

THE VANCOUVER SUN



Dogs helped save a life - a reader shares her story

By KIM PEMBERTON

People love their puppies. Last week, I invited readers to send me their puppy pictures and let me know what your dog means to you. Thank you to all who contributed for this regular feature that I will begin next Friday. One e-mail stood out for me in particular from journalist and dog lover Corey Van't Haaff, which shows just how much a dog can make a difference during the hard times. With her permission, I'm reprinting that below along with photos of Corey's four special dogs - a preview of some great pictures to come from readers and their pooches.



By Corey Van't Haaff

No one brags like the mommy of four gorgeous girls—here are mine. I don't have a puppy photo of Esmerelda (German Wirehaired Pointer), the tallest one in the group photo. Here also are Olga (Golden Retriever/German Shepherd cross), Tallula (Toy Poodle cross) and Clara (Chihuahua cross) as puppies.

You asked what they mean to me. A quicker question would be what don't they mean to me.

In 1999, my marriage ended and my two dogs, one cat and I lost our house three days before Christmas. Within six months, the cat and the oldest dog died. I wanted to, too.

But Esmerelda kept me going. She was steadfast in her reliance on and trust of me, and I could not let her down. On the days I was too depressed to work, she lay beside me. But on the good days, which become more and more frequent, she looked at me with such love and trust, I



knew that I had to work hard to give her the type of life she deserved.

With three dogs in my care, I worked even harder. My writing business grew and I was able to purchase a house. My must-have list was all dog-related: a large fenced-in yard, floors not carpet, and all the living on the main floor as aging dogs cannot do stairs well. I moved my writing business into my house so I would not have to be away from my girls all day.

A few years later, I felt I had room for another puppy. Olga was at the Coquitlam shelter (gods amongst dog people) and when I first picked her up, I didn't put her down until the shelter agreed to let me adopt her. She came home with me a few days later and has been a loyal, protective yet lovable baby girl. She is smarter than any dog should be. I soon found out that Olga had serious hip dysplasia and really bad knees that needed fixing. I worked even harder and took on new clients. I paid for two operations for Olga's knees. She walks now without yipping. In fact, she runs and jumps.

These dogs give me all the love one woman could possibly hope for; companionship, attention and laughs. They entertain me constantly. They make me so very happy and give me four incredibly strong reasons to be the best person I can be, so I can make their lives happy, safe and fun. They are under my desk while I interview people. They are beside me when I watch movies. I bought an SUV so we could take drives together, and each one has a seatbelt and the little ones have booster seats. They see the vet regularly and part of their allowance (which is saved for unexpected and frivolous dog purchases) now goes to sponsor two dogs at SAINTS rescue. These dogs, like all dogs, are the best dogs to ever walk the face of this earth.

I know I could not live without dogs. I am blessed to be able to live with these four dogs.

