

Bailey's Story

We had lost our beautiful 11 year old black lab a year earlier. That dog was really special; not only because he was a great buddy but because he was the first pet I ever had. Growing up in New York City, the apartment building where we lived did not allow pets, or at least that's what my parents told me. Anyway, I knew when I grew up and earned my first house with a backyard a black lab and I were destined to be best friends. For eleven years I wasn't disappointed.

But believe it or not this story is not about our black lab it's about Bailey – the black and tan all-American that stole our hearts a year after we lost our black lab.

My wife, Donna, and I had decided to wait awhile; so almost a year had gone by before we started considering another dog. We decided to go to the Humane Society and take a look but we promised ourselves that we must be willing to walk away if we did not find the right one. To our surprise, we were able to do that about three times. That was tough to do, but one Saturday morning we got up and went to the Humane Society and as we entered I noticed my wife was lagging behind. As I walked down the row of cages I noticed a scruffy, little, shy, 20 lbs, black and tan, floppy eared, bright eyed little dog. I hesitated, looked real close and kept on walking. At that moment I knew that dog would be coming home with us. After pacing a few more steps I slowed and turned back to see my wife kneeling down and talking to the black and tan. There was a connection. I felt it and I could see it with my wife.

We visited with the dog outside for awhile and realized there was much work to be done. It was clear she was a tormented little dog and very distrusting. When we brought her home she actually stayed in the same spot for almost 48 hours and did not move. She

shied away from any male but after some time began to warm up to Donna. As time went on we began to establish a routine and create a sense of normalcy to our lives together. However, to my disappointment, I did not have the confidence that Bailey and I would ever be real friends.

Just when we thought real progress was being made, Bailey began to demonstrate that she was a real escape artist. She would go over and under fences....but she would always come home. Even though we were apprehensive about the disappearing act, we felt that she was becoming a real dog!

Then it happened....one day I came home from work and could not find Bailey anywhere. I looked in the backyard. She wasn't in the house, upstairs or downstairs. However when I was upstairs I noticed that my office door was ajar and the window was open. At that instant I noticed a hole in the window screen just as if Superman had decided to fly out the window. As I ran downstairs I began to imagine what I would find outside below the window. It was actually quicker for me to cut through the garage so as I hit the garage door opener and as it began to rise I saw this scarred , floppy eared, dismayed, black and tan, little dog crawling under the garage door. As I ran to her she did not appear to be hurt just scared to death. I checked her out and to my amazement she was unhurt. I picked her up and brought her back into the house and sat together for awhile trying to figure out what had happened. During this lengthy one way conversation I was searching for an answer to the questions: Why did this happen? How long had she been out there? To my dismay it could have been since 8 o'clock in the morning or just a few minutes before I came home. Bailey just stared at me but did not tell me the time.

What we did not realize was the cause of Bailey's second story flight from the window. It was a few weeks later and we were all involved in the living room when we noticed Bailey stretched out

on the floor, straight legged, and stiff as a board. We picked her up in her frozen position, rushed her to the car to take her to the emergency vet. To our amazement she suddenly relaxed looked up at Donna with her doe eyes and started licking. Bailey was back to normal but we didn't know why?

We concluded at the time that her past behavior was due to separation anxiety. Tearing things up in the house while we were gone, courageous attempts at backyard escapes and second story fly-by's seemed to fit that diagnosis. Upon further consideration it was determined that this behavior was just the precursor to Bailey having seizures.

With the help of our vet, some calming medication, and making the move to a new house with a larger elevated backyard; Bailey became a new dog. We noticed she would climb to the highest point on the slope in the backyard and gaze over her new domain. This visual ability brought her a peace and calmness that we had never experienced with her before. A number of uneventful years went by, the relationships became established and now she was part of the family. She was happy and we were happy for her!

An unexpected turn of events came when we decided to relocate to the wide open spaces of Idaho. For us, it was a marvelous change. One we have never regretted and for Bailey, it was a dream come true! Instead of gazing over a few neighborhood backyards she now had acres and acres in any direction to explore.

Bailey would patrol the few acres we had and bring some gophers and birds home as her prized possessions. Hours and hours spent nose down and tail wagging up in the air. As she expanded her adventures she would have to navigate and make friends with the neighbors hunting dogs, the horses across the way and even red Angus cattle down the road. But she was such a peaceful spirit she seemed to get along with all creatures large or small. One time we found her in our backyard nose to nose with a coyote. As we raced to protect her it seemed as though they simply finished their conversation and the coyote turned and jogged away. This calmness within her belied the seizures she

experienced years before. Now she seemed at peace, comfortable with herself and her surroundings.

Our Idaho backyard did have a small four foot chain link fence around it. But it did not matter to Bailey; she would simply climb over it in a very human way and she would be off to explore. We were glad that she never got around to teaching our other two dogs that skill. No matter where she went, one or two loud calls and she would gallop back, tail wagging, and ears flopping. Sometimes, I would swear she would also have a smile on her face.

But things started to change. We noticed that Bailey had trouble climbing the fence. When we called her it took longer for her to respond. Much of the bounce in her run seemed to have vanished. Then we started to notice she was bumping into the furniture in the house.

To our surprise, we realized that quite a few years had gone by in our lives and it had done so quickly. In the process, Bailey's sight was diminishing along with her hearing. One of the last times she was out on her own, she ventured down our dirt road as part of her normal routine. But now she was not as alert to cars coming down the road. Then it happened...it was not a case of truck hitting dog but rather dog hitting truck. Bailey actually ran into a truck...and it knocked her silly and scared! When we got to her she had a mild facial laceration but the real injury was to her self-confidence. She knew things were changing and not necessarily for the better.

Almost immediately she lost interest in leaving the backyard. She slept most of the time and rarely attempted to prance around. The puppy dog behavior which characterized her for so long was now gone.

Bailey spent more time in the house now. A black mark now exists on the walls about 16 inches from the floor as she would lean against the walls as she walked around the house. She rarely walked in the open spaces anymore choosing the walls to guide her. Her sight was now almost gone.

This development caused additional problems that if they weren't so funny as they happened they would bring tears to your eyes. Bailey would always go forward; never in reverse. When entering the laundry room she could find herself behind the dryer and getting caught. When the dryer was on we think she would panic thinking it was an earthquake. Another instance occurred when she entered the bathroom. She would get herself tangled up in the tubing behind the toilet under the tank. Lesson learned....we would close the doors to all the rooms while she was in the house.

As months went by, Donna and I decided it might be time! Bailey was struggling getting up and walking. We determined the following Monday we would make a vet appointment. We wanted to take the weekend and spoil her with rich food and spend time with her. But as luck would have it, Bailey had a great weekend...so we pushed our vet appointment to the following Friday.

On that Friday, Bailey got up and I directed her towards the yard where she started running around before she had breakfast. We gave her a special meal which she really enjoyed and got all over her muzzle. With this energy, we began to second guess our Friday decision. It was a beautiful day and we let her stay in the yard enjoying the fresh air and slight breeze. An hour later, she was down and could not get up.

Our vet appointment was for 4:30 in the afternoon. In the meantime we thought we would just let her sleep and relax. But at 3pm I woke her up and thought maybe she and I could go on a final walk together. But she could not get up; so I picked her up in my arms and walked out to the front yard. Thinking maybe one last pee and poop on some fresh cut grass would be appropriate. But she couldn't stand; so I picked her up once again and walked over to the agility arena. After all, it was Bailey who got us involved in the sport of dog agility. So, as Donna joined us in the arena we wanted to give her the chance to see, smell and remember the hours spent running through hoops, over jumps, teeter totters, and up and down the "A" frame. But there wasn't any real

reaction. We made one last attempt and carried her out to the pasture that she enjoyed so much running free and going after gophers! But she was done. She knew it and finally Donna and I came to terms with the inevitable less than an hour before our vet appointment.

By 5:30 pm that day Bailey was gone. We brought her home and let Boomer and Graycee pay their respects and placed her in view of the pasture she loved so much.

She was a gentle and peaceful creature and now we know she is still running free, through the pastures and meadows, ears flopping in the wind with our black lab at "Rainbow Bridge".

Bailey --- we will miss you!

Mike and Donna