

My Lacey Story

By Lacey's Mom

I remember hearing about the Collies in Montana in November after they were stopped at the border. I read the updates on the AWCA website. Jean Levitt always signed off "Calmly, Jean." I didn't feel calm and yet it made me feel better to see that many people had taken on these Collies as their own and were devoting themselves to walking them, feeding them, cleaning them, and just hugging them. The updates from Jean and Thea and Rev and the others were very moving. The story of BC (later to be Beautiful Collie) and the Collie that was given her first stuffed toy were touching. I read about how the dogs were getting better with care and attention. I loved the people of Shelby, Montana.

I had followed the Montana Story from a comfortable distance and it still made me sick. I shared the stories with my friends and co-workers and we all read the reports together.

Then in January, my friend Joan e-mailed me and said, "I have confirmed that our dogs' mother is one of the Collies in Montana."



First look at Lacey

I had no idea this story would become so personal to me. I sat at my desk and cried. I made the decision to try and bring her home to us. I was still crying when I called my husband. "We have to take in another dog." (We already had 3.) My husband was quiet. Then, he said, "You have to follow your heart." I told him that Lacey was our Buster's mother and described some of the abuse she had suffered. He said, "Just get in the car and go get her right now. Bring her home this afternoon." It wasn't quite that easy!

Seven years ago a female Collie named Lacey was sent to Southern California to be bred. She had 10 beautiful puppies. The father kept all the puppies and I picked my Buster from that litter. Joan has a brother to my dog Buster, my friend Cathy has a sister to our dogs. My Buster and I were inseparable. I thought he was perfect.

I didn't know much about Buster's mother,

only that she was in Southern California for a year – and that she came from Alaska. I wrote a letter to David Pauli of the Humane Society and to Lisa King of the AWCA Rescue. Then, I called David Pauli. I found his phone number on the Internet and he actually answered the phone when I called. I took deep breath and started in talking. He was so kind to me. Joan had suggested to me, and David Pauli agreed, maybe I could get Athena Harmon to just give me Lacey. She would be about 10 years old. We thought maybe Athena would be happy to have Lacey placed in a forever home.

I e-mailed Athena asking for Lacey. I told her that we have Lacey's son and that we live on 2½ acres of grass, fruit and shade trees. Our dogs have the run of our yard and house. Athena's mother responded to my request, "Athena received your e-mail. She was very appreciative of your kindness in offering to provide a good home for Lacey. However, we are still confident and hopeful that she will be able to retain possession of all her dogs. At that point she will be placing some up for sale. Lacey will not be one of the dogs. Athena feels deeply committed to Lacey...has cared for her every day of her life. She cannot at this point in her life pass her onto a stranger, no matter how loving her new owner would be. We send you our warmest regards and thanks for your kindness in offering Lacey a home should she every need one." A very kind response, but not the answer I wanted to hear.

I called David Pauli again and he said that we would see what happened with the second trial. He doubted there would be a long line waiting for a 10-year-old dog. My friends Joan and Cathy kept me on track. They were so encouraging and supportive. They never gave up hope for me even when I was discouraged – and this was a discouraging time.

I called reporters in the Great Falls area. I looked for anyone who could help me find out which number

Lacey was at Camp Collie. I didn't know that none of the dogs were identified except by the number they received when they were taken off the truck.

Then, I called Jean Levitt. I was nervous because I knew how much she was doing on this case, and I didn't want to interfere with her work. She was a hero in my eyes. I said to Jean, "I am looking for my dog's mother in Montana," and Jean said, "Is it Lacey?" I had sent enough letters and e-mails and made enough calls that Jean already knew about my search. Jean was wonderful. She was heading to Montana for the second trial and would keep a look-out for Lacey.

After the second trial, Jean called me again. She said, "I think we found Lacey! She is number 108." Athena had identified some of the dogs on the witness stand. When Athena saw a picture of 108, she said, "That is Lacey." Jean had taken notes. I was on top of the world! Lacey was number 108. That meant there were 107 dogs taken off that truck before her.

I asked my mother to go to Montana with me. My husband checked his frequent flier miles and had enough for 2 tickets! Our plan was to fly to Great Falls and drive 2 days home in a rented car.



Lacey & the kids

The night before our trip a friend called me. It was 11 pm and I am always in bed, but that night I was up, excited for our trip. She had heard I was going to Montana and asked what city. When I told her Great Falls, she said that the doctor she works for is from Great Falls. He had a big double cab pickup truck in Great Falls and wondered if we would drive it back here for him. So, we didn't even need to rent a car! Everything just fell into place. Funny how that happens when everything is right.

We flew into Great Falls and drove to Camp Collie. I told the girl at the front gate that I was there "to pick up my dog." Mike, the deputy sheriff led us into the building. The tears began to fall again. These dogs were asking to be petted, to be taken home and loved. They wanted families and yards of their very own. I felt such an appreciation for the volunteers who first nursed them back to health and then worked providing care and love for all these many months. Mike led me over to Lacey's pen for a brief introduction. She wasn't jumping around. She got up quietly and came to the door of her pen. I wonder if she had been waiting for us. She was ready to go. I was so thankful for that "hold" sign on her pen that Jean had put there for me. She belonged to me! I felt like she had been mine since January, and now I was finally here to take her home where she belonged. She did not know how hard Joan and Cathy and I had looked for her.

Little did I know that Vicki, a woman who would become my friend, had adopted Lacey's pen mate and had wanted to adopt Lacey too. She had planned to come back for her if she needed a home.

I was lucky to have found my Lacey. And I have met some very special people along the path.

I filled out the paperwork, eager to get back to her. And, after e-mails and phone conversations, I finally got to meet Rev and Jean in person!

Unbelievably, the day we took Lacey from Camp Collie was my dog Buster's 7th birthday. It had been 7 years ago that very day that Lacey had given birth to that beautiful litter of pups. It had been 7 months since I had begun to look for Lacey.

Lacey was quiet, but as we left Camp Collie, the closer we got to the main gate, the harder she pulled on her leash. She wasn't going back!

We had a good trip back home. Lacey forgot herself half way through Utah and actually wagged her tail for the first time. She seemed as happy to be home as we were. Aside from an occasional trip to the vet, Lacey never left home again.

On Lacey's first day in the house she went into the kid's room and slept between their beds during their afternoon nap. Our other dogs took Lacey into our family with few disagreements.

I was lucky to be Lacey's mom for 3½ years. In that time she bloomed. I know she was happy. She had the happiest little gait when she walked beside me. High stepping, happy. She knew Christmas mornings, Thanksgiving leftovers, and many family gatherings. She loved the kids at the Little League practices in our yard. She loved beef ribs and pig's ears and anything that our children dropped from the table. She loved our son and daughter. She loved to lie in the grass. I am having a very hard time this spring, as days get nicer, I think she should be under one of the trees enjoying the day. She should be next to me as I put in the garden. She loved being in the yard with us.



Buster & Lacey

Lacey could not read, so all those "socks are not toys" signs up at Camp Collie were wasted on her. Socks made fine toys especially when someone pulled on the other end of it.

In February my husband and the kids were away for the weekend with Indian Guides. Lacey and I were home alone. Lacey was not doing very well. I worked in the garden with her lying next to me on Saturday afternoon. We sat outside and enjoyed the day together. I cooked her a steak for dinner and she ate it all. When I went to help Lacey outside in the morning she was lying so comfortably, peacefully, that I just watched her for a minute

before I went to wake her. I put my hand on Lacey's back and she exhaled. I thought she would wake up soon and quietly turned and walked away from her. I wasn't five steps away when I turned back to look at her again. To watch her sleep so peacefully. When I turned back she was gone.

I loved Lacey with all my heart. She was a very special Collie and friend. She made it through all the cruelty and was gentle and loving with everyone always. Babies could crawl on her and she would lick them. Children who were afraid of dogs came and sat next to her. She had a wonderful, loving spirit. Lacey lived to be 15 years old. I wish she could have been with us for all her years.

Thank you Border agents for having the courage to stop that truck. Thank you Shelby Montana for putting your lives on hold to help these poor Collies day after day for many months. Thank you AWCA for taking care of the Montana Collies and for standing up for them and speaking for them. For bringing in vets and groomers. For paying the bills. For the heartfelt updates on the website that kept us all involved. Thank you Collie Hugers for all your comfort.

And thank you Jean Levitt for finding Lacey and letting me share 3½ years of her life. Thank you Jean for letting me tell Lacey's story to the AWCA world. I sincerely believe you are a Hero. You went to Montana. You stood up for these Collies. You always put these Collies first. Lacey would thank you too.

I miss her with all my heart. Our Lacey was loved. And I know she loved us too.