

On the Positive Side

A do-over for Mulligan

By Jo Ruprecht For the Sun-News

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His name was earned the hard way. In golf, a mulligan is a sort of kindness, a mitzvah. Through no fault of your own, your shot has gone awry and your partner allows you to call a mulligan, a do-over without penalty. That was how Mulligan adopted us.

Deb had searched online for "Old English Sheepdog." Mulligan's photo was captioned "50 pound clown." She passed him by; she wasn't ready for a new best friend. Casey, her third sheepdog, had died a prolonged, expensive and unexpected death. Healing from that process was taking some time. But Deb was drawn back to the photo, and she felt Casey nudging her to read about this boy. After all he was billed as a cross of Old English sheepdog with wheaten terrier, and wasn't that an interesting combination?

He was living at a Doberman rescue ranch in Ventura, Calif. The woman who ran the place had a soft spot for terriers. Ardis had found him on her rounds of local shelters and brought him to the ranch rather than risk his being put down. When Deb saw his photo, he had been with the Dobermans more than a year. He had been adopted twice by the same person, but both times he had landed back at the ranch. Somehow the person adopting him hadn't learned that he needed companionship and a well-fenced backyard. Left to his own devices and misnamed Gotti, he had complained loudly to the neighbors when left alone for hours and had jumped the fence in search of friends.

Deb heard Mulligan's story as one involving a poor matchup preceding the dog's behavior. But how does someone in Las Cruces check out a dog in Ventura? As Mulligan's luck would have it, I had a college reunion approaching, and Ventura was only about an hour farther than the get-together in Claremont. That was some weeks away, but Mulligan didn't seem to be going anywhere.

We took Oscar, my great schnauzer-cocker guy, on the drive with us so that he could check out the possibility of Mulligan. As we made our way to the ranch, we enjoyed the avocado groves and the lemon trees shading the drive. Numerous Dobermans greeted us as we went to the terrier area to meet the clown. He was more interested in playing with his pen mates. The four of us, Mulligan, Oscar, Deb and I, went to a fenced area to spend some time together. Our visit was uneventful; it wasn't love at first sight. On the other hand, there weren't any problems either. We had been looking for clear-cut signs, and we didn't see any.

After some discussion, we decided that we would bring Mulligan to Las Cruces. We could at least foster him and socialize him to family life; if need be, we could use our contacts to find him a home beyond the ranch. Ardis was glad to send him with us for a new chance. We had some challenges, especially in our first week together, but that's another story. We gradually worked past Mully's fearfulness and "rescue" behaviors; Frank, Vanessa, and Adrian at the Doggie Dude Ranch helped tremendously with that. Mulligan's happy and outgoing nature became more evident even with new acquaintances. Mulligan had found his do-over at last.

In turn, Mully provided a do-over for Deb. She had been deeply shaken by Casey, both in life and in her passing. Casey had been very unlike Deb's earlier sheepdogs in temperament and in health. Mulligan gave Deb the chance to try again, to start over. In the process, she found a sweet, somewhat cross-eyed boy who loved to play and always had his favorite pillow nearby. Those were clear signs; it had become love.

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