

October 9, 2021

Hi Ann!

Ed Kettenbrink here. It has been a long time since you and I have chatted. I know Gail contacted you to let you know that we lost Wendy. She died October 2, 2021 at 10:20 p.m. Today, October 9, 2021 is the 11<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our bringing her home to begin her new life as part of the Kettenbrink family (a.k.a. "pack"). I would like to tell you some about her life after she left your care at the Dalmatian Rescue of North Texas. I think you will be pleased.

In the fall of 2009 our beloved Daisy Mae, a small 12 years-old female Dalmatian died from liver cancer, and I wanted another spotted little girl. You know it takes a while to make that transition and to find another dog that is "just right." In early August of 2010, Gail was having a slow day at work and "surfed the web" looking at Dalmatian rescue websites. That is when she found that lovely photo of Wendy that you had posted on the Dalmatian Rescue of North Texas website. She called me where I was working and told me to look at the photo on your website. Although I am not generally an impulsive person, my response was "I want her!" At the time I was planning on leaving for a weeklong business trip to Colombia, South America the following Monday. Gail said "Maybe we can go see her when you get back from Colombia." I said "No, I want to meet her before the trip." Something in your posted photo of "Wendy" really spoke to me, and that was the start of my love affair with Wendy beginning before we ever met. I was never disappointed – she was just as wonderful as that picture portrayed.



Here is the picture that began it all! This is the 2010 Dalmatian Rescue of North Texas that announced that Wendy was available for adoption.

We drove up to Dallas the next day, a Saturday, to meet Wendy. We arrived with our elderly male Dalmatian, Elvis, because, after all, he too needed to approve of her. Everything went fine and we all liked her, but Wendy wasn't sure what that meeting was all about. She was concerned that you, her then major friend, had stepped out of the room. Fortunately, you approved us to become her human adopted parents. Before she could come home with us, Wendy had some medical issues to resolve. She had heartworm, was slightly anemic, needed to be spayed, and had a torn ear to be repaired. The spaying needed to be put off until her milk dried up, as she was turned in with eleven (this was on the adoption documents) mixed breed puppies. We understood that she had a hard time with the heart worm treatment and it was not until October that she was released from veterinary care and we could bring her home – what a wonderful day! We knew that she had had adversities in her life so in the car trip from Dallas to Houston, one of us drove and the other one rode in the back seat holding and petting Wendy, changing off at the half way point. No more cages for Wendy girl! On our arrival in Houston, we were greeted by elderly Elvis. As a welcoming, he played with Wendy for several hours in our back yard, as he, too, was excited about the new pack member! In fact, we believe that was the last time that Elvis played, as he was just getting too old and stiff. Of course, things were strange for her in a new house and it took her several days to become familiar with the layout. For sleeping arrangement, we had a built-in dog box, the size of a large crate, with a wrought iron gate in the wall of our bedroom where some of our previous dogs had slept. That first night Wendy went right into it, with no problems at all. However, by the second or perhaps third night she made it clear that she wanted nothing else to do with cages or crates, and she promised to be good and she slept in our bed until the last several years when she could no longer jump up by herself. Initially, you indicated that you didn't think that she was fully housebroken, but she must have immediately housebroken herself, as accidents in the house were never a problem. That first day or the next, Wendy discovered we had beds and couches in our house, and it was clear she knew exactly their purpose. She respectfully stayed off them until Gail told her it was OK to get on them. Clearly, she had prior experience with such items and we dearly wished we knew more about her life before she arrived at the Dalmatian Rescue of North Texas. But, I guess we'll never know.

Wendy was a very intelligent girl and learned fast. She was very well mannered and followed our directions and never caused much trouble. I can count the number of times on one hand that she required a reprimand. Without a doubt, Wendy was the best dog we ever had.

Things just rocked along, with the dogs having their people, human couches and beds, dog beds, a fenced yard and a dog door and everything else that they wanted. A few years later, Elvis died, mainly of old age at 13-1/2 years old. We wanted to get Wendy another canine companion, so Gail contacted Sarah Ledgerwood (of Robinwood Kennels north of Dallas). She is the breeder from whom we had obtained three of the previous dals, including Elvis. She and her husband, John, had retired and moved 34 Dalmatians back to their home state of Indiana and, yes, they still were raising Dalmatians and had several available. So, off to Indiana from Houston we went, including Wendy, as she would have a role in the selection just as Elvis had with her. We did want another male. Gail didn't want a puppy and I didn't want a liver Dalmatian. So, we compromised and selected a liver puppy! I named him "Indy" for his state of

origin and this is just an abbreviation for his full name “Indiana Bones.” Indy and Wendy became fast friends and playmates. The dogs always seemed to be happy, with a stress-free life.



Here is Wendy (on the right) at about 11 years with her younger, liver spotted boyfriend, Indy, both engaged in strenuous canine labor.

When we got ready to retire, we desired to escape the big city and decided to move to a small town in rural eastern Iowa, close to where Gail and I both attended graduate school, and Gail’s home state. We found a Victorian house just perfect for us and bought it several years before we were ready to move, which we leased out for a while. We made multiple trips with a rental truck moving possessions and on one trip the dogs came with us before the final move. What great fun it was for them to be in the truck with us and “see the sights” when we stopped for an exercise and potty break. Staying in a motel was a great adventure (on this 1200 miles trip each way). They would jump from bed to bed and it was likely that you didn’t wake up with same dog that you went to bed with! It was these moving trips that the dogs discovered that wonderful restaurant called McDonald’s that had mouthwatering (literally!) Chicken McNuggets. They never had anything like that before because at home they only got healthy dog food!

When we finally moved to Iowa, the dog’s life was much the same as in Houston, although they had to get used to cold winter weather and snow, something they hadn’t encountered in



Houston. They adjusted just fine, and they didn't think snow was nearly as awful as rain. We customized the new house for dogs with a dog door, a new 6 feet high Aluminum fence (a 10K expense), complete with a smaller dog yard.

Sometime in early 2019, I began to notice that Wendy was getting stiffer and was having some difficulty jumping up into the bed and we finally compromised on a nice dog bed on the floor near our bed, making her life a little easier. I decided Wendy probably needed more exercise. I had never been much of a dog walker and had no idea of how memorable and pleasurable it would be for both of us. So, Wendy and I started out on daily walks. I started out slow and easy and monitored time and distance with my Fitbit and gradually increased the time and distance. We walked all over our small town and I tried to daily vary our route. By the end, we were walking up to ½ mile daily. At the time I didn't realize that Wendy was 13 years old when we were doing that and I didn't figure that out until after she died.



Here is Wendy at 13 years of age getting ready to take her fat human companion animal for a walk

Wendy never showed fatigue or stress. I could see her legs getting stronger with the muscle size increasing. She seemed to love this activity and if I delayed too long with my morning coffee, she would stand at the front door to let me know it was time for her walk! On our last

walk in May 2020, Wendy's rear left hip went out going up the front steps and she obviously had some pain. I thought she probably had a traumatic injury that would eventually heal. But it didn't. Our local vet diagnosed her problem as a progressive degeneration of her central nerves in the hind quarter, which I gather is fairly common. They could do nothing for her other than to prescribe Gabapentin for the pain, which did an excellent job and which she took the remainder of her life. We were also directed to a specialized vet who practiced canine chiropractic medicine and acupuncture, which, I believe, gave her some benefit but never restored her hip functionality. So, Wendy could not get up by herself and she became a semi-invalid, and I had to help her. We went out for short 3-leg walks and to do her business supporting her with a halter and sling 4 to 6 times a day. Being a human and everything Wendy knew that I wasn't too smart but she was able to teach me a few basic commands that she could give me to allow her to satisfy her basic needs and desires. Having been married for over 50 years, I was abundantly familiar with constant female directions, so I seamlessly fell into the role of Wendy's fulltime caregiver. By this time, Gail had developed some medical problems (now resolved) which included several joint replacements, so she couldn't be as active a helper as she would have liked. The intensity of my relationship with Wendy continued to increase from this point onward until the end of her life.



Here is Wendy as an "old woman," over 14 years old. Her spots have become lighter, but she is still a pretty girl and as sweet as she was as a young dog.

Wendy eventually, more or less, lost control of her right rear leg and began to lose muscle mass all over. For a year and a half, I continued to take Wendy out for little walks and bathroom breaks, regardless of the weather, sometimes even having to first shovel snow. Do the math – that is something between 1600 and 2000 bathroom breaks and mini-walks that we made. Why did I do that? Because I owed it to Wendy because I had promised her a "forever" home. She accepted her invalid status with grace, never seeming anxious or struggling, knowing that I would take care of her needs and wants. The Gabapentin controlled her pain. She never lost her cognitive abilities and she always was alert with quick bright eyes. She always followed both Gail and me around a room with her eyes and interacted with us as much as she was able to,

and she wanted to be with us! I know many people would have put her down because the amount of attention she needed was just “inconvenient,” but I could not do this because of her condition, I stated above. I have no regrets for this decision.

We have had a total of eight “furbabies,” all now gone except for Indy (six of them were Dalmatians). I loved them all, but none as much as Wendy. I don’t know exactly how that happened, but it *did*. We just “clicked” together. You see, she and I had a very special relationship and were deeply bonded together. I changed her life when I got her out of the Rescue and she knew it! She also changed my life by her affection and devotion to me. It seems that intense interaction occurred between us every day. It became even stronger and more obvious after she became a semi-invalid and finally an invalid, and I became her fulltime caregiver. Wendy generally didn’t want me to get too far away from her when I was around. She kept her eyes on me whenever she was awake. In fact, in the evenings she didn’t want me to go to my second-floor office, but to stay downstairs with her. So, I did and I don’t regret it, as it meant we had more time together. I never experienced anything like this before and I am sure I will never again have such an intense bonding experience with another living creature. It was a once-in-a-lifetime event.

We have had dogs that were ready to leave this world and at least one that wanted to die. I don’t think Wendy wanted to die. She didn’t want to leave me. She ate and drank until the very end, until her body could go no further. She even had some bites of her favorite foods (apple, cheese, and turkey meat) on the morning of her last day. I believe she willed herself to go on. She died peacefully of natural causes, in her own bed in her own house being touched by her loving adopted parents at age 14-1/2 years old. That is the way I prayed she would leave us. She truly received the “forever” home she deserved and which I promised to her. What more could a Dalmatian possibly desire?

Now we never really knew Wendy’s age for sure. However, after her death I carefully went through her adoption package. I found that the original treating vet had recorded her birthday as May 21, 2007. That would make her almost 14-1/2 years old at her death. I know that is quite old for a Dalmatian and I was amazed. Genetics and biology wouldn’t have allowed her to go much further, so I take comfort that she was not cheated on her lifespan.

Wendy’s next chapter is cremation. Ultimately, her ashes will be mixed with Gail’s and mine and those of our other dear dog companions and interred together, hopefully for eternity.

Ann, you gave us the most wonderful gift anyone could provide when you entrusted precious Wendy to us. We treated her with love and the best care we could possibly muster. I have no regrets for the management of her life and passing, and I hope you will agree. I think you can check off in your ledger that the placement of Wendy Girl with the Kettenbrinks was an unqualified success. Ann, in my book you are a saint because of all the spotted boys and girls you have saved. Because you saved Wendy, the three of us had 11 wonderful years together. If we can ever do anything for you, never hesitate to ask.

I do apologize for the length of this message. I thought you would appreciate knowing more about Wendy Girl's life after the Rescue Center and how good it was. Not everyone can understand how important these beloved spotted creatures become to the family they join and I needed to tell this story to someone who would understand. I knew you would. Writing this story is also much needed therapy for me! One is never ready for these departures, no matter how much one knows that they are coming. I miss Wendy Girl. I didn't want her to go, but I knew it was her time. We had eleven wonderful years with her and she will never be forgotten.