

My elderly dog taught me a lesson about the benefits of adopting a senior pet

BY PETE GRATHOFF
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My worst case of buyer’s remorse involved a dog.

While volunteering at a local shelter in the summer of 2017, I was pondering whether to get another dog. I already had Henry, a Black Mouth Cur mix who had been instrumental in helping me deal with the grief following my wife’s death two years earlier.

Henry was 9 years old at the time, so I didn’t want a young pup that would bring too much energy to our home. However, I wasn’t sure an older pet had much to offer. But while at the shelter I saw Val, who frankly had a number of things working against her.

She was also 9, had a gimpy front paw, was slightly cross-eyed and had been at a Missouri shelter for so long that she was sent to the Kansas branch in hopes someone would adopt her. One of the people at the shelter noted Val was super sweet but had been given up by her family because they had too many pets.

Henry and I enjoyed a quiet lifestyle. He was Mr. Low Key and didn’t make much fuss around the house. I was assured Val also was quiet and would be a good compliment. So I adopted her and immediately changed her name to Cal, which was short for Calpurnia, the housekeeper in my favorite book, “To Kill A Mockingbird.”

Cal, who died a couple of months ago just shy of age 17, almost immediately made me regret my deci-



I adopted Calpurnia when she was 9 years old and she lived with me for nearly 8 years.

sion.

THE RUNAWAY

I acknowledge this first story of my remorse is my own fault. Henry was so good he didn’t need to be on a leash while I was in the front yard, and I optimistically believed Cal would pick up on Henry’s vibe and stay in the unfenced area.

Twenty minutes and a nearly one-mile chase later, I realized Cal had

much more verve than I was led to believe.

More examples were soon to follow.

I had taken the dogs with me while running errands one warm day, and when exiting the store, my phone rang. The number wasn’t familiar but I answered anyway. It was a kind gentleman from a hardware store in the same strip mall where I was shopping, and he got my number from the tag on Calpurnia’s

collar.

“Hey, this is Matt from Nuts and Bolts. Your dog just walked in,” he informed me.

“Walked in?” I repeated incredulously.

“Yeah, there’s an automatic door and she just strolled in.”

Cal had jumped out of an open window (another thing Henry never did) and made her way to the store, and I don’t think she was looking for a screwdriver.

It wasn’t the last time that happened, either, but I soon realized it was best to have her stay home unless it was cool enough to keep the windows up in the car.

I wasn’t so sure that adopting this spunky 9-year-old was a great idea.

But a funny thing soon happened, Cal learned the rules and really became a sweet and wonderful dog. There was a memorable turning point. It came after another trip with the mutts, and upon arriving home, I opened the door to let them out. Henry sniffed around the grass as he meandered toward the house ... but Cal bolted.

This time, she headed toward a busy road and wasn’t heeding my, um, requests for her to stop. So I tried something new. I pretended to fall and called out for her. Lo and behold, the deception worked. She came back to check on the welfare of the guy feeding her on a daily basis.

After that, the runaway attempts slowed to a trickle before stopping. I was particularly happy she was with me when Henry died three years ago. After that, she really was a great furry friend. That vivacious behavior continued, but she had learned the rhythms of her new home and I had adjusted to her zest for life.

Well, as best as I could. Here’s another fun doggy story.

My dear friends took in Cal when I traveled, and they still talk about an amazing moment that took place in their home. It’s my favorite example of her *joie de vivre*. They have four kids who frequently hang out in their living room. Cal loved being around children at play (there must have been kids at her former home), so she enjoyed those visits.

But on this particular day, the kids were playing in a family room, a half-flight of stairs down from the usual gathering place. My friend Jacob was sitting on the stairs blocking Cal’s path to the action, so she took flight. Literally. Calpurnia got a running start and jumped over Jacob and crash landed in spectacular fashion on the floor near where the fun was happening. Remarkably, she got up none the worse for wear and happily enjoyed the kids’ chaos.

Jacob and Ruth still laugh about that to this day.

CARING FOR HER

It wasn’t all good times. Calpurnia had a number of health issues in her lifetime. She lost sight in her right eye, was plagued by liver and stomach troubles, had a cancerous tumor removed at age 15 and suffered from dementia near the end.

I was honored to provide her a comfortable life in those final years. Although she’d been dumped at a shelter for being one too many pets in a household, Cal was the center of attention and love at the end.

I’m not sure if I’ll get another dog. The pain is still fresh. But if (OK, maybe that should be *when*) that day comes and I’m ready, I won’t search solely for a young pup. I’ve had puppies and they are great. But I also brought home 9-year-old Cal and she enriched my life for nearly eight years. She enlightened me, and I now know a little something about the joys of owning a senior pet.

You really can teach an old dog new tricks. And the opposite is true too.

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FROM PAGE 1A

STADIUM

ready signed the paperwork.”

Despite the surprise among some lawmakers, the Chiefs told The Star on Thursday that Donovan spoke with Kehoe and some state legislators ahead of the letter becoming public.

In the letter from Donovan, which was released publicly by Masterson on Thursday, the Chiefs’ president cited progress in negotiations with Kansas. The Kansas program, known as a STAR bonds plan, was originally set to expire on Monday.

“We believe the foundation is in place for something truly historic — not only for our team but for the future of the state’s economy and national profile,” Donovan wrote in the letter addressed to Masterson and eight members of the Kansas Legislative Coordinating Council.

The LCC, in response, said it intended to call the July 7 meeting. Masterson also said he planned to oblige the Chiefs’ request and extend the deadline through the end of 2025

instead of a full year.

The meeting will occur after the Monday deadline for the STAR bonds plan, but the LCC is permitted to retroactively extend the deadline. Masterson said in a news release that Donovan’s letter “indicates that the drive to bring this historic project to Kansas is moving down the field.”

The letter and news of the Kansas plan’s likely extension appeared to catch several Missouri lawmakers off guard Thursday afternoon. Missouri legislators were largely under the impression that the Kansas plan had a hard expiration date and would not be extended.

“That’s disappointing,” Brown, the Kansas City Republican, said. “Real disappointing.”

KEHOE EXPRESSES OPTIMISM

Other lawmakers and officials in Missouri appeared to frame the intention of the letter as the Chiefs simply trying to negotiate a better business deal.

“It looks like a continued effort to get the best deal by comparing competing offers,” said Missouri Senate President Pro Tem Cindy O’Laughlin, a Shelbina Republican.

“We’ll continue to work toward retaining the Chiefs.”

The spokesperson for Kehoe, Missouri’s governor, said in a statement to



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Fans cheer after the performance of the Star-Spangled Banner during the AFC Championship Game between the Kansas City Chiefs and the Buffalo Bills on Sunday, Jan. 26, 2025, at GEHA Field at Arrowhead Stadium.

The Star that Kehoe “believes this is a result of the work of legislators to pass a competitive offer during special session.”

“This request means that Missouri is still in the game to retain these teams and critical economic drivers,” the spokesperson, Gabby Picard, said. “Now, it’s up to the local levels to do their part to ensure we keep the Chiefs and Royals within our state’s borders.”

Shortly after the letter became public, the Kansas City Council met in closed session for 20 minutes to discuss what Mayor Quinton Lucas cryptically de-

scribed as “sports and facilities” before the council embarked on a two-week summer break.

Council members made no public mention of what they discussed behind closed doors when they returned to the council chamber in City Hall for the start of their regular weekly legislative meeting.

Kansas City Mayor Quinton Lucas said late Thursday afternoon that the city has assembled what he claimed was “a unique, comprehensive, and unmatched offer to secure the future for the Royals Downtown in what would be one of the finest

and most beautiful facilities and districts in baseball.”

Lucas was less specific on what if anything the city might provide for the Chiefs.

He said the city “will continue its active engagement” with the Chiefs, but provided no specific details. Lucas said Kansas City would ensure the, “necessary financing and development support to provide a first-class facility for Chiefs football, practice, and entertainment for fans year-round.”

The Star’s Jonathan Shorman, Sam McDowell, Mike Hendricks and Mat-

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