

Jasmine - A Lovely Middle Aged Lady

I had just started volunteering at the SPCA of Texas in 1999 a few months after Caesar died. The SPCA had a program called TLC (Tender Loving Care) in which all potential volunteers were required to participate in order to qualify as volunteers in any capacity whether it was as an off-site adoptions counselor, school docent for children, answering the phones, fostering an animal, etc. It basically involved walking, playing with and socializing the shelter dogs. Exercise and interaction with the animals (many of whom were sad, traumatized and stressed) were key components of this program. I believe it was implemented so that every volunteer understood what the SPCA was truly about – rescuing, rehabilitating and finding “forever” homes for animals in need.

I was very apprehensive about completing the hours required of me, as I was extremely sensitive to the animals’ plight. I felt their depression, anxiety, hopelessness and despair—their fear and, in some cases, their terror. However, I had made my decision to become a volunteer and was already reading a multitude of books on grief and grief recovery so that I could get ready to become certified as a Grief Recovery Specialist and establish the SPCA Pet Grief Counseling Program.

It broke my heart to see beautiful, loving animals that for one reason or another had found their way into the shelter. Many were large and old and I knew would never be adopted. They would be euthanized. I used to cry each time I came out to visit with the animals. I talked to them and told them how beautiful they were and how much I loved them. I asked God to bless each one and to guide and direct it to a happy, loving home. I wanted to adopt each and every one and provide them with a life of joy and love and peace.

It was not long after I became involved with the SPCA that I noticed an eight or nine year old slightly overweight middle aged yellow lab. Her name was Jasmine. She had been surrendered by her owners and now sat bewildered in her kennel in the middle of the dog shelter area. I saw on her description/profile card that she was heartworm positive. I was devastated. I knew that the likelihood of this gentle, loving middle-aged dog getting adopted was slim. She and I developed a bond, and I fell in love with her. She was so sweet and affectionate – and so very despondent. Her tail always wagged enthusiastically when I approached her kennel. I couldn’t bear for this dignified old lab to remain in this environment. She had been a member of someone’s family and had known what it was like to be a couch potato and companion for her humans. And yet, here she was – in this place with other strange, lonely, homeless barking and howling dogs.

I took her for walks and played with her at the shelter. She loved catching tennis balls and was very good at it, as a matter of fact. I discussed the idea of adopting her with Norm, and brought her home from the SPCA.

She loved living at our house and couldn’t believe her good fortune at having a pond to swim in. She LOVED our pond and plunged right in and began swimming like a pro immediately. She rid herself of the shelter smells and exercised to her heart’s content.

She would walk a few feet around the pond, then leap into the water and swim, and then jump out over and over again. She was a very agile swimmer. It was such a joy to see her engaged in the activity she was born to perform.

Within a week or two, Jasmine became desperately weak and ill. We rushed her to our vet, and, apparently her heartworm disease was very advanced and was resistant to our efforts to cure her. Although we attempted to treat her for heartworm from the moment we adopted her, she became increasingly ill and debilitated.

She remained at our vet for nearly a week with IV's and receiving all kinds of medical treatment. However, there was little hope for her recovery, so when the vet informed us that she could die at any moment, we decided to bring her home and provide her with quality of life for whatever time remained. She had spent enough of her life in confinement at the SPCA and at the vet. As soon as we brought her home and let her out in our back yard, she walked slowly and unsteadily but with determination to our pond. She was too weak to jump in, but she drank from it and lay beside it. We sat with her and petted and held her close to us. We left her to rest. When we returned a few minutes later to bring her back into the house, she was dead.

Her old, tired and worn-out body had given out. But at least she had been loved – and respected and appreciated. We had adopted her as a member of our family and she knew that she was both safe and loved. Jasmine was an inspiration to us in so many ways. Her determination and perseverance were exemplary. She truly lived by the credo: Keep On Keeping On. She taught us so much about dignity, growing old and the fragility of life. She was a “trooper” and a heroine to us...