

## Sunny Our Diving Dog

When my husband and I were first introduced to Sunny, she was a rambunctious, happy-go-lucky seven-month-old yellow lab who wanted nothing more than to play and be loved. However, she was a member of a family (husband, wife and two young boys) who had purchased her from a breeder on a whim to serve as a playmate/companion for the boys. Unfortunately, between soccer practice, boy scouts, piano lessons and choir practice as well as other after school activities and homework, there was little time to pay attention to the pup. The family had a very small back yard, and whenever the dog was let out, she was unintentionally destructive, digging, pulling up flowers and shrubs, etc. But it wasn't her fault. She was bored, frustrated, insufficiently exercised and suffering from the lack of human affection and interaction.

She had not been socialized or trained in any way or integrated into the family. Instead, she was regarded as a nuisance and a "mistake" as no one in the family had any time for her. She was kept confined in a travel kennel in which she could barely stand up for twenty out of twenty four hours each day. She was contained in order to protect the home from her destructive behaviors, i.e. urinating or defecating in the house, chewing furniture, rugs, running into and knocking over ceramics and glass ornaments and so forth. She was a purebred puppy "with papers" that the family had purchased from a breeder for \$800.00, but her family had no idea as to how to properly care for this little girl who meant no harm to anyone or anything. This little female lab named Sunny was silently suffering in her small cage.

A carpenter who was helping with a remodeling project at our house told us about Sunny's plight and her family's desire to "sell" her. He told us enough disturbing information about the dog for us to arrange to meet her as soon as possible. Once we assessed her quality of life with this family, we paid one hundred dollars for her and brought her home. She was current on all her vaccinations and we were provided with her veterinary records indicating that she was in generally good health. She needed eye surgery for an inverted eyelid, but other than that she was all right. What I found most upsetting were the numerous scars on Sunny's head and the flinching that she did any time someone raised a hand to pet her or pick her up. I knew she had been beaten and hurt by members of her old family. I was really happy and relieved to bring her home from her tiny house and almost nonexistent back yard to our two-acre back yard which featured two of Sunny's favorite things in the whole world – a large pond and a swimming pool. A Labrador retriever couldn't ask for anything more!!!

I can't say that Sunny, during those early years, was not a handful. Like Marley in *Marley & Me*, she was extremely strong and energetic and always into some kind of mischief. But she loved us and her canine siblings (not to mention her home-cooked meals) and her playtime. More than anything, however, was Sunny's love of our pond. Now, ten years old, Sunny still swims the length and width of it. However, her true area of expertise, is retrieving Frisbees from the bottom of our swimming pool. She will do whatever it takes to determine the precise location of the Frisbee at the pool's bottom.

She then analyzes the most expedient and strategic ways of getting to the Frisbee, dives in, circles the Frisbee, and then dives again at a 90-degree angle with her legs straight up in the air in order to fetch it. And...she won't take "no" for an answer. Once we've thrown the Frisbee in the pool, she is relentless in her pursuit of it, She seldom, if ever, gives up – even when we do our best to distract her from her mission. She would happily swim, dive and retrieve 24/7.

Sunny has come a long way from the sad little puppy we met almost ten years ago. She is lovable, friendly, playful, loyal, good-natured - a wonderful member of our family and a friend to every person and creature she meets. As a variation of a saying goes, "May she live long, dive long and prosper..."