

TREASURED MEMORIES OF DARETTA

By Lynn Kelleher

Dedication and Acknowledgements

The following short anecdotes are some of my treasured memories of my guide dog, Daretta. I would like to dedicate these stories first to my husband Dennis, who encouraged me to do this project and helped me edit these remembrances.

Secondly, I want to dedicate this to Claire and Jim Benson, Daretta's puppy raisers. Without their love, patience and care, Daretta would not have become the wonderful guide dog for me that she was. Lastly, and most importantly, I dedicate these stories to Daretta. She is the main character around which these memories revolve. Without her there would be no treasured memories.

The first Day Going to Mass

My guide dog, Daretta, and I had just graduated from the Guide Dog program on December 14, 2002. After we were finished with the graduation ceremony we left to go home to Sea Ranch. It was a very stormy day so my husband had to drive more carefully to get up the twisty coast road.

The next day December 15 we took Daretta with us to church for the first time. As we got out of our car and approached the church, Father Theo saw us coming. He walked towards us beaming with pleasure at seeing Daretta. We introduced him to her and he knelt down in front of her and blessed her. I was happily surprised not knowing what a dog lover he was.

When mass started he announced that the parish had a new member, Daretta, Lynn Kelleher's guide dog. I was a little embarrassed but Daretta sat placidly through it all. She was quiet and well behaved all through the service. At the end of mass, Father announced that Daretta was the best behaved member of the parish. Suddenly, I heard a voice call out from the back of the church that said, "yes, she was good and slept through your entire homily." The parishioners all roared with laughter and Father took the joke on him quite well. Smiling, father blessed us and ended the mass. What a wonderful way for Daretta to meet the people at church.

Leading the Way

Not long after bringing Daretta home from Guide Dogs we had an occasion to go to San Francisco. As the three of us walked along I could feel through the harness Daretta's joy. She loved going to new places and especially the city with all its noises and obstacles. As we moved along we came upon a large construction site that covered the sidewalk in our path. We stopped to check it out. Dennis, my sighted husband, was ready to take us across the street and around the mess before us. I stopped him and asked him to let Daretta work.

I gave her the signal to go forward. Cautiously she moved ahead. She lead me through the construction without bumping me into a single obstacle. Dennis followed us and marveled at her ability to find a safe path for us that even he had not seen. When we finally emerged on the other side of the construction site we were marveling at this dog's ability to lead me safely through it all. We both praised Daretta and I gave her a pat. She wagged her tail gently and we moved on to our destination.

The Tall Grass

As days passed by Daretta and I established a routine. We would take several walks each day on the roads around our house at Sea Ranch. It was a rural area so there were no sidewalks for us to use. We walked on the left margin of the road facing traffic, so cars could see us and Daretta could see them. While on these walks I noticed we were drifting out into the center of the road and away from the safety of the shoulder. I used hand motions and verbal commands to let Daretta know that she should stay over on the shoulder. Thank goodness the speed limit was twenty five mph. More than once I was surprised by the closeness of a moving car.

I was getting frustrated and concerned about our safety. Suddenly, one afternoon when the wind came up I heard the swishing of weeds and tall grass blowing on the side of the road. I reached over Daretta's back and found these tall grasses swaying in the wind. I finally realized the reason for Daretta's disobedient behavior drifting out into the middle of the road. The grass was so tall it blocked her view.

We returned home and I called the maintenance department and explained the situation to them. They were on our street shortly mowing all those wild grasses. The next time Daretta and I walked she stayed on the shoulder of the road and we walked safely. I was relieved to have discovered the problem.

The First Summer at Lake Almanor

Daretta and I had been quite lonely at Sea Ranch, especially during the week when Dennis was at work in Sacramento. We decided to rent a little apartment in Davis near Sacramento. Moving is always difficult but for me I had the added disability of back problems. I did too much and ended up having back spasms. We decided that Daretta and I would go to Lake Almanor where I could relax and recuperate near friends.

Once at the lake I had to figure out how I could exercise Daretta. I took an extension leash and using that I let her run in circles around me in our large back yard. I could not walk much at that time. I was very nervous that Daretta would pull on the leash and hurt my back further, unknowingly. I knelt down and talked to her explaining everything. I told her she had to be gentle and never pull on the leash. I know she understood because she only pulled on the leash one time that entire summer and there were plenty of squirrels, dogs, and other critters to attract her attention which might cause her to run.. She was so gentle.

To rest my back I would lay on the floor in front of the couch with a pillow under my head and watch TV. Daretta came over and laid down with her head on my pillow only she placed the top of her head next to the top of mine. We lay head to head on the floor sharing the pillow. I wish I had a picture of the two of us laying like that. As the summer continued my back gradually healed. We were able to take wonderful walks because of Daretta's gentle guidance and companionship.

The Little Rascal

In the fall we left the lake and returned to Davis. At our apartment I could relieve Daretta under some large trees in the front of the building. One of the trees was a carob tree. It dropped pods full of carob beans all over the ground. Knowing that Chocolate can be lethal to dogs I scolded Daretta and removed one of the pods from her mouth when I heard her chewing it up.

The next time we went to relieve I was careful to listen so I would know if she had picked up a carob pod. Satisfied that things were fine we returned to the apartment. I left Daretta in the living

room for a few minutes and then returned. Suddenly I felt myself walking on something hard on the rug. I reached down and felt around. What's this, I thought. Then I found a recognizable piece of a carob pod. That little rascal. She must have quietly picked up a pod outside, held it in her mouth, brought it inside, and ate it when I left the room. How smart is that?

After that, I not only listened to be sure she was not chewing something while relieving, but I felt her muzzle and mouth before we entered the apartment. Food was one of the few vices Daretta had. I smile even today to think how she outsmarted me at least that time.

Making Friends

In the fall of 2003 while walking home from church I heard someone with a dog approaching. It was Lena Contreras with her Guide Dog, Baltic. I spoke to her and we chatted while we walked back toward her apartment and mine. Daretta and I spent a little time at Lena's apartment and that was the beginning of two friendships between Lena and me, and between the two dogs. After that we would try to get together to go shopping in downtown Davis or just let the dogs have a play time.

For a shopping trip we would meet at the corner between our two apartment complexes. If one of us arrived at the corner first while the second team approached, the two dogs seeing each other would get all excited. They were saying in body language "Hi Girlfriend!" Lena and I would both have to gently correct our dog and remind them that they were in harness and working. Soon they settled down to the walking routine we developed. One team would walk in front for a block and then the second team would move up and take the front position for the next block.

One day Lena and I decided to change this routine. The team in front stayed in front for a second block. Well, the dogs did not like this change at all. It was amusing to see their reaction. Daretta tried to pull backward for the second block, and Baltic who was in the rear tried to pull forward. We both got the hint and went back to the old established routine. They are so funny.

Who Ate the Butter?

I had taken two frozen sticks of butter out of the freezer to soften for use in a baking project for later. I heard the doorbell ring and it was Lena and Baltic over for our weekly visit and the dogs' play time.

Lena and I were seated at the kitchen table enjoying some tea and began to chat. Our attention was drawn by the sound of dog toe nails on the floor on the other side of the kitchen. We noticed that they were quiet and not playing. We both walked over to investigate. I felt around on the counter top and found only one stick of butter. Where was the other one? The two dogs were standing innocently next to the counter. The butter evaporated with its wrapper on. Could these two rascals have eaten it so quickly and silently?

Lena and I scolded the two dogs. We never knew if they both shared the butter or if one of them ate it all. It did not seem to bother their digestion. Now we smile when we think of this episode. We just never knew who was the culprit.

A Delicious, Delicious

Daretta and I were waiting for Lena and Baltic to come over for a visit. I happened to be looking for something in the refrigerator when an apple fell to the floor and rolled. I tried to find it, but before I could, the doorbell rang. I opened the door and Lena and Baltic entered

As Lena and I sat sipping tea, we both heard a slurping noise and went to investigate. We found Baltic standing with the runaway apple in her mouth. This apple was large enough that it jammed Baltic's mouth open with her teeth stuck into the apple. She could not get the apple out and it was impossible for her to close her mouth. Apple juice was dripping down her mouth and muzzle from the holes her teeth made in the apple to eat it. Daretta was delightedly licking the juice from Baltic's muzzle. What a funny sight it was. Lena removed the apple from Baltic's mouth gently I could only imagine the disappointed look on Baltic's and Daretta's face. Their fun was ended. We laughed and the dogs went on to play. There is nothing more delightful than two dogs playing happily. Our dogs did that often.

Saved By Daretta

I decided to take a walk with Daretta to down town Davis. We walked down F Street and had to cross several streets before reaching the shopping area. One of these was Fifth Street, my least favorite crossing because it is a very busy intersection. There was a traffic light which helped a little. Dogs are color blind and don't know when to cross so they wait for their partner to tell them to go forward when it is safe. I listen to the traffic next to me going my direction. When it starts to move I know it is okay for us to go forward. I heard the car to my left start up its engine/ I gave Daretta the forward signal and stepped down into the crosswalk. She froze in place. Then I heard the car to my left make a rapid right hand turn right in front of us. The driver didn't beep the horn or give me any auditory signal of his intention to turn in front of us. In California it is the law that a driver must always yield the right of way to a blind person especially when they are in a cross walk. Since the driver turned without yielding he would have hit both of us had Daretta moved forward in compliance with my command and signal. I was a bit shook up by the experience and praised Daretta for her intelligent disobedience. I knelt down and hugged her giving her more praise. She had saved my life. What a dog! I realized how much I loved her and how important she had become to me.

The Chocolate Muffin

Summer had arrived again and it was time for Daretta and I to be at Lake Almanor. Dennis stayed at the apartment in Davis while he worked during the week and came up to the Lake for each weekend.

We were so glad to see him on Friday evening when he arrived. He surprised me with one of my favorite treats, chocolate muffins. They were so large that we shared them. That night we settled down to watch TV. and enjoy our dessert. The phone rang so he put his half muffin on the back of the upper section of the end table where he thought Daretta would be unable to reach it.

After talking on the phone he returned to enjoy his half muffin. Much to his surprise, it was gone. All that was left were some shreds of the muffin paper. Daretta must have eaten it, but how did she get it? Then we realized that this end table backed up to the stair railing leading upstairs. With her long snout she was able to climb a few stairs and reach the muffin through the rungs of the stair railing.

At first we were concerned because the muffin was chocolate which can be harmful to dogs. Luckily It was not solid chocolate like a candy bar. Daretta was a big seventy pound dog so it didn't bother her. We marveled at how intelligent she was to be able to figure out how to get at the muffin. We laughed and realized that we would have to be more careful in the future.

The Apple Tart

Dennis had gone back to Sacramento to work and Daretta and I were together at Lake Almanor. A few days earlier I had made an apple pie. I made a small tart for me with the extra dough. I looked forward to that tart for my dessert after lunch. I set the tart on the dining room table and left to get my tea.

When I returned to the table I could not find my tart anywhere. Suspicious I called Daretta's name. She did not move. I called her name again and still she was disobedient and did not respond or come to me. I got down on my hands and knees and crawled under the table. There I found my tart with only pieces of the crust remaining. The apple was eaten out of it completely.

I had to make her understand that she could not and should not take food from the table top or counters. I also realized that she must have smelled the apple in the crust. I was in the habit of giving her half an apple cut up each day with her dinner. But she still had to know this was the wrong thing to do. I said loudly "no food". Then I stood up and slapped the flat of my hand down hard on the top of the table. I was hoping to startle her a bit. I repeated no food. Then I explained this to her. To my knowledge, she never took food from a counter top or table top again. It was a lesson well learned by both of us.

The Swimming Lesson

During the summer of 2004 Claire Benson, Daretta's puppy raiser, and Bonnie, another puppy raising friend came to visit us at Lake Almanor. Claire had a new crossbreed puppy she was raising with her named Heather.

When they got out of the car Daretta was very happy to see Claire again. She was also glad to see another dog. As we walked from the car to the house, Daretta kept looking back at the car. Claire realized that she was looking for Jim, Claire's husband. He had helped Claire raise Daretta. Unfortunately he did not come on this trip. It was a great reunion for People and dogs and resulted in a new friendship between dogs.

When Heather was taken down to the beach she ran right into the water with such abandon and joy. Daretta after watching for awhile felt more confident and joined her. Previously, Daretta had been very reluctant to go into the lake. The dogs had fun playing in the water and on the beach. This helped Daretta's apprehension about swimming. After that time Daretta enjoyed frolicking in the lake.

Guiding me on the Beach

As time passed by, Daretta and I spent long summers at the lake. With the help of our son, Peter, and a friend we built a stairway access to the beach over the rocks that went over the small cliff leading from our house to the beach. Because the lake level lowered as we reached the later part of summer, I found it more difficult to walk across the beach and find our boat dock.

I decided to train Daretta to take me to the dock. When I reached the bottom of the beach ladder I called Daretta. When she came to me, I held onto her collar and asked her to take me to the dock. After a couple of times she got the idea of the command and what I wanted.

This enabled me to go to the dock where I would deposit my towels while we went for a swim. Afterwards we could lay on the warm sunny dock to dry off. One habit of Daretta's that I had to correct was the need to shake on me after coming out of the water. I would be all nice and warm and she

would shake cold water all over me. I hollered and she got the idea that I didn't like it. She learned to shake off away from me and then came over to enjoy the sun on the dock. Those were wonderful, happy times

Happy at Play

Daretta and I walked to the beach at Lake Almanor one day. Renters had moved in next door and were at the beach with their two young year old Labrador retriever pups. Daretta was four years old.

The three dogs met and got along. Soon they were playing happily. Beth, the owner of the pups gave me a running description of their antics They ran and splashed in the lake then ran up and down our dock. They were in constant motion for about an hour. Then we decided that it was time for the dogs to rest.

That night I did have a very tired dog. She slept well. The next morning I found Daretta laying by the back sliding door. When I asked her to go out with me to relieve she got up very slowly. I could hear her groaning silently. Her muscles were all sore from her active play the day before. After moving a bit we took a walk and that seemed to loosen up her muscles. All was well.

A visit with Precious

Our daughter, Kathleen has a 40 pound dog named Precious. She is very friendly and outgoing. She and Daretta got along just fine and enjoyed playing together. Kathleen and Precious came to the lake for a visit one day. Soon, we all headed for the beach. Daretta and Precious had a great time running and chasing each other in the water and on our boat dock. The next thing we knew the dogs were wrestling on the dock. I heard a splash. Precious had fallen into the lake off the dock. She simply shook herself, unharmed, came back up on the dock and continued to play. The two dogs proceeded to have another wrestling match. This time Precious learned into Daretta and we heard another splash and it was Daretta who fell into the water this time. She got up,, shook herself, and headed up to the house I hosed her off and dried her with a towel before letting her enter the house. Another happy play time was over.

Our First Cruise

Dennis and I enjoy cruising. We can leave our belongings in our cabin and then participate in activities on ship board or take excursions at the different ports of call. Of course Daretta accompanied us on these cruises, which numbered seven for her lifetime. We were part of the first Guide Dog group to cruise on Princess in 2004. We had about twenty dogs and sixty nine people in our group. We made friends with the Gillespies who had a Guide Dog named Rinelle and we remain friends to this day. Rinelle and Daretta were best friends until Rinelle passed away in 2014. Now that Daretta passed in 2015, I'm sure they are in Doggie heaven together playing and having fun.

Daretta's Spot

Our favorite cruise with Daretta was one sailing from Quebec to New York in 2006.. She was the only dog on this ship which was full of Canadian and British people. We did not know what

extreme dog lovers they were. When we stepped onto an elevator, someone always asked to pet Daretta. I would take off her harness so she could socialize.

In the evening we attended the theater several times. We found two seats together that had a space between them and the wall with room on the floor just wide enough for Daretta to lie down. The crew noticed that we took these seats each time we came for a show. One night Dennis looked up and saw a sign on the wall above the spot where Daretta laid. The sign read, "this spot is reserved for Daretta the dog." We were so pleased with this kind gesture to us and Daretta. The crew on Princess cruises really do take good care of their passengers.

The Nor'easter

While on the Quebec to New York cruise we experienced a Nor'easter while off the coast of Nova Scotia Canada. The ship was traveling south and the storm was blowing from east to west. Needless to say, lots of people became seasick. We went back to our cabin after the show. It felt as if we were being rocked in a huge cradle. We fell asleep but in the middle of the night we were awakened by the shipping rocking more violently back and forth. The drawers were moving in and out and the doors were rattling. I went to the bathroom and when I returned to bed I found my husband in bed with a blond, a four legged blond. Daretta had awakened and was panting nervously. Dennis took pity on her and invited her to join us in our bed. That was fine for a while until she stretched out. We started sleeping with a dog and ended up with a hog, a bed hog. She sprawled out across the bed while we clung to the edges of the mattress. Finally it was morning and the storm had abated. We were relieved with the new day when the ship sailed on much calmer seas.

Meeting Olivia

On April 15th 2011 our granddaughter Olivia was born. We were filled with joy and wondered how Daretta would react to a new baby. She was over ten years old. Previously Daretta had little to no contact with children or babies since we had become partners. Upon seeing Olivia for the first time, Daretta may have been a little curious but she was always her calm serene self. The baby crying or making noises did not seem to bother her.

Daretta first seemed to notice Olivia more when Olivia started crawling around and wanted to touch Daretta's fur. We would take Olivia's hand guiding it to touch Daretta explained to Daretta what we were doing.

When Olivia began to strand and take unsteady steps often losing her balance, Daretta would get up and move away when Olivia got close to her. I am sure Daretta was nervous about Olivia falling on top of her. Eventually, when Olivia learned to walk steadily, Daretta would lay calmly while Olivia ran right up to her.

The House Guest

The summer after Olivia's second birthday, Dennis and I took a cruise around Great Britain. Daretta was twelve years old and lacked the stamina for this cruise. She stayed with Peter, our son, and his family. Olivia was delighted to have Daretta staying overnight for a couple of weeks. Because of her calm demeanor, Peter was able to take her to work with him. After work, he and Olivia took Daretta for walks in a nearby park. He allowed Olivia to hold Daretta's leash on these walks. Daretta was good and did not pull on her leash. Olivia loved this new responsibility. Their whole family enjoyed Daretta's visit.

The Kelleher Parade

When we arrived home from our cruise we resumed life with Daretta as usual. Olivia came to us for one day each week. She and Daretta were good friends. Olivia loved to pet Daretta and the dog enjoyed the attention. We liked to take a walk each day. We walked in a way that our neighbor called it THE KELLEHER PARADE. I was in the front using my white cane. Behind followed Olivia holding Daretta's leash. In the back was Dennis, keeping an eye on everyone.

One day while we were walking in our parade line and I turned the corner I assumed Olivia would follow me. Instead Olivia started to go toward the street. Daretta moved in front of her blocking Olivia from going into the street. Dennis called out in a sharp voice, "Olivia No!" That startled Olivia a bit so we knelt down and talked to her about the dangers of going into the street without holding a grownup's hand. I was so proud that Daretta on her own took action to protect Olivia.

Getting Old

Olivia generally came to stay with us on most Mondays while her folks were at work. This meant that we ate breakfast together. Like many children, Olivia was a slow eater and sometimes dilly dallied. I encouraged her to finish her breakfast by telling her that she could feed Daretta's chewable vitamin to her. I showed Olivia how to hold the large flat vitamin in the palm of her hand so Daretta could take it. At first Olivia was a little wary of Daretta's large jaw and big teeth. Soon she found out that there was nothing to fear. Daretta picked up the vitamin gently using her lips and never once left tooth mark on Olivia's hand. Giving of the vitamin became a weekly ritual.

In January 2014 we celebrated Daretta's thirteenth birthday with party hats and noise makers. We had chocolate muffins for humans and a dog treat for Daretta. It was lots of fun and I think Daretta enjoyed it too. For the next 15 months, Daretta seemed to age more rapidly due to deteriorating health.

On Easter weekend in 2015 we stayed at our home at Sea Ranch with Peter, Tricia, and Olivia. Daretta had aged quite a bit and could not leave the house except to relieve. She was too feeble to go to the beach, to church or walking any distance. It was sad for us to leave her behind. She got lots of love and attention from everyone. Olivia took a blanket and wrapped up in it on the floor with Daretta. It made a great picture, the two of them cuddled up together. Peter liked to lay on the floor petting Daretta and giving her tummy rubs. Little did we know then that they would never see Daretta alive again after this weekend.

Passing into Eternity

Daretta had some kind of medical episode. We still don't know if it was a mild heart attack or minor stroke. She remained on her bed for all her meals and drinks. She only moved when it was time to relieve. We were worried and made an appointment to see the Vet at Guide Dogs. On the morning we were preparing to go to Guide Dogs, I was measuring out her food and I heard toe nails clicking the floor. Daretta was coming over for her food. It was like someone had switched dogs during the night. We went to bed having a very listless dog and in the morning she seemed more active.

At Guide dogs they did blood tests and could not find anything extraordinary for an old dog. We brought her home and just watched and waited. We only took her to church one more time

because the harness had become too heavy for her to wear. She had to stay home except for short walks.

Wednesday April 22nd she seemed to have gotten back some of her old energy. She was happy to see Kathleen when she came in and seemed peppy when she and I took a walk around the block in the early morning.

On Friday night she started to fail and I sensed that this was similar to the episode several weeks earlier. On Sunday morning we took a short walk but she was panting a lot. Around noon Daretta and I went out for her to relieve. On the way back she stopped to show me that a chair was in my way. She was still taking care of me even when she was not feeling well and out of harness. I gave her a drink and left the room.

Later in the afternoon Dennis and I had a BBQ and wondered why she did not come outside with us .At her dinner time I prepared her food as usual and called her name. She did not come. I found her stretched out on the carpet not moving. Dennis tried to give her a kibble but there was no response. She didn't even open her mouth. We called Kathleen and she came over. She and Dennis carried Daretta into the car. After examining her the vet agreed that she must have had a stroke of some kind. A call was made to the Guide Dog vet and he agreed that Daretta should be put down. I hugged her while the shot was given and she was gone. What a good dog. I was so sad but relieved that her suffering was over and her death was sudden. I am so grateful for the over twelve years we had together.

We knew she had cancer and was failing for about a year and a half. The last six weeks were difficult for her and us. It is so difficult to watch a loved one decline. She never whimpered or acted grumpy. We told Olivia that she was in Heaven playing Frisbee with Jesus.

She has left a large hole in our hearts and daily routine. I still avoid walking in places in the house where she used to lay. We are grateful to have had such a wonderful dog in our lives.

EPILOGUE OF DARETTA'S TRAVELS

Daretta was my Guide Dog and friend guiding me from December 14, 2002 to about February 15, 2015. During those years she went on seven cruises, 2 to Alaska, 2, to Mexico, 1 through the Panama Canal, 1 to the Caribbean and 1 from Quebec to New York. She went on three interstate train trips, 1 to Seattle, 1 to Salt Lake City, 1 from Toronto to Quebec and many local train rides between Sacramento and the San Francisco Bay Area.. She flew across county many times to places like New York, Florida, Nashville, Toronto, North Carolina, Colorado, Seattle, Los Angeles and Las Vegas She spent hours in our ski boat and in our canoe at Lake Almanor. We estimate that she rode about 200,000 miles in the car with us going to places like Sea Ranch, Lake Almanor, Redding and other California destinations. She was a wonderful traveler.

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