
Lost Souls: FOUND!™

Inspiring Stories About Labrador Retrievers

Kyla Duffy and Lowrey Mumford



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Table of Contents

The Green Tomato

A Story of Circumstance

Recycled Sam

Some Gentleman!

Just "Fur" Fun

Discovering Beau

First Love

Third Time's the Charm

One for the Road

Just "Fur" Fun

B Quad

My Chocolate-Covered Yellow Lab

Angel in a Dog Suit

Everything Happens for a Reason

Just "Fur" Fun

The Few, The Proud, The Customs Service Dogs

More Than Mischief

The Best Buddy

The Holiday Blessing

A Wagging Achievement

Just "Fur" Fun

Living With

Aiden's Eyes

Hugo in Stereo

Do You Know This Dog?

Just "Fur" Fun

Jail Dog

Porter Pride

What's in a Name?

Complete the Puzzle

Surprise Inside

Just "Fur" Fun

A Fox in the Garden

The Love of a Labrador

Something to Chew On

Rescue and Recovery

Retriever Recipe: Barley Stew

Learning Lab

Not "Just a Dog"

The Green Tomato



Imagine that you've decided to expand your household pack to include a companion for your aging Lab. You scour dog rescue websites for a smaller Lab so as to not intimidate your demure girl. Eventually, you find a 60-pound Lab who seems perfect, but you forget one thing... *He's only nine months old and still has a lot of growing to do!*

A few months after his listing was posted, our pack takes the eight-hour drive to Wild Heir Lab Rescue in South Carolina, where we are greeted by a growing, 75-poung giant; a dog who leaps couches in one bound!

"Little" Barkley puts his paws on my shoulders and looks me in the eyes. And Maggie, whom I at first feared would be terribly displeased with a huge, clumsy brother, is elated. Her infectious enthusiasm hits me, and I can't help but like him too.

Barkley has no qualms about leaving South Carolina with an unfamiliar pack in a strange SUV. He leaps right in and immediately decides the back seat is simply an exercise hurdle to get to the front. ("Umm, he's in your seat") So I open the door and take him around to the back. By the time I return to my seat, he's back in the front again. Repeat two more times.

Barkley never appears confused or anxious upon arriving in his new home. He paces the bed every night ("Did we get an insomniac?") until I realize he just wants on the bed. His "inch" becomes a "yard," and Maggie and I are now pillows for him to lie on while he buries his nose in my neck. Gently lying down isn't an option – Barkley prefers falling across us from standing.

All dogs are friends, all squirrels are foes, and moles are to be carried carefully in one cheek. ("What's in Barkley's mouth?") Leashes and Maggie's collar are edibles ("Why isn't Maggie's collar on? Why are her ID plates on the floor?");

Nylabones and tennis balls are pacifiers; water is for slobbering across the kitchen, requiring a rug to be put down; vacuums are a terror, at times necessitating escape *through* a (closed) Plexiglas door (he wasn't injured); and couches are the place I provide Barkley with a lap to lie across.

Maggie is his most beloved big sister and best friend whose side he won't leave. Her head may be for drooling on, but no matter - Maggie, now 10-years old, is a pup again. Every play session begins with mutual nose licks before pandemonium ensues. Post-breakfast wrestle-mania is marked by joyous sounds of thunder throughout the house and every rug accordioned against a wall. Maggie loves an ambush, hiding under a desk or chair and leaping out at Barkley with a playful "snap-snap" of her ferocious fangs. Maggie lets Barkley chase her just long enough to gain momentum and turn on him - the chased becomes the chaser - and he's as delighted as she.

Beastly Barkley has invigorated my sweet Maggie, and in turn, he has found a teacher and playmate. Like the shiny green tomatoes Maggie taught him to enjoy from our garden each morning, our rescue Lab, Barkley, is young, crisp, and vibrant, leaving us without a dull moment to speak of.

Helen Strauss

A Story of Circumstance



Like so many other stories, mine is one of coincidence and circumstance. Ten years ago I endured major brain surgery and a brief near-death experience. Fortunately, it left me with a somewhat altered outlook, giving me a greater sense of compassion for people and creatures struggling to maintain a normal, healthy life. This experience resulted in moments of total exhaustion and despair, but some indescribable motivation kept me going. There were times along the way I

wondered why I couldn't stay on the peaceful "other side," but I eventually came to believe the main reason I remain in this world is to not only inspire others with my story, but to also find a way to give something back. I just had not discovered what that would be.

Twenty years ago, our family moved into a subdivision to be close to schools and other activities for our two daughters, and my wife constantly questioned why we couldn't have a dog. Between my travel and the typical busy schedule of the family, I felt a dog wouldn't receive the attention it deserved. For years I have seen overweight, bored, and neglected dogs that appear to be objects of their owner's amusement with limited concern for the dog's welfare. I explained to my wife that I had no intention of going down that path.

Following my surgery, our circumstances had changed, and I eventually agreed to open our home to a dog. My wife found Sir George, a blind 18-month-old Lab, on the rescue website, and I seriously thought about the challenges he must be facing without the benefit of sight. I reflected on my own struggles and recognized some common ground. Still, we ventured to the rescue headquarters keeping an open mind to

all the adoptable dogs. The puppies were especially cute and difficult to resist, but, not surprisingly, they are quickly adopted. As I recall, when the moment came to make a decision, my wife and I looked at each other and asked the same question, "What do you want to do?" Our mutual conclusion was a concern that if we didn't take George, who will adopt him? And so our decision was made. I remember the tears in the rescue director's eyes after hearing our choice. She looked at us for clarification and asked again, "You'll take George?"

Soon after adopting George, my wife entered him in a basic obedience class where he easily became the star pupil. Next we decided on therapy dog training with The Delta Society. Again, he easily passed and has managed to upgrade his status. He visits patients at local hospitals, elementary schools, and nursing homes. The experience is not only rewarding for George, but it also helps those with disabilities and illnesses to connect with a blind dog that is so happy and oblivious of his handicap. During one visit, my wife encountered the nurse who retrieved George from an Indiana animal shelter before he was transported to Cincinnati.

Apparently George was severely neglected and his owners were reported to the Humane Society. Sometimes we

wish he could tell us his story, but then again, it's probably best if he doesn't remember. We find it far more important that we give him the life he deserves for the present and the future. George and I visit the park often, where he swims and retrieves his ball or stick from the lake. Strangers watch him and are amazed when they discover he is blind. We run errands together to Home Depot or Lowes, and he has become a favorite among the staff. He even tolerates the grandbabies crawling all over him, and we have never experienced even the slightest problem at home. Is it a coincidence that he arrived at the rescue just prior to our visit? I can't answer that, but what I do know is that he is the perfect fit for us.

Often I close my eyes and try to imagine what it's like to live in a world of total darkness. It is frightening for me, but considering that George has no choice, he has learned to adapt by responding to touch and sounds. He groans from delight after a good belly scratch, gobbles his food with absolute gusto, and is excited when he knows we are preparing to travel somewhere. To us, he's a big, soft, gentle, loveable teddy bear and a pleasure to hug. I don't know if I would have been so drawn to George and his disability had I not been through a life changing experience myself. Yet, the most gratifying feeling for

us is knowing George is in the absolute best possible home for the rest of his life, and although he has brought so much joy to our family, it's even greater to be able to give back.

Rich Ayers

Recycled Sam



Recycled. *Noun.* To reprocess, salvage, save, reclaim, recover.

December was a busy time for Miami Valley Lab Rescue (MVLRL): too many dogs, not enough fosters. I had been looking for a rescue to keep our ten-year-old Lab, Meg, company when I went back to work full-time, so I agreed to temporarily foster

to help ease the strain at MVLR and as a trial run of sorts, to see how Meg took to a new dog in her home. My boys liked the looks of a two-year-old Yellow Lab named Sam.

Sam. It was a strong, simple name befitting the big, beautiful dog that ran into my house and promptly lifted his leg on the Christmas tree. Upon hearing my rather startled "Sam!" he made a mad dash to the crate and disappeared. "Well," I thought, "the dog obviously knows how to self-punish." And that didn't bode well in the back of my mind. It was a small taste of things to come.

Sam's history is sketchy at best, but I'm certain family life was totally foreign to him. He had no house manners whatsoever. Not a clue. He could rollover, though. And sit. Petting, or heaven forbid, hugging, resulted in turning and pulling away. Belly and ear rubs were out of the question. Touching his front paws caused severe jerking, all of his leg muscles coming into play as if he were being electrocuted. He had several goofy, quirky habits that we never figured out, such as circling us at a fast pace like a land shark with a toy, shoe, or whatever was handy, in his mouth.

Mealtime was a serious event. Sam would spin like a circus dog, sometimes getting dizzy, staggering to his bowl.

While Meg daintily picked one or two morsels, looking around as she chewed, Sam sucked his food down like a Hoover vacuum in under 30 seconds. I know because I timed him once. It's doubtful Sam has ever tasted anything that crossed his palate. He still eats as if there's a canine army behind him just watching and waiting for him to make a false move. Thanks to a four-mile run every day and a long nightly walk, he has the defined waistline we all dream of and weighs in at a muscular 82 pounds. By all rights he should be as big as a barn.

He surfed counters, ate absolutely *everything*, including a box of Q-tips, two bars of soap, a grill brush (scary), manure based fertilizer (expensive!), a dead mole (no, this was NOT on the counter), and two packages of frozen chicken breasts, cellophane included. My son thought that was cool. "His poop will come out shrink wrapped," he said. After that I'm pretty sure my neighbors thought I fed these things to Sam in order to make his poop decorative and interesting. The sticks of the cotton swabs sticking out at odd angles were a big hit, but the Brillo-like explosion of the grill brush was really something. How he ever passed it we'll never know.

Leaving the house required advance planning. I called it *Samitizing* and it didn't work. Left alone Sam was a magician,

opening drawers and cabinet/closet doors and dragging all contents onto the carpet. Despite my best efforts, we were on a first name basis with a local emergency carpet cleaning service at \$90 a pop. I was so frustrated and angry. I never had these issues with Meg. I could leave a roast on the floor and she wouldn't touch it (certainly not a reflection on my cooking). She didn't eat garbage or dead animals. My mantra became, "Sam's going back. Either that or I will strangle him with my bare hands. I now know why he's been recycled!" Nobody bought it. They knew me too well.

Crating was an option, of course. My brain said, *do it*. My heart said, *not for ten hours a day*.

Sam is a character, a natural clown. His youth was about the joy of living, spontaneity, frequent clumsiness (crashing into a tree while showing off), slowly but surely learning what was expected of him, finding trust, and eating, eating, and more eating. He's sweet-natured without a mean bone in his body, and I think we were the first to fall in love with him. He couldn't swim, flailing and pawing at the water like a drowning dog. With feet the size of ping-pong paddles he should have pulled through the water like an Olympian. He, to this day, would

rather explore and forage for food than swim. A dip on a hot day is fine, but something to eat is infinitely better.

Sam fell in love with Meg from the first. He disgusted her, but eventually she tolerated and finally loved him in return. She was his playmate, mother, girlfriend, grandmother, and best friend. He groomed, teased, wrestled, protected and took all her toys. He became her ears when her hearing failed, her eyes when her sight dimmed. She groomed, frequently scolded, always tattled on, and disciplined him as only an older dog can do. She was the alpha and he was her yellow boy, her fountain of youth, until her death at 15 1/2 years old. They had been together five-and-a-half years.

We often wondered if much was going on in that big, beautiful noggin. Yeah, there is. I found that out after Meg's death when he grieved for weeks, sitting in the front window, watching and waiting for her to come home. He disappeared to his bed for hours rather than being with his family, a big Labby sigh his only sound. His gentle, brown eyes, the windows to Sam's soul, mourned for his best friend.

I have learned so much from Sam - things I could have done better while raising my children - like stepping away from a situation that caused anger and dealing with it later. I've

learned more about unconditional love and patience than I ever wanted to learn. I've learned laughter is far more important than a permanent stain on the carpet or Cheerios everywhere. I've learned that recycling is good and not just cans. I've learned that I love Sam more than I ever could have imagined. He owns my heart and doesn't even know it.

We recently fostered a Yellow Lab named Sadie and then adopted her after two weeks. She's young, sweet, and thinks Sam is her very own plaything. Sam, in turn, is much too patient as she steals his toys. He should flatten her. Sadie is still sometimes nervous and uncertain but getting better with time. She needed us and Sam needed her.

Sam's almost nine now, and slowing down. He sleeps more, his circling is slower and he sits for meals, although he drools and quivers in anticipation. He hasn't run into any trees in a while. He does still carry a toy or my shoe in his mouth when greeting people, no matter who it is. Now I *Sadie-ize* rather than *Samitize*. But things aren't that important anymore.

Recycled Sam, my Sam who wasn't supposed to stay, turned out to be a diamond in the rough. We polished him up and he's priceless. But then, he always was.

Linda Kiernan

Just "Fur" Fun

A Second Chance: When our Black Lab, Chance, was no longer able to chase balls due to a brain tumor, we had to let him go to doggie heaven. We were dogless for the first time in our married life, until, at a stop light, my husband and I looked over at the car next to us and saw "Chance!" Unbelievably, the sign on the car said "Adopt A Dog at Second CHANCE Dogs." Within four days we had adopted LuLu on what would have been Chance's 11th birthday. -*Cyndy Woodside*

The Huntress: I adopted Sydney to replace an older dog who passed away. What a surprise! Not only is she a great pet, but she is the best Retriever I've hunted with ever. She points, flushes, and retrieves, and people love to watch her energy. I wish I could clone her. I've purchased and trained two expensive Labs with great pedigrees in the past, but my Lab/Chessie Sydney is the best all-around dog I've had in 58 years. What nice treat for guy who gave an adopted dog a chance. -*Duke Altschuler*

Surprise Inside



We enter the final chapter. Somehow in the last 24 hours your spindly legs stopped supporting your 100 pounds. Suddenly years of memories flood back, and in between my tears I laugh out loud.

We had an unconventional meeting. Who knew one could meet a dog online and, just as they say, when you least expect it love comes. It was a casual effort on my part, cruising through breeder's websites, ooh-ing and aah-ing at photos of beautiful, and surely well-behaved, dogs. All my prior dogs had

been, umm, bordering on bizzarro behaviors; they all fit into the "goofball" category. But this time was going to be a concerted effort to find an older pal, one with exemplary traits - a turnkey dog. Chewing, digging, barking, and howling would never exist in this future older dog, only perfection.

The surprise came one day by way of the announcement: "You've got mail." It was an obscure, mysterious note from someone, mentioning the availability of an older Lab with no details other than a phone number. The area code was some faraway place, but my interest was bubbling. In an instant, fingers were dialing the numbers.

The quiet voice on the other end of the phone belonged to a carpenter, who spoke of his client's dog. He said the dog was big, beautiful, and lonely. Buzz word. Thoughts racing, heart pounding, hearing him ask if I would call the dog's owner. But how could I, when they didn't even know their carpenter had become a matchmaker for their dog?

We settled on the carpenter notifying his clients of his crafty plan, and only then would I make a call. On the phone he next day, the quiet voice said his part of the deal was done, and within an hour the arranged marriage had been completed. The

lonely dog would fly here and be the ideal, hundred-pound, well-behaved dog they promised me.

While driving to the airport, expectations crept in. This dog would be the perfect Lab, and of course, I would be a model guardian. As the carrier was opened, though, a massive and wild, 130-pound creature charged out. A last ditch grab at his leash resulted in a shoulder-jerking trip around the parking lot, until he finally stopped. Snorting, growling. How could this be the dog I had imagined?

What a ride we have been on all these years: three trainers, surgeries galore, a plethora of medications, special diets, nonstop aggravations, irritations... Yet still my heart entwines yours, every beat. You have been my friend, my therapist, another parent helping raise my son, and now I am resigned to entering the final chapter with you, calling you every nickname that rolls off my lips, hugging and kissing the days away.

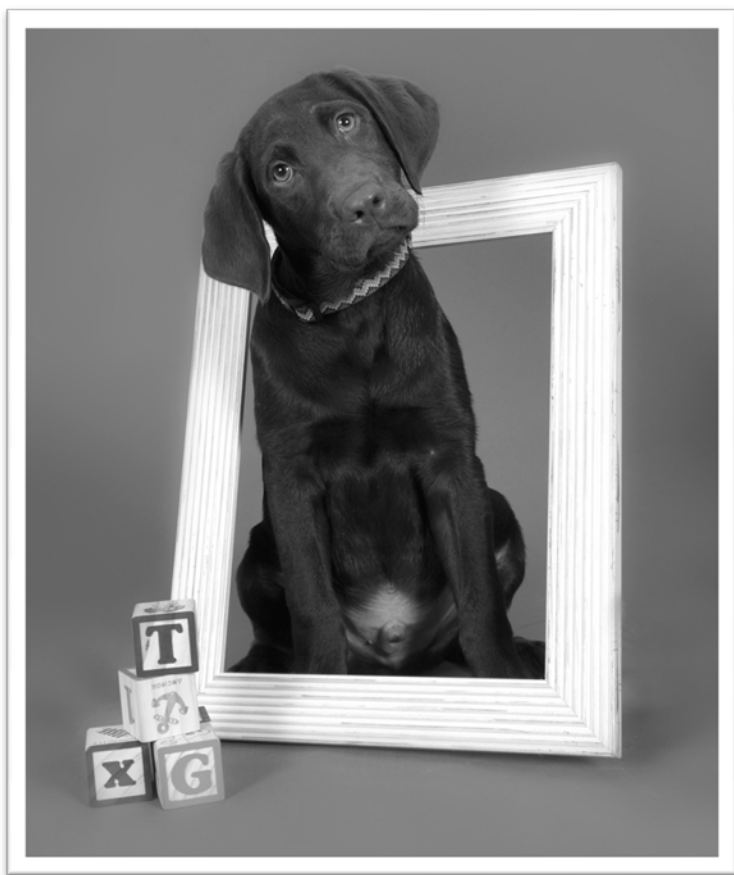
Crackerjax, you're the best.

Jann Gath

Learning Lab

No Shame in Using The Return Policy: Tux was our fifth foster dog. A family adopted him, but then reported back that Tux was hiding in the closet, running away from the kids, and shedding tons of hair. Their vet wanted to put Tux on an anti-anxiety medication, but I knew he just had to come home. Agreeing they weren't the best match, the family promptly returned Tux without guilt or shame. We adopted him and he's been a great big brother to subsequent foster dogs ever since. - *Emi Wyble*

Cat-a-What? It's called cataplexy, and it's not a fear of cats. The condition causes Rudy to collapse and fall asleep when he becomes excited. He can see and hear what's going on but can't move his muscles for 2-5 minutes. Sometimes cataplexy sets in at the most inopportune times. For example, six-month-old Rudy once bolted into the street after a cyclist. The excitement caused Rudy's back legs to give out and he fell asleep in the street...at the exact same time a car came around the corner! Though he doesn't have a cat complex, Rudy may just have nine lives – the cyclist jumped off his bike and whisked Rudy out of the road just in the nick of time. -*Tom Puhr*



"Can we pleeeeee play fetch now?"

About Happy Tails Books™

Happy Tails Books™ was created to help support animal rescue efforts by showcasing the love, happiness, and joy adopted dogs have to offer. With the help of animal rescue groups, stories are submitted by people who have adopted dogs, and then Happy Tails Books™ compiles them into breed-specific books. These books serve not only to entertain, but also to educate readers about dog adoption and the characteristics of each specific type of dog. Happy Tails Books™ donates a significant portion of proceeds back to the rescue groups who help gather stories for the books.



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