

Taking a Chance on Granny Annie

A Florida woman brings home an abused senior dog—and opens her eyes to the wonders of older pets

by MAY LATTANZIO

I'm not good at visiting animal shelters. I just can't forget the pleading eyes of dogs and cats in need of homes or the vacant looks of those haunted by abandonment or past cruelties. There are so many animals with life and love to give.

So instead, I've worked for many years as an off-site volunteer for the local humane society: On my blog, I post pictures of adoptable dogs at the Bay County, Fla., municipal shelter. I used to think this would be the extent of my volunteerism for that agency.

Then one weekend I saw a picture of a nameless three-legged Boston terrier. Her owner was incarcerated, and the dog had been given to someone who mistreated her so much that she was confiscated by animal control.

I already had eight dogs, all rescues, including three Bostons. I didn't need another. But I could foster her temporarily. Surely, a breed rescue group would snatch her up. If not, someone, somewhere would want a special-needs dog. Or maybe she could be a therapy dog? Of course, I thought—she'd be perfect!

Monday morning: There she was. Much older than her given age, 5. Maybe 500. Her coat was scurfy and worn away in patches. Her right front leg was missing. Wide scars on her flanks, covered with white hairs, told a tale of serious trauma. Her forehead looked as though it had been cleaved down the middle, and I suspected her skull had been fractured. She had warts, pink bumps, and lumps all over—and she smelled.

The wretch at my feet looked up with dim eyes swimming in a gray face and wiggled her stumpy tail, which wagged the rest of her. Swinging like a ball on a chain from her back leg was a large cyst attached to a

narrow cord of skin.

She would be a challenge, but I was up for it. There had to be a home that would welcome a pitiful Boston with a disability.

The dog enjoyed the ride home on the front seat of my van. After making hasty introductions to my other dogs, I walked her straight to the bathtub. Within hours, she was sleeping peacefully.

The following week I queried my contacts half-heartedly and got only one response. By then I'd realized that her perfect home had been found: It was with me.

I named her Granny Annie and she fits right in, having quickly learned the rhythms and routines of the house. She gets along with the other dogs and even likes the cats. She knows to stay behind the others as they rush out the back door into the yard. She tires easily and takes frequent rests while the others play about her. She loves dog biscuits and even eats from a spoon. And she is a little hard of hearing and sometimes can't see me unless I wave my arms.

Today as I write this, Granny Annie is 2 pounds heavier (not a good thing) than when she first arrived. She's a cheerful old girl with a healthy coat and ears. She has soft



places to sleep that she can reach without jumping, and she basks in the warmth of heaters. And because of her, I spend much of my time working to place the dogs at the Bay County shelter. (It's a good thing I'm old and retired, too—a real job would interfere with my purpose.)

In return, Granny Annie has taught me about survival against great odds and cruelty, the dignity of age, and the courage to deal with handicaps. She proves to me every day that old lives are worth saving, something I wish more people would recognize. If you're planning an addition to your family, please consider adopting a middle-aged or senior animal. They're waiting for homes in shelters all across the country.

Granny Annie is no beauty, but inside that scarred body shines a golden heart and endless sweetness. I'm still not good at visiting animal shelters—but this time, I'm so glad I did.

► **MAY LATTANZIO** is a freelance writer and photographer and a volunteer wildlife rehabilitator. She lives in Youngstown, Fla.