

OLD FAITHFUL

You may note the strong influence my dog, Jazz, has played in my recovery. She is over 100 now in “people years. She will be sixteen this summer, which is unheard of. The vet says the average lifespan of a dog her size is ten years. It started early with her visit to the hospital when I was so very sick. I noted then her gentle soul that sensed my tenuous condition. When overwhelmed on my first visit home, it was Jazz who gave me comfort. She offered stability in what was familiar in her attentive and loving manner. Jazz was the anchor who communicated without words, a realness in just being. At that time words confused me. She acknowledged my well being that words could not convey.



After my experiences in Carbondale and St. Louis, again, it was Jazz who welcomed me home. Despite my feelings of invisibility, she was always glad to see me, even when I was not so loveable. Throughout the years of change she has remained my best friend and a wonderful companion.

Jazz quickly adapted to my new lifestyle. As I could not call her vocally, she adapted to my non-verbal commands. Always, she intuitively came to my right side, knowing my left side was paralyzed.

After my accident, therapists came to our home to work with me. Jazz kept a close watch on my interaction with the therapists. She positioned herself between them and me. She intently watched everyone who interacted with me including my wife, Lynda. When accidentally Lynda hit my chair, Jazz growled and snapped. Also when Lynda had to leave, she made sure Jazz was with me should anyone try to harm me. I think Lynda was right. Jazz can look very mean. In contrast, Jazz is deathly afraid of thunder. It seems strange that such a fierce looking animal literally shakes with fright during a thunderstorm.

Jazz likes to be with me. She likes to go in our van. She jumps on the back seat by my wheelchair. When you tell her she cannot go, she lies down and says no more. She particularly likes to go through the drive through at fast food places. If you have any doubts that she understands, just mention McDonald's. Also, if you doubt that she can count, put three treats in your pocket and only give her two.

Jazz and I have had a special bond from the beginning. Before the accident as I mentioned, a younger Jazz and I went for Sunday morning walks. I taught her to stay by giving her the stay command, then walked out of sight and gave the command to come. She would run to me as if she was greeting a long lost friend. Before my accident I drove a white pick up. When she spotted a white truck that was, or could have been mine, she would run toward the road to start her ritual. On my arrival home, she met the car or truck and led the way up the driveway, stopped at each tree, looked up and barked scaring off any birds that might be in waiting. I guess she was effective, because I have never been bird attacked getting out of the vehicle. All of these behaviors continue today.

Jazz liked to go fishing and still does. She is a happy dog when you get her leash or a fishing pole. She particularly likes to go fishing. She comes running when there is a catch. When a fish

is thrown back, she goes after it. She also likes to jump down into our pool area, but cannot get out until someone opens the door to the pool area and lets her out.

Jazzy cannot express herself verbally but she can get her desires across. She is an excellent listener. She seems to know that she has two large ears and one mouth for a reason. If she wants to go out or come inside, she knocks on the door with her paw. If she wants your attention she will nudge you with her nose. She likes to have her chest rubbed. When petting her and she wants her chest rubbed, she will redirect your hand with her paw. Jazz also sits quietly nearby when others are eating, hoping for a share.

Lynda, my wife, and our kids got Jazz from the local humane society. They went in to look at a puppy, and noticed a pup sitting above them watching their every move. She was black with brown markings, partly German Shepherd although she spoke no German.

Jazz, like me, suffered a traumatic brain injury. Evidently, she got into the neighbor's garbage and was hit on her head with a shovel. I did not get into the neighbor's garbage. Also, unlike me, she recovered completely.

My psychologist knows Jazz is very smart so she asked me, "Why don't you have her get the paper for you?" My reasoning is selfish. I do not want to wait for her to read it. She is truly amazing. She has had no formal training, but she has gotten me out of trouble more than once. When I fell in the bathroom and could not get up by myself, she sensed that I was in trouble and, unprompted, went upstairs and growled uncharacteristically at my daughter until she followed Jazz who led her to my aid. If you tell her something, by her actions she seems to understand what you are saying. She would be "shocked" to find out that she is a dog. Upon looking at the size of her teeth, I am not about to tell her.

Jazz looks forward to Mondays because she knows she is going with me to see my psychologist. Her friend, Merlot, is there. They are like two kids when together. Merlot is a French name. I should have figured as much from the little hat he wears half cocked on his head, his accent and the way he looks at Jazz. He is a rescued Weimaraner who looks like Scooby-Doo. They know they get treats while I am with the therapist. Merlot likes to sit with Pat. When Pat wants him to move, being a psychologist, she says to him, "Is Jazzy getting a treat?" He continues sitting there a minute then gets a wide-eyed look like I don't know, maybe she is, then jumps down and goes out to check. As soon as we are finished meeting they bark in unison, knowing it's treat time. Merlot has taken a cue from Jazz. He knows that after our meeting we take Jazz to get a hamburger. Now he knows about hamburgers and he is ready for one, too.

I am grateful for all the experiences with my Old Faithful Friend, Jazz my constant companion.

We recently got Jazz groomed. I hope she does not find out we paid for it out of her "college fund."

Dale Osborn