

Sophie

While on vacation from Los Angeles, my husband and I found our soon to be beloved Dachshund/Beagle/Catahula mix darting in between cars in heavy traffic on a 5-lane highway near Houston in late July. My husband and I were visiting St. John's Retreat Center in Montgomery (about an hour north of Houston). We were looking for a mobile home to temporarily place on the property we had purchased which adjoined St. John's. I was horrified to see this small black and tan creature almost hit by several different vehicles. I hid my eyes under my hands and prayed that the little dog would cross the road and make it to the other side safely.

She landed in the parking lot of a fast food restaurant. The smell of grease in the over hundred-degree heat was nauseating, But our new little dog friend who was terribly overheated, dehydrated and exhausted wagged her tail. She smelled awful and had apparently been on the road for a long time. We immediately gave her some water and petted her. We examined her and determined that she had not been seriously injured in any way. She did not have any collar or identification tag, but she had been spayed and displayed no sign of having been abused. She was one extremely lucky dog. She licked us gratefully. She was very friendly. We were frightened she would run back into the treacherous highway, and so we gently picked her up and put her in our air-conditioned rental car.

We named the dog Sophie and spent the rest of our vacation with her. She was very well-behaved and was a wonderful canine ambassador. We cleaned her up, took her to the vet and stayed a hotel that permitted small pets. We had her transported to Los Angeles via plane. My husband's parents met her at LAX and brought her to our home when we returned from our trip.

Sophie was such a beautiful and loving creature. Her love knew no bounds or barriers. She instantly fell in love with our other dogs, Katie, Caesar and Spencer. She got along wonderfully with all other animals and with people. She adored children in particular. It was when, at an outdoor mall, Sophie and I encountered a quadriplegic little boy in a wheelchair guided by his older brother, that I knew Sophie was extraordinary. Without hesitation, she jumped into the little boy's lap and started kissing him all over his face. The little boy's face lit up, and he laughed and laughed. He asked a lot of questions about Sophie, and the two quickly became the best of friends. Sophie and I had several more encounters with the little boy in the wheelchair. The boy's brother said he had never seen his little brother react to anyone this way. He had fallen in love with Sophie, and Sophie couldn't seem to get enough of him. Sophie never saw barriers – she loves everyone and every creature she met unconditionally.

After the episode at the outdoor mall, I knew that Sophie had to be certified as a Therapy Dog. She became my first Canine Good Citizen and my first Assisted Animal Therapy Dog. She visited patients in hospitals and assisted living centers. She worked with and helped countless people with special needs like autism, cerebral palsy, Down's syndrome,

etc. She brought joy and healing to people of all ages. Children, however always held a special place in her heart...