their stress. Also, many of the students hung around just to talk to us. Some obviously felt better by talking about their own dogs or expressing the void they felt from leaving their pets—“I miss my dog back home so much.” Response to “Puppy Love” was even greater than we had hoped: “This is what we need,” “I wish there were more dogs here,” “Can you do this every week?” “I love dogs....”

Wait a minute—didn’t some of the students look unusually mature? Indeed, we had also been attracting a number of staff who were coming back from lunch and stopped to talk. One woman glowed, “this has lifted my spirits,” as she went back into the library. And then, a stream of staff emerged from Olin Library, led by a woman who said eagerly, “we heard there are dogs out here!”

But the most touching of all the responses was completely wordless. A young woman stopped in front of Shanti (wag, wag, dance a little) and sat down cross-legged on the sidewalk. She pulled Shanti close and cradled her in her arms. Shanti laid her head on the student’s shoulder and relaxed. I could see the student hugging the dog more closely, who remained motionless as the student put her head on top of Shanti’s head.

As she bent over Shanti even more, I saw in her face a deep, desperate sadness, and finally she closed her eyes and buried her face in Shanti’s furry neck, soaking up comfort. Shanti lay there for the longest time without moving a muscle. It was as though the dog had sensed the need and how to respond to it.

Animals, Our Environment, and the Human Psyche by Taylor Beauvais

A conclusion long derived from the basics of psychoanalytical psychology is that the environment we find ourselves in is a huge driving factor for our psychological well-being. Some people might find clutter comforting; some people may have an OCD-esque tic that they need to have everything clean and organized. The common ground for any and all environmental comforts is that they are things that have been known to keep the human psyche in check. Animals share a similar tic, in that they need to have things in their environment a certain way, although it is usually much more primal. The thing that makes animal psyche so much different, and generally important, is the fact that animals do not have the capacity to refrain from their emotion. When an animal feels some sort of disturbance or something unsettling they will react appropriately, making it fairly easy to identify to any bystander that said animal is in some sort of distress.



As the human psyche has developed and been shaped by our worldly culture, we have become prone to crave understanding and a certain togetherness. This togetherness and understanding is exactly why animals are such a profound part of the human environment. When you have a dog or cat or ferret or any

number of odd animals lurking your hallways, they will be able to sense what you feel. If you feel sad your dog will catch on, and he will join you in your sadness until it has passed. When you are happy and playful, your cat will notice and be happy and playful too. The greatest thing about animals is this sense for emotion. If you track history back to the end of the nomadic people you will find animals joining the human environment as more than just food and clothing. You will note the development in domestication over the centuries, from being our dinner to being our companions helping us through everyday disdain.

This is not to discriminate against animals that aren't necessarily our pets though. Un-domesticated animals still play a key role in our environment. Anyone who has ever stayed up late listening to a coyote howling at a full moon can vouch that the mood of an evening can be dramatically moved by interaction with a far from acclimatized beast. They too sense when you are spooked and it can spook them also. Animals can literally smell when you are afraid of them and will react appropriately for their circumstance. Housepets fulfill our need for understanding, wild animals fulfill our need to be in-tune with nature. The animals in our environment clearly impact our psyche; it's all a matter of if you will let them.



TESS TO THE RESCUE! by Linda Getz

Loud crying can be heard coming from the School Social Worker's office at Newfield Elementary School. Pete, a 2nd grade student, is hiding under the couch distraught and refusing to come out. Tess to the rescue! Tess walks into the room and almost immediately the student comes out, wraps his arms around Tess' neck and gets a big kiss. Pete quickly de-escalates and shortly thereafter is able to return to class and continue on with his day.

Tess is a 4 year old Labradoodle who has been "working" at Newfield Elementary school for the past 4 years. She started there when she was 5 months old and comes to school every day with School Social Worker, Linda Getz. There is significant research available on the emotional benefits of animal assisted therapy and activity. It shows that animals in counseling sessions and in the classroom facilitate trust, nurturance and relationship building. Tess is used to help students become more sensitive to others by paying attention to body language, facial expressions and tone of voice. Since animals cannot communicate verbally, children become more in tune with these cues from animals and thus apply them to human interactions as well.

Tess writes letters to students. She runs a "Tips from Tess" group in which students write letters to her for advice on anything from bullying, problems at home and loss, to conflicts with friends. Tess answers them (with the help of some of her buddies) and offers strategies on how to solve these dilemmas. She can be seen sitting at the computer in Mrs. Getz's room writing each student a personal letter. Tess has helped students with school



anxiety feel better about coming to school. These students stop in to see Tess when they arrive in the morning and are greeted by someone who is always super excited to see them. She will often walk them down to their classrooms as a way to ease their transition into the day.

Tess has made the school feel more friendly and fun. Animals are a great way to reach some of those students who may be struggling with social, emotional, academic or family issues. Dogs do not see color, class or disabilities. Tess loves everyone equally. I really don't know who is happier to see each other every day, Tess or the students!

Linda Getz

School Social Worker (564-9955, ext. 1213)
Newfield Elementary School

Little Boy Blue

Standing near the window, where I know he can't see me, I watch my young son get off the afternoon school bus. I can tell from the slump in his shoulders that he's had a hard day. I know that my words won't take away his sadness. But, I want to tell him that the hard parts won't matter when he's older; that he'll find his way.

So, I wait for him to come inside.

Dragging his backpack behind him, he trudges down the sidewalk. I take a deep breath and start to search for the right words to say. Still, I watch him. I can see the visible rise to his chest; that well of emotion that he's squashed deep down inside himself all day that finally starts to bubble up to the surface.

Boys are supposed to suck it up. And, he has. But it was unspeakably hard and it cost him.

It's not something that I ever taught him to do. This survival tactic is something that kids learn out on the playground or in school hallways; both places where kids can be mean to other kids.

I never get the chance to tell him anything because he keeps on going, past our house and down to the foot of our neighbor's driveway. He squares his shoulders and stares at something that I can't see. Then he walks down the driveway, heading toward the back of the house.

I move to the kitchen where I can watch him from the window over the kitchen sink. And, I stand in the exact spot where my grandmother stood when this was her house. She had two sons, neither of whom grew up here. Both of them were grown men, married with kids of their own, when she and my grandfather moved here.

My son is the first child to grow up in this house. He was three years old when we moved out here from the city. We doubled our living space and more than tripled our yard space.

His life was relatively calm until he was old enough to start going to school. In almost no time at all, life was scary ... with no end in sight.

Things that were easy for other kids were next to impossible for mine. It took everything he had to walk out the front door on a school day. There were a lot of days when he just didn't have it.

Like the day he climbed the tree in the front yard and sat there for two hours before I could coax him down. It was a nightmare for both of us.

School was overwhelming: too noisy; an onslaught of unfiltered sounds that he drowned in. I can't imagine how difficult it was for him. I always knew that by the end of a school day, he'd be heading for a meltdown.

Today would be different.

I watched, mystified - could not figure out what he was up to until I saw him stop directly in front of the latched gate that was part of the fenced enclosure for Jake's doghouse. He had to get up on his tip-toes to reach the latch, fiddle around with it before he could get the gate open. No doubt, Jake heard him but chose to stay inside of his doghouse.

Jake was a Lassie dog, the Rin Tin Tin of Labrador Retrievers. The dog that broke the mold? Jake was that dog.

The couple that picked him out of the litter when Jake was just a pup had never owned a dog together. And, I suspect that although they might have had dogs while they were growing up, they'd been dogs that their parents had chosen.

However it happened, and sometimes you get lucky that way, the pup they picked was perfect. They brought him home when he was between 8-12 weeks old. As long as I knew him, Jake was easy-going, never got riled.

If Jake had been human, and you were a dad, you'd have wanted your daughter to go out with him. Because he'd take care of her. Oh, he'd have fun

and she would too. But, you'd know that Jake would behave like Paul Newman felt about his wife. Jake would be that kind of a good guy.

If Jake was a little boy and you were a mom, you'd want your son to be his friend because Jake would be the best friend that anyone could ever have. He'd be fun to hang out with. He'd know how to tell a good joke, he'd be good at sports. He'd be kind.

Jake was a big black lab, easily tipping the scales at close to 60-75 pounds as an adult dog. He'd have been a great dancer; he was incredibly light on his paws. I watched him, one time, gentle himself down in a living room that must have had five kids, all under the age of six, romping and stomping around. Jake knew how to move around them to make himself be smaller than he was. It didn't matter what those kids did to him. He was fine with all of it.

Just thinking about him after all these years makes me smile.

Which is what I did as I watched my son duck his head into the opening of Jake's doghouse, getting ready to burrow inside. He was headed to Jake, where he knew he'd be safe.



Kathy H Porter
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www.HealingRescueDogs.com

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