

FOURTEEN



Griffen

February 2007

It was February. Kendall was up to something. She was leaving the house on the weekends for hours at a time without telling me where she was going. I also found some computer printouts around the kitchen of shelter dogs.

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In a stern voice I said, “Kendall, I told you I’m not ready for another dog. We have Pepsi, and that’s enough for now.”

“Lauren’s just looking on the computer,” she said.

Then Lauren came over to me and showed me a photograph. “Look at this dog, Dad. Isn’t he beautiful? He’s blind but he needs help.”

“Are you nuts?” I said to her. “Let me be as clear as I can: No new dog!”

A week passed. I was working in my home office. Kendall and Lauren were out somewhere. Chase told me the girls had taken Pepsi for a ride. They were gone for a long time, but I thought nothing of it.

I heard the garage door open. Kendall and Lauren were home. But then I heard a commotion upstairs. Pepsi was making his “devil run” around the house. But I heard something else.

“Oh no, what’s that,” I shouted. Before I could get up to see what was going on, a small dog came bouncing down the basement stairs to greet me. “Isn’t he beautiful?” Kendall said. She had a big smile on her face.

“I told you it’s too early for another dog. I can’t believe you didn’t talk to me about this first.”

Rescuing Sprite

“If I had told you, you would have said no,” she answered.

“That’s right, I would have said no. I need another five or six months before we consider getting another dog.”

Kendall apologized and said she’d return the dog the next day. She and Lauren had taken Pepsi to a PetSmart in Frederick, Maryland, which was showing dogs that were up for adoption. They had seen a dog sleeping in one of the cages who caught their attention. He had curly fur but they couldn’t see his face. They picked him up to see what he looked like. They both looked at each other and knew he was coming home with them. Pepsi and the dog also hit it off. The dog then followed them around the store as if to say, “I’d love to come home with you.”

As afternoon turned to night, my apprehensiveness subsided, as Kendall knew it would. I couldn’t let her return the dog. God knows what might happen to him if no one else adopted him. It was a fate for which I didn’t want any responsibility. As it was, a wonderful group called Friends for Life Animal Rescue Inc. in Monrovia, Maryland, had already saved him from being euthanized by the local shelter, which hadn’t been able to find him a family after a few months. Besides, after a few hours with the little guy, I

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was already attached to him. He was as cute as could be—a mix of poodle and Lhasa apso, they say (I actually think he’s part cairn terrier, but what do I know), and he couldn’t be more than twenty-five pounds.

I could tell he was happy to be in our home. He explored each room, sniffing here and there. He walked over to each family member, as if introducing himself. He needed and deserved a loving family. My family.

We debated what to name him. Lauren suggested “Dewey” after the drink Mountain Dew. Kendall mentioned “Fresca” or “Fanta.” After all, we’d named our other dogs Pepsi and Sprite. Chase and I shot them down. We decided to break from the line of soda names and settled on Griffen.

Once again, Kendall had been told the dog was six years old. And once again I told her, “He’s not six years old. He’s older.” We later learned that he’s eleven. As Kendall dug further into his background, she discovered that his owners had decided that their lives were too busy to keep him. They wanted to travel more. So they actually asked their vet whether they should put him up for adoption or have him euthanized! Can you imagine? I have nothing but contempt for such inhumanity and selfishness.

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Rescuing Sprite

I fired off an e-mail to Chris, asking him to perform a complete exam on Griffen. I wanted to make sure that if there was anything wrong with him, we'd do everything possible for him. Chris responded, "Wow!" He was as stunned as I that Kendall had brought home another dog.

After Chris examined Griffen he told us one of his ears had been severely infected for some time. He said he had to muzzle Griffen to look at his ears because of the pain it caused him. A few months later fifteen(!) of Griffen's teeth had to be removed because they were in such bad shape. And due to persistent problems with his right ear, Griffen recently had a total ear canal ablation—that is, his right ear canal was removed. Had his original owners bothered to care for him, the poor dog would not have had to suffer as he did.

Griffen won't have to fend for himself anymore. He has received excellent medical attention, and from now on he will be properly cared for. It turns out he also has a heart-valve problem. But as someone with his own heart issues, I know there's no reason why he can't live several more years. I sure hope so.

Griffen is now surrounded by people who love him, and a furry friend who will give him companionship. He no longer has to wonder where home is. We're working on his

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house-training, which means many more early morning and late-night walks. But it's worth it. He's a joy—our little joy.

Moments before Sprite passed away, I looked into his eyes and promised him that we'd never forget him. And I think about him many times every day.

Sprite will never know all the good he did during his short visit on earth and the events he set in motion: Because of him, I was moved to write this book. So it's only fair that a portion of all the proceeds I receive from *Rescuing Sprite* go to dog shelters and rescue groups across the nation, which are overwhelmed with Sprites and Griffens who are in desperate need of food, shelter, medical care, and loving families willing to open their hearts to one of these babies. Rescued dogs, like all dogs, appreciate every kindness.

Nothing will ever replace our beloved Sprite or Pepsi or Griffen.

And in the end, we humans are the lucky ones.