

Dodger Memoir

“This is Dodger,” we tell all the new dog walkers at the adoption center on Saturdays. “She doesn’t have that name because she likes baseball, so hold on tight to her. She’s really fast.”

“Dog!” yells my youngest daughter, Hilary, pointing to the freeway median. “Dog!”

Her older sister, Gwen, who is driving, has already seen the dog and is pulling off the road to the shoulder on the median side, even as she speaks.

My youngest son, Patrick and I are still looking around for a dog, when both of the girls are out of the car and heading toward the stout black animal who is running down the edge of the grassy verge.

The four of us are heading down I 15 on the way to Pocatello and lunch at Red Lobster, when we make this sudden stop someplace between Idaho Falls and Blackfoot. Now we have an extra passenger, a short stout heavily pregnant mixed breed dog. Who had apparently been abandoned in the middle of I 15.

This was not the first animal we have acquired from the side of a road. She is, however, the first from I 15. When we get back home from lunch, we call the available foster homes with a free space and deliver the dog to her new and temporary home.

Within a couple of weeks Trixie, as her foster mom calls her produces four or five of the homeliest puppies we have ever seen. They are, for the most part, mottled gray or gray with some black or white markings in addition, kind of like greyhounds. One of them is black with a white chest. That one becomes Dodger.

At the end of three months Trixie and her puppies have been vaccinated, spayed/neutered and adopted. Except for the black one. Except for Dodger. Puppies begin to really grow at this age, and so does she. She grows and grows and grows and grows. And she looks more and more like a greyhound, except for her color. And she’s fast. She outgrows her foster home, which specializes in

puppies and small dogs, and begins a trek through most of the rest of the homes in our system. She has a great disposition, but she really hates to be confined. Her various foster homes get together on Saturdays at the adoption center to compare places she has escaped from and distances she has gone. Did I say that she was fast? Yeah, she was really fast. And her stamina becomes legendary.

At some point, one of her placements, who clearly has a literary bent, names her the Artful Dodger. That name pretty much says it all. It is shortened to Dodger over time, and that name sticks.

Our adoption events are held on Saturdays in an empty store in the old mall. The dogs are walked in the mostly empty parking lot by anyone who volunteers or in many cases is volunteered by a parent. “Hold on tight.” we tell them when they get Dodger. Sometimes they even do, but mostly not so much. She looks so friendly.

She never actually disappears never to return, but she gives everyone a run for their money. She will keep just out of reach of whomever has charge of her. Dodging here and there, just out of reach, like a fast and complicated game. Eventually someone else, someone who isn’t responsible for her will be able to get close enough to her to snag her collar by pretending not to care. Or she will run up to a total stranger, she is quite friendly, and someone will yell, “hey grab her will ya.” and they do, and that is that for the moment. It’s a pretty big parking lot so there’s lots of room to run.

Tall, fast ugly dogs don’t get adopted very quickly so she is with us for quite awhile. At one point into the second year, one of the less benevolent board members suggests that it might be best to have her put down,”So there is more room for more adoptable dogs.”

Others of us feel that concept is at odds with our overall mission of animal rescue. So, Dodger comes to live with my oldest daughter at my house. We quit bringing her into the adoption center on Saturdays

One of the volunteers asks me, “Where’s Dodger?”

“At my place. And she’s going to stay there.”

“Okay. Let me know if you need anything.”

We live on one of the busier arterial streets of Idaho Falls. The backyard is totally fenced. In spite of that Dodger still manages to escape at least a couple of times a month. This tends to happen when my daughter had taken her dogs for a drive and is either bringing them in or taking them out. Dodger loves to ride. She has even figured out how to open the car windows, both sides, and stick both her head and tail out of the rear windows at the same time. Despite her size, she is able to escape this way too.

Once she goes out of the door of the car at a busy intersection by jumping over me and onto the road. I forget how the door is open, but it is. Fortunately, I am able to grab her collar and pull her onto my lap, I am driving, before she gets run over. Everyone else in the car laughs and this adds to Dodger's reputation.

When she escapes in the neighborhood, Gwen walks up and down the streets cursing and yelling "Dodger, you bitch, come here." Sometimes Gwen is wearing her Humane Society T-shirt, which I think looks unfortunate. Eventually we find that if we leave the back door of her car open in the driveway that Dodger will, sometimes, climb in and we can close the door and trap her. Sometimes this is not until way after dark. Dodger is having a great time. The rest of us not so much.

Gwen moves a couple of times for work and finally goes to Boise. Dodger moves with her. By now Gwen had acquired another tall thin black dog with fluffy hair named Bonnie. Bonnie goes too. Eventually I move to Boise as well and live with Gwen for a couple of years. By this time Dodger is starting to slow down. She no longer runs the neighborhood with anyone in hot pursuit. We no longer have to trap her in parked cars. Walks with the dogs are relatively quiet. We're sure that the incident of the neighbor's chickens is more accident than intention, and no one dies after all.

My daughter gets married and is expecting. They are moving into their first house, when we all noticed that Dodger is not doing well. Gwen takes her to the vet who advises surgery. The plan is that if the operation isn't going well that the vet will put Dodger down on the table.

I am teaching summer school and at noon I get the call. The vet has discovered a large hemangioma. Nothing can be done and he has put Dodger down. She's gone.

And that would be all, except for what happens on my way home from work that day. I am stopped at a stop sign on Amity and Five Mile when Dodger sails in through the driver's side window, in front of me, and sits on the passenger's seat. She is unmistakable. Her enthusiasm and joy are so palpable that her presence fills the car. She is sitting there in the seat and telling me about how happy she is, and what an amazing place she is in. Her presence is so clear that I turn my head to speak to her. Just like that she is gone. Once again Dodger has escaped. I put my now empty car in first gear and drive home.