



*A message  
from Jim*

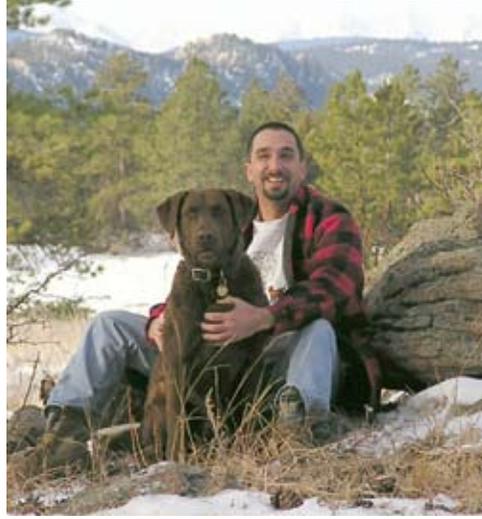
*This issue of my newsletter does not include any economic, financial, retirement or IRA information. Instead, it is a story about my best friend. There comes a time in a person's life when you need to put aside the turmoil and chaos of living, and just sit back and reflect. For me, this was that time. I hope you enjoy my personal story. I will return with my regular newsletter format next month.*

## MY BEST FRIEND

**I** can remember the day quite vividly, even though it took place well over 12 years ago.

It was December 21st, 1996 and I was on my way to Canamonda Kennels, a Chesapeake Bay Retriever breeder in the tiny town of Harrisville, R.I. where my new 12-week-old puppy was waiting. As I drove down the scenic tree-lined road my thoughts went back to the first time I visited the breeder, six weeks before, when I undertook the near impossible task of choosing one special dog from a litter of nearly a dozen yelping, playing bundles of puppy vigor.

Surprisingly, the task took far less time than I first imagined. There was one dog that caught my attention even though there was nothing extraordinary or remarkable about him. He wasn't the biggest, strongest or most outgoing. In fact, he carried none of the delightfully charming attributes that melt a person's heart as they choose a puppy. He was, quite frankly, just sitting there.



Staring right at me.

**I** took one look at him and just knew. I turned to the breeder and said that's him; that's my dog. Customarily, hesitancy is part of my modus operandi, but today, hasty and

impetuous decision-making ruled the moment. Picking my next life-long companion was literally that simple.

I parked my truck in the driveway and made my way to the breeder's home. Her reputation was based on her fine work breeding Siberian Huskies and Welsh Corgis. This would be her first Chesapeake litter. Nearly eight years after reading an article in a now defunct outdoor magazine that christened the Chesapeake Bay Retriever as the ugliest, most stubborn and obstinate of the working breeds I – a soon to be rookie Chessie owner, motivated by nothing more than an unrelenting desire to prove a magazine article wrong – was buying a puppy from a rookie Chessie breeder.

It was a moment of firsts for the two of us.



As I entered the breeder’s home I couldn’t help but notice – in fact only a blind man could have avoided – the hideous small dog sitting by her side. Just about as tall as half the distance from her ankle to her knee, it appeared to be a mutated cross between Joseph Merrick, (better known as the Elephant Man), and some type of dreadful red dog. Looking down at this horrifying fabrication of canine gene-splicing it became abundantly clear this animal was little more than a living, breathing, walking nose with feet. I could only verbalize the words that immediately popped into my head.

“Eeeewww, where’s my dog?”

*H*er answer cut through me like a knife. “Right there,” she said, pointing to the living, breathing, walking nose with feet that was now standing by her side and wagging what appeared to be a tail made for a tank. “That, that’s the dog I picked?” I exclaimed. “Yes, that’s him,” was her tort three-word reply. The only thought that entered my mind was damn, the magazine article was right! Yet something strange happened to me as the reality of the situation set in. Yes, the living, breathing, walking nose with feet was still a canine abomination, but he was now **my** living, breathing, walking nose with feet canine abomination, and suddenly he wasn’t that unsightly after all. In my eyes, he became the most beautiful dog I had ever seen.

I felt like a kid again and Christmas 1996 had come four days early. I took the canine abomination to every friend and family member who would answer the door. To my surprise everyone graciously avoided mentioning my new puppy’s uncanny resemblance to Joseph Merrick until I made the ill-fated mistake of ending my flaunting tour at the police department where I served. One expressive officer summed



up what undeniably must have been on everyone’s mind that night.

“That’s one hell of an ugly dog you got there Saulnier,” were the words that followed me out the department’s back door.

*U*ndeterred, I took my new companion home where I proudly showed him his new “den.” I suspect if he had the ability to talk he would have pointed out what I called a “den” looked suspiciously like a cage on my kitchen floor. And who could have blamed him, because it was, quite

literally, a cage on my kitchen floor! Days before his arrival I had painstakingly designed his cage to be everything a young puppy would covet. It was large, although not too large as to take away the sense of security and comfort his wild canine brethren sensed in their dens. It had three layers of blankets, countless puppy toys and the most extraordinary item of all – an atrociously expensive water bowl whose manufacturer guaranteed was tip-proof.

It also had that one element of a cage that, well, makes a cage a cage: a locking door.

The moment that locking door closed it began. The living, breathing, walking nose with feet was in effect a living, breathing, walking **mouth** with feet, and it was emanating a piercing, blood curdling and unbearable yelp that literally made the bawl of a baby seem peaceful. It was sharp. It was piercing. It was agonizing. It was also never-ending.

*I* turned the light off and retreated to the living room where a couch and TV awaited. I naively thought his yelping would end once he was in total darkness, but I soon learned the living, breathing, walking nose with feet was not an animal easily soothed by the dark. It merely angered him more. His yelping intensified and the situation quickly escalated into a battle of wits between the two of us. He yelped; I turned the TV

on. He yelped louder, I turned the volume up more. This game of point/counter point continued, but I was doomed from the beginning. My TV was electronically limited in its ability to produce volume. The living, breathing, walking nose with feet infuriated beyond belief was not encumbered with such limitations.

Then I heard it. The sound was unmistakable, even over the sound of my TV and his relentless yelping. The atrociously expensive water bowl that was guaranteed by its manufacturer to be tip-proof had been tipped. He won; victory was his, and he knew it. I turned the TV off. The drop in volume was for him my white flag of surrender. His yelping became an excited bark as I entered the kitchen where he was proudly standing on top of the overturned tip-proof water bowl relentlessly wagging his tank-like tail. I opened the cage and he followed me back to the living room. I laid on the couch and picked him up. He dropped his enormous nose on my chest and looked me squarely in the eyes as if to say, "Now, isn't this much better?" I held him securely in my arms with his massive nose buried in my face. Soon the two of us fell soundly asleep until early the next morning.

We were inseparable from then on.

*O*ver the next two years our bond intensified into a relationship that transcends

words and description. We learned about each other, our personalities and our limits. He became my best friend and I his, and he came with me nearly everywhere a dog was allowed. He not only grew into his massive nose, he grew into a tremendous and powerful waterdog, fearlessly plunging into the coldest New England lakes boldly breaking ice as he tirelessly retrieved felled ducks and geese. He became a



remarkable 100-pound figure of Chesapeake stock: barrel chest, broad square head, curly coat, deep red color and profound yellow eyes. Without doubt, he, not I, proved that magazine article irrefutably wrong.

*W*hen he was three we embarked on a new adventure – to Colorado, to begin our lives anew. He loved the outdoors just as much as I did, and our new home's five acres of land and abutment to national forest provided us with countless acres to enjoy and discover. He was all I had in Colorado and we spent all

our time together. Eventually I met new people and established meaningful friendships, but many forlorn nights it was him, not them, whom I would confide my doubts and uncertainties over moving away from family and starting a new career. As usual it was that incredibly huge nose of his that somehow made the moment. He would bury it in my face, look at me with understanding eyes – as if the words I spoke made total sense to him – and I would begin feeling somehow everything would work out just right.

And it did. By our third year in Colorado my business was successful, I had friends I considered family, and our insatiable love of the outdoors was satisfied nearly every day as we spent time together exploring, hiking, swimming, and retrieving. Without benefit of any instruction from me, or even a rudimentary understanding of property rights, he taught himself the boundaries of our five acres. He marked the trees, roamed its perimeter and boldly chased away every animal that made the mistake of venturing into his domain. In time all our forest critter neighbors learned his rules of engagement and gave him the wide latitude and respect he somehow felt he deserved.

All except one.

*W*e had a custom on summer nights. I would enjoy a cup of coffee (or

a good cold beer) and he would retrieve tennis balls I hit off the back deck. It was the highlight of his day, and most nights his insatiable desire to retrieve was never satisfied in the time it took me to finish my beverage. On this particular night his routine was no different, he wanted to keep retrieving. We entered the house from the back deck and he ran to the front door, tennis ball still in his mouth, where he dropped it and waited for me to open the door and throw the ball into the front meadow. As always, I obliged and watched as he exited the house and ran to retrieve the ball.

*I* had barely walked away when I heard his unmistakably loud and livid “I’m angry” bark. I turned in time to watch 100 pounds of powerfully built Chessie charge across the meadow at full speed towards the side of our garage where a very unlucky 130-pound or so black bear found himself trapped between a hard-as-a-rock garage foundation and dumb-as-a-rock Chesapeake Bay Retriever.

In no time I was on the front deck yelling his name at the top of my lungs, but it was all for naught. He was intent on his one mission: rid his property of this trespasser. Time literally stood still, but the impact of their collision was unmistakable as a combined 230 pounds of muscle, bone, brawn and fur collided in a deafening thud.

The bear lost. It was on its back, all four legs pointing in the air. Once again his massive and ubiquitous nose was in the thick of things as he placed it squarely in the bear’s face. Unbelievably, there was no biting, fighting or clawing. They simply looked at each other, snout to snout, the bear on its back and the living, breathing, walking nose with feet standing above it. Fortunately, the encounter ended as quickly as it unfolded. My yelling, which



had never stopped, finally got his attention and he bounded over to me with a proud “Gee Dad, did you see what I just did?” look on his face. He jumped on the deck, sat by my side, and together we watched the bear stand, gather its composure, shake off a cloud of dirt, and meander away into the forest.

We never saw that bear again.

*T*here were countless other adventures, journeys and escapades as we made Colorado our home. But on May 11th,

2009, our time together came to its inevitable end as he left my life the same way he came into it – hugged securely in my arms, his huge nose buried firmly in my face. Tears uncontrollably poured from my eyes as a veterinarian gently administered a deadly cocktail of muscle relaxants. Silently, with little more than the incommunicable understanding and awareness we shared between us, I felt him say goodbye to me as his once powerful barrel chest fell motionless, and the living, breathing, walking nose with feet I had come to love so very much, stopped breathing forever.

A dog did not die that day, a part of me did. For nearly 13 years he gave me what has thus far proved to be just an illusion in my life: unconditional lasting love and devotion. He was the best friend I ever had. A friend whose loss has left a void in my life these words cannot adequately convey.

A friend I miss terribly. A friend I loved so very much.

A friend I called Mosby.

