

LAS CRUCES SUN-NEWS

On the Positive Side

Older dogs a good fit for older people

By Pamela DesGeorges / For the Sun-News

Posted: 07/10/2010 10:34:46 PM MDT

I was malingering! It had been two months since I had taken my sheltie to her veterinarian and had her put to sleep. Fayja had been my companion for more than 12 years, since I was widowed and since she was a puppy. Now Fayja was gone, preceded in death by the other dog, Mollie, who had died six months earlier. I was bereft.

Together with Doug, my husband of six years, I decided to wait and look for a kitten to come and join our family. But, I wanted a dog. One night I came in after tending to my garden and said, without warning, "Can I get a new big dog?" Without a moment's hesitation Doug said, "Yes."

Our search began. We went to the pound and to Safe Haven. We talked. I wanted a young mixed breed we'd seen with lots of energy. We talked older dog and more relaxed temperament. We agreed, collie.

Our veterinarian agreed that older dogs work well for older people, and suggested an online search.

So I first saw our new dog, Luna, on my computer screen. I was expecting to see a tri-colored collie with an intelligent look on her face. Instead I saw a dog that was totally white except for her tri-colored head, with a stupid-looking grin on her face.

I went to the "more information" button and began to read about our dog's history. She had been over-bred and after her bath. And she was sitting on a sofa! That explained the silly-looking grin. She'd really hit the good time.

During the adoption process for the dog I was the one who was actually being processed: four pages of questions to be answered, references, and then a home visit.

Southwestern Collie Rescue does such good work! It is a wonderful organization run by warm, loving people. Their whole goal is to find and rescue these lost collies and give them warmth, food, and love 'til they can find their "forever home."

The longer the process went on the more I wanted to adopt this grinning, happy-looking dog. I didn't think I could cope with losing this dog if it went to someone other than me. When I checked again online they assured me, "Yes, this dog is yours now once she's spayed."

Finally, at the end of August 2008, we were told we could bring her home in a couple of days. Our dog was being fostered in Santa Fe, so we arranged to meet the foster parents in Los Lunas, N.M., finish the adoption papers, and bring her home.

Doug took the Saturday off work and we drove up to Los Lunas with suspended excitement. When we arrived at our destination, I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. I don't easily get upset or nervous, but I just couldn't wait to meet Luna.

We met the foster parents, signed all the paperwork, and reimbursed them for the dog's care. Then both husbands helped Luna into the bed made up for her in the back of our car.

We stopped at every rest stop between Los Lunas and our home in Las Cruces. Our dog managed to leave her mark at every stop. We arrived home, settled her down with lots of loving, gave her a light meal and settled her in for the night. We thought!

Within about 10 minutes of Lights Out, boom! Luna had knocked down the baby gate and was in our bedroom snorting around for somewhere to sleep. I settled her on a quilt on my side of the bed, turned out the lights, and all was quiet. I heard the heavy breathing of deep sleep. We have all slept soundly with that arrangement ever since.

I lost 10 pounds after walking Luna for the first three months, we walked at such a fast pace. She didn't unwind until we were back home. But as the weeks went by she grew and began to trust us and love us in return for all the love we showered on her.

Slowly, she started to relax. She found other dogs on her way about the senior mobile home park. There were dogs she visited while walking, there were dogs behind closed gates that she could walk up to and sniff through the rails, and there were dogs that she couldn't wait to see and furiously wag her tail at.

She also learned that people in the park that didn't have dogs were warming up to her. One lady said, "I have been scared of dogs since I was a child, but this dog walked up to me before I saw her and I realized that she wouldn't hurt me." That lady now waits for us if she sees us coming to get her pats in.

Sometimes as I walk her Luna is so happy she nudges me with her body to let me know she loves me. I stop, bend over and give her a big hug, too. One of our neighbors is Maryln, who works long and hard volunteering for the Humane Society of Southern New Mexico. She saw this exchange and told me later, "It made my day! It brought tears to my eyes."

Luna still has the name she had when she was found. We felt that she would prefer the name she had always known and we respect that.

An older dog for older persons totally worked out for us. Our dog arrived housebroken and well-mannered. In her earlier days she must have had some type of dog training because she has been a joy to train for the small things I expect from her. WE LOVE OUR DOG!

Pamela DesGeorges is retired from New Mexico State University after 20 years. DesGeorges has loved her pets as ongoing family since her dad brought home a kitten. The DesGeorges recently added a foundling cat, Max, to their family.