



Dianne Soper photo

## Bailey hits the jackpot

In the spring of 2007, an ol' stray was hanging around the University of North Texas' Dallas campus in South Oak Cliff.

"An ol' stray"—a despicable term. Let's try "Part of Our Family." That's what this "ol' stray" became— took about a split second. But first there was the adventure.

The dog's plight inspired creation of an informal rescue group we'll call Team Emily. The hard-luck dog was spotted by a UNT student who e-mailed rescuers for help. Myla Johnson answered and lined up other rescuers. Team member Becky Delgado says Myla went to the campus "every single day to leave food and tried each time to win her trust."

Hopeful rescuers called her "Emily" (she'd later become Bailey). After dodging rescue for months, Emily was near death when her food was doped and she was caught. Becky says Emily was "severely emaciated, had every parasite known to man, flea and tick infested, a skin infection, sarcoptic mange, conjunctivitis, an open wound on the side of her face from a coyote attack, and she was heartworm positive." During three months at City Vet, Emily was

nursed to health and gained 35 pounds. She was a gentle, loving favorite at the clinic.

Once healthy, Emily was enrolled in K-9 University. But she didn't need training to capture hearts. She won Debbie Wessel's in a split second.

The timing was a moment of grace that eased months of mourning. In August, 2007, Debbie's beloved 110-pound black Lab, Shadow, 12, had lost a six-year battle with Cushings Disease, thyroid problems, and rheumatoid arthritis. Shadow died "on the day of her choosing—I am convinced of that," Debbie says. The family "tearfully bid her farewell in our veterinarian's office. My last memory of Shadow is whispering in her ear 'Mama loves you, Shadow.' She opened her big brown eyes, wagged her tail, and took her last breath. I thought I would never heal from that heartbreak."

For months, Debbie's family "could barely stand to see the pain in my eyes." When loved ones suggested another dog, "I told them I was too busy with moving and wedding plans [for her daughter] to train a puppy."

Future son-in-law Travis Haskin suggested an

older rescue. Debbie says she “falsely assumed that abandoned dogs are abandoned for a reason. I felt that it would be too difficult to deal with a dog who had issues or who had been trained incorrectly. The kids plotted against me and contacted an animal rescue group.”

Gail Whelan of Companion Animal Network told Travis about a loving two-year-old Lab mix who’d endured an awful ordeal. Travis and Jenny met Emily at K-9 University. The next week they convinced Debbie to meet her there. “One look at that beautiful sweetheart and I was hooked. Her eyes were so soulful, her spirit so gentle. We both knew it was a match.”

Gail and Becky brought Emily to Debbie’s home the next evening and Debbie’s husband, Rick, “fell for her almost as quickly as I had,” Debbie says. “After everyone left that evening, she jumped on the couch and settled into a big stack of pillows.”

Debbie recalls a tender moment with daughter Jenny that first night. “Tears welled up in her eyes and she said, ‘This is the first good night’s sleep she’s ever had in her life’.”

“Regardless of where I am,” Debbie says, “she is never far away. I even have a bed for her in the kitchen. I think Shadow is her guardian angel, whispering dog talk in her ear saying, ‘OK, Bailey, this is what mom really likes for you to do!’”

Bailey “was ready to be loved,” Debbie says. “She’s never been aggressive. I think that’s what a lot of people fear about getting a rescue dog. She’s just been sweet and loving and very appreciative of everything that she gets.”

Debbie sees Bailey as “a tribute to those ladies who persevered. We will forever be grateful to the group who wouldn’t give up on her.”

**Did you pick your pet or your pet pick you?** “I guess in this case we picked her.” Daughter Jenny, 26, her then-fiancée/now husband Travis, 26, and son Jared, 21, were in town for a Thanksgiving visit with Debbie and Rick, CEO of First Cash Financial Services. “Travis talked me into meeting her and my heart just melted. Most would not think she’s beautiful, but she was just gorgeous to me. She’s just perfect.”

**Her name?** In her new home, she didn’t seem to respond to “Emily.” One evening the family was calling out names. Someone said “Bailey” and “her

head picked up!” Emily became Bailey.

**Any marketable skills?** “She likes to cuddle. She likes to take her head and put it against someone else’s head. When she wants to play, she pushes her head against yours.” (Debbie did this phone interview from bed—the perfect dog was on the bed, too, next to Rick with her head right up against his.)

**Do you take your pet car-shopping?** “Absolutely, it had to be perfect for her or we wouldn’t buy it. Bailey needed a bench seat in the SUV, not two single chairs. She also needed air vents on her row. She got both.”

**All pets are perfect, but...** “She has a fetish for expensive shoes. She goes into the closet and the only things she destroys are my shoes.”

**What’s the most adorable thing she does?** She loves rawhide bones, but she’s “never eaten one. She’ll take it and hide it as if she’s saving it for a rainy day.” Sometimes she puts the bone between couch cushions. Sometimes she drops it on the closet floor, then piles shoes on top of it to hide it from visiting dogs.

**Oddest thing?** “I think it’s the way she just sits in the window and guards the house.” In their Westlake home, Debbie has “an office upstairs with floor-to-ceiling windows. We put a doggie bed under each window. She goes upstairs where she can see the street and when she sees our car pull up to the garage, runs downstairs and meets us at the door.”

**Do friends and relatives want your dog?** “Yes, everyone loves Bailey. She’s not one of those dogs you have to put up when friends come over.”

**Favorite treat?** “Peanut butter—anytime I get peanut butter she gets a big scoop of it. She raises her lips up and pulls it off with her teeth, off my finger.”

**At bedtime?** Bailey gets in on Rick’s side of the bed, says Debbie, then “when he comes to bed, she will get up,” move to the bedroom couch and sleep on the couple’s Abilene Christian blanket. “She never curls up in a ball to sleep any more—she stretches out as far as her feet and head will go. She’s feeling at ease, very comfortable.”

**At smoochy time, I kiss my pet...** “Usually it’s goodnight kisses on the lips.” —Larry Powell

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