

This Is It: No More Dogs!

By Dan Krause*

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Dan Krause and his wife, Mery, have had Golden Retrievers, two at a time, for most of the last thirty-five years.

It was about eight years ago when we last went through the trauma of saying farewell to canine friends. Both of our adopted dogs then were beginning to have the kinds of problems signaling that they were approaching the end of their life cycles. Sara developed a tumor above one eye, and the vet told us to watch for signs that the pain was becoming intolerable. When those signs emerged, we had to say our farewells to her.

She and Jake, our other adopted dog, had been inseparable from the time we acquired him. We suspected that he wouldn't be as enthusiastic about life once Sara was gone, and we were right. About eight months later, Jake's life quality diminished to the point where he couldn't get up the stairs or go outside to relieve himself. And so we had to say our farewells to Jake. Both episodes were so difficult that we vowed we weren't going to have any more dogs. The departures after their relatively short life spans were just too painful. We kept that promise to ourselves for almost two years.

And then a friend sent us a picture from a unique animal shelter in Michigan, adding, "I'm sorry." This picture included the story of a brother and sister who had been brought to this shelter and were so bonded that the shelter refused to send them out for separate adoptions; it was almost a BOGO kind of arrangement. The picture showed two adorable dogs, but the logistics were almost impossible because this shelter was in central Michigan, more than five hundred miles from our place. "But what the hell," my wife said, "why not at least make a call, just to see."

Why indeed? So she made the call and arrangements were made for us to come for an initial visit on our “way through” in a few months. “No problem,” I told myself. They will probably be adopted by then. Well they were not. Apparently there are not many people who are in the market for two adult Golden Retrievers. When we appeared for our interview, the staff member told us that the dogs were somewhat standoffish, so we should not be upset by the behavior. When the dogs came in the room, they ran over to us, gave us a few sloppy kisses, and that was that. So much for our earlier vow.

But, as we learned, this was the beginning and not the end of the adoption process. They had to check out our “dog references” and even our property to make sure we had an enclosed yard suitable for larger dogs. So we hustled back to our Michigan home and with the help of neighbors, I threw up some fencing. It would be more accurate to say that we installed the fencing, and then I threw up. They flew the dogs, and we had already decided to rename them, Luke and Annie, in on a Lear Jet owned by the shelter owner’s father. They checked out the fencing, and went on their way, leaving Luke and Annie with us.

The dogs settled in to their new lives quickly. They learned the routines fast, and they loved meeting new people. They turned at least four or five “indifferent” people into dog lovers. Luke and Annie had that effect on people, especially kids.

One of the things Annie and Luke couldn’t get enough of was our daily walks on the logging trail in the national forest across the street. They had spent much of their adult lives living in a small trailer, and running free on that logging trail must have seemed like heaven to them. Over the next few years, we noticed that Luke

would occasionally lag behind in catching up to Annie and me. A few times, we found him later, resting by the side of the road. We just assumed that he was a little slower, or that he enjoyed stopping to smell the roses.

It wasn't until we brought him to our vet in Gulfport, Florida for a teeth cleaning that we discovered his lagging was due, not to smelling any roses, but to an enlarged heart caused by an irregular heart rhythm. They suggested that Luke get a pacemaker. Fortunately, a research program had just started at the University of Florida Small Animal Hospital, and Luke was selected to participate. Luke was now the proud wearer of an experimental pacemaker.

After the surgery, he could finally keep up with Annie. By this time, we had sold our place in Florida and moved to Asheville, North Carolina. And Luke and Annie took to the mountains as quickly as they had to the logging trail. They could scamper up the mountain faster than either of us, which isn't saying much. The only problem we ever had with them was their aversion to other dogs. We tried a lot of things, including therapy, but nothing worked. There was probably something in their history that prompted the behavior, but whatever the reasons, we couldn't find a solution. So we worked around it.

But this aversion didn't extend to every animal. Once we took Luke and Annie for a visit to the country home of my wife's cousin. The cousin had a "barn cat" that she had tried to chase off her property. While we sat in her living room, the cat came up to the window and started pawing at it. The dogs started barking and so we thought we would take them outside and maybe the cat would decide to look

for another, friendlier place to settle. Everyone would be happy, including my wife's cousin.

We went outside. The cat charged the dogs, ran up to Luke, and put her paws on his chest. Well, the dogs loved it. We took them off leash and went for a long walk; Luke, Annie, my wife and I, and the cat. That night, we made a fire outside and sat outside with the dogs resting, and the cat happily chewing on Annie's tail. My wife's cousin was so amazed by the whole episode that she arranged for the cat's adoption by friends living in Minnesota. At last report, the family and the cat were doing beautifully.

And then time started taking its toll again, always too much and too soon. Luke developed a melanoma on his tongue. We decided that at his age (eleven), we were not going to put him through chemotherapy. But the surgeon was able to remove the tumor without affecting his eating. Then we started watchful waiting. Unfortunately we did not have to wait that long. Luke, as many dog owners experience, also developed arthritis and then just seemed to get tired of the whole thing; after about year, and then within the span of about a week, he went from fairly active dog to one I had to carry outside in order for him to go to the bathroom.

We located a wonderful vet here in Asheville who makes house calls for end of life procedures. She was incredible in every way. We were able to say good by to Luke while he was laying on his favorite rug in our dining room, where he was surrounded by my wife and me, a compassionate veterinarian, and, of course, Annie. You hear the phrase "a good death," often, probably too much, but that is what Luke

had. He went quietly and peacefully, as we told him what a wonderful companion he was and how much we were going to miss him.

And so we are here now in North Carolina with Annie. Every day, we look at her and wonder, is this the day when she is going to decide that she doesn't want to go on without Luke anymore? If and when that happens, that will be it. No more dogs for us. We just can't do it again.

Yea, right.

If you have any comments or questions on this article, please drop me a note:

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If you are interested in knowing more details about the wonderful shelter where we got Luke and Annie, or if you want to contribute to a first-class organization with terrific staff and a wonderful philosophy about dogs, their contact information is:

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