

A Once in a Lifetime Dog.

Australian Terrier Breed Column
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I lost my once in a lifetime dog in January. He was 8 ½ years old – always by my side. He went to work with me, waited patiently while I saw my patients and hopped in the car at the end of the day, glad to be going wherever I was going.

Reggie was a champion – literally a bronze grand champion, but also a true champion in his very essence. He finished with 3 Best Puppy in Show awards and earned 6 group 1st wins during his specials career – always with me as his teammate and handler. Eagerly willing to go along with whatever silly request I made of him, sometimes it was heeling by my side and sit when I stopped while later same day striding out at the end of his leash and nailing a free stack in front of a judge. No problem, I'll do it because you've asked me too (that day he earned Highest Scoring Dog in Obedience with a 198.5 score and finished his bronze grand championship going BOB from the Veterans class.)

Reggie was the first Australian Terrier ever to earn an EE (Endurance Earthdog title) after which he would earn 5 more "EE" titles because both he and I loved the activity so much. Always a true champion and gentleman, Reggie was never aggressive to brace mates and owners were thrilled when their inexperienced dog was paired with Reggie, knowing he would suffer the shenanigans of an inexperienced hunter with grace and wisdom.

Competing in agility and nose work, rally and barn hunt, he could be sound asleep in my lap and I would only whisper "want to do some work" and off we would go for some fun with utility articles, scent work, or a few drop on recalls. The few times he didn't understand the job; I would step back and consider a better way to communicate. In teaching utility articles, I put out a scented article and an unscented article. I sent him out, he bounded away, grabbed the nearest article, brought it back to me turned and grabbed the other article and brought that one back too. Clearly to him this was twice as fun as the retrieve! So I removed the unscented article and hid the scented one. This was a game he knew well! After three times of finding the hidden scented article I added the unscented to the scented article. Aha! He knew exactly what I wanted, the one that smelled like me.

Our favorite time was always early evening, getting home from a stressful day at work, I'd grab a glass of wine and off we'd go to the woods in our backyard. Me sitting on a log and him rooting under a tree, periodically he would glance up at me with this look of wonder Isn't this the best thing, ever?

And it was the best thing ever.

I know I'll have other dogs, and I'm sure they will be good dogs and fun dogs, show dogs and

companions. Perhaps even a puppy from him that will occasionally stop me in my tracks with the way he looks at me, channeling his dad.

But a once in a lifetime dog only comes once in a lifetime, and when they leave , you realize they've made you a better person, more joyous, more forgiving, with a deeper sense of love for all your relationships, because they were a perfect example of unconditional love.

This column was written by guest columnist, Dr. Heather Rife. If you have a subject you would like to see addressed or would like to be a guest columnist, please contact me.

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