

# HER MAJESTY'S KENNEL: DEVASTATED BUT NOT DESTROYED

## We Miss You!

Normally I love to write, but this is one story I wish I didn't have to tell. It was just in the November/December issue we were given the opportunity to have a kennel visit, and just a couple months later, life changed. I have always loved the story of the Wizard of Oz because I believe in my heart it is the story we should all live by. Our whole purpose in life is to help each other make it down the road of life. Through our tragedy, I am more convinced than ever that this is true. Here it goes, please bear with me as I write about the saddest time in our life.

It was Christmas Eve and as always, we go to Mom's for the Family Christmas. Randy goes to the graveyard where his parents are buried and leads a candlelight service and then joins us at the house. I love Christmas. I guess I got it from my Mom; she loves having the family at her home for Christmas. The plan is always the same, We go to Mom's, open gifts, Randy comes back home to take care of the dogs, I stay with Mom, Dad, sister and her husband, and Randy gets up the next morning, takes care of the dogs and comes back to Mom's to see what Santa has delivered. Mom and Dad only live 30 minutes away, so it's not a long journey. This Christmas, the Grinch showed up and destroyed Christmas.

As we got close to the house, the pungent smell of smoke entered the car. In front of the house were fire trucks with their flashing lights. Randy ran. I walked. As I got close to the house, I asked Randy's son Adam, what about the dogs? He led me over to a lady, Carrie Davis and said, "She saved what she could." She hugged me and said, "I drove by and saw the smoke.

We had only been gone for 3 hours, all the Christmas lights were unplugged and the regular lights were left on. We had just finished our Christmas Eve with Mom's family and Mom had given us our Christmas pajamas (a tradition). We had put on our pajamas and made Christmas Eve pictures. Randy was taking the gifts to the car and getting ready to head back to the house when the phone call came. He ran back in the house, "Chuck, the house is on fire."

I don't know how to describe the feeling other than "shock." We ran to the car and took off to the house. We cried the whole way to the house. All I could say over and over was, "The babies, oh, the babies."

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"Did any of the girls upstairs get out?" I asked.

A frown and tears came to her eyes, "The fireman found the little puppies, and they're in Adam's car. They tried to give some of them oxygen, but it was too late."

Tears filled my eyes as I walked up on the porch. There laying at the front door was Lily, the mother of the two 3 day old puppies in the car. She had protected her babies by laying on them, but had lost her own life. I picked her up and just held her. I heard my Mother screaming for my pain. Randy went in to see if he could find anyone, but it was not to be.

We immediately asked where the dogs and cats were. They were at the animal shelter. We called the man at the animal shelter and he said he couldn't let us have them. The fire investigator called him and asked him to give us the dogs to which he finally agreed. We gathered the 2 puppies and I called David and Carlene Gilstrap and asked for help. They had a mother of 4-week-old puppies. David (who lives an hour away) asked where he needed to meet us. We told him we were on the way to the animal shelter to get whoever was saved and to just drive and we would call him and meet him wherever he was.

When we got to the animal shelter, the only dogs that were there were Jericho, Dash, Cole, Jonathan, Cade and Sherri Kaye, all of the dogs that were downstairs except for Megan. All of the cats were there except the one who got away and a 12-week-old kitten. We took the dogs and left the cats there. As we were driving to meet David, our cell phones went dead. How were we going to find him, we had no phone. As we pulled up to a pay phone at the nearest exit, there sat David and Anna (David and Carlene's daughter from California). Someone was looking out for us. We told David we had no where to take the dogs and he immediately said, "They can go with me." As he drove off, Randy and I just sat in the parking lot at the gas station, in shock, not knowing what to say or do. We finally drove to Mom's. As I walked in the house, I walked up the stairs and saw my Mom and sister Dayna and collapsed in the floor crying, "He took my babies, oh my babies." My mother and sister sat and held me. I couldn't stop whaling. I will never forget the tears that hit my face from my Mom's and Dayna's eyes. I couldn't stop crying. Every time I would stop, one of the girl's faces would come to my mind and it would all start over.

Randy was downstairs with my Father and brother-in-law Chris. Randy held it together better than I did. I felt bad that his family wasn't there to help him. Adam, Millie (wife), and Sam (grandson) are the only family he really has. His brothers and family are missing out on a really good man.

As we awoke a few hours later, it was not a nightmare and the tears returned. Randy looked at me and said, "I've got to get the kids. I can't leave them there any longer." I couldn't go. Adam and Millie met Randy at the house and they searched for the kids. Not one was burnt. All had died of smoke inhalation. Megan who was the only one downstairs that didn't get out, had gotten afraid and hidden under a table. Sienna was lying on the bed and the 2-month-old puppies were in the pen. The rest of the girls were in the kitchen.

We spent the rest of Christmas day crying.

The next day we came to look at the damage. Everything was pretty much ruined. The fire had stopped at the entrance foyer. It had burnt everything that we cherished and seemed to stop when it didn't matter anymore. As we walked in the basement, out of the ashes came a small little kitten. How it got there we will never know because the cats were all upstairs and where Miracle was, it was almost impossible for her to get there unless the stray cat we adopted showed her the way. Randy took her and picked up the rest of the cats at the animal shelter and took them to Animal Medical Center where they bathed, checked everyone out and boarded them.

As everyone left, one by one, we realized we were now homeless and had 21 holes in our hearts. We were lost. What do you do? Where do you go? How do you make it?

Then something amazing happened. David and Carlene brought us their motor home to stay in. Randy's nephew Todd, came and started working and getting us electricity (I had never seen this guy before, but he stepped up and decided to be family for Randy). Ron and Connie Russell who own S&S Pet Supplies, brought us a computer, set it up in the motor home along with phone service. People from our Chattanooga Kennel Club started showing up. Friends called, "We'll keep your cats for you as long as you need us to." A couple of girlfriends of ours showed up and took what clothes we could find and went and washed clothes so we would have something to wear. (I am going to quit naming names, because I will forget someone. I know they didn't help for recognition, but because they care.) A friend called Randy and said, "Check your Paypal account." The Pom community had begun their work. Pom people from all over were sending money to us by Paypal. Checks and sympathy cards from the dog world started rolling in. Calls, on top of calls and Emails, on top of Emails were coming, all from dog people. Offers that you would not believe. We have a female puppy for you, a show quality when you are ready. I want to loan you one of my females to breed one of your boys to.

I would look at Randy and say, "Who is that?" "I don't know!" was his reply many times.

People whether they knew us or not were coming together to help. They felt our pain. Many would say, "I don't know you, but I've heard what wonderful guys you are and I want to help." One email we received was on a board on New Years Eve. It was from a lady in another country who had heard of our despair and written in broken English wrote, "I want to sak you all to stand still wan moment, fore the 2 boys how have loss there 17 poms, we al are together with are family and pom, but watt a heartbreaking night this mus be fore them, I hoop tad the will know tad tere are still people like I how are thinking of them one this special nig, leds say a little pray this night for them."

If anything good came out of our heartbreak, it was the pom people and the dog world that proved me right. Our job is to help each other get down the road. Everything that everyone has done has kept us from giving up. It's like everyone surrounded us and said, "We are here and we will not let you quit." Don't come up to us and say anything bad about anyone in the dog world because we can prove you wrong. People may have their faults, but when it is time to step up, their hearts are right. It wasn't the Christian Churches that came to our rescue, it was dog people... and for that we will always be grateful.

The fire investigator showed up and my greatest fear was that I had done something decorating for Christmas to start the fire. Randy went over and met with him. He was so complimentary of our kennel. He said even through the ashes he could tell how well our kennel was kept. He said he had been to many kennel fires, and he felt bad for the dogs that were kept there. He told Randy that he might want to consider designing kennels. He said, "And I've never been to a kennel where the dogs had their own big screen T.V., couch and recliner. He found that the fire had started in the kennel in the light fixture. It was not a connection, it was a bad light and there was nothing we could have done to prevent it. Randy came to the camper in tears, "It wasn't our fault. There was nothing we could have done to prevent it." It was the first time I had seen Randy actually break down.

I went back to work January 2, 2008. As I sat on the couch in the motor home not wanting to go, crying until tears would no longer come, Maj, her Majesty, visited me. She said, "Hey Daddy, we are all o.k. We played show dog today and they let me win. Granny clapped as we all went around. We're going to let Cassie win next. Ellie Mae and Dorothy Gayle said they still think it's stupid and won't play. Granny said you would come watch real soon. She said it will seem like a long time to you, but here it won't be long.

Well I gotta go play. I love you." Whether you believe it or not, I believe she came to me. As I got to my first patient, she told me how sorry she was. I told her, it hurts, but I now look forward to making it to heaven because there were going to be a bunch of Pomeranians lined up waiting for me to cross that gap. She asked, "Do you believe dogs go to heaven?" I replied, "All I know is God is love and those dogs sure did provide me with more love than I have ever known. So if God is love, the love He provided me with must be there too." So I asked her, "Do you believe there are dogs in heaven?" She replied, "I do now."

Now I have one more thing I have to do and thank you Brenda Segelken for asking us to do this to help us heal.

Ridge and Victoria are safe in the loving hands of Bronya Johnston (hopefully Victoria is pregnant with Barbara Moore's Buster.)

Jonathan, Cole, Dash, Deezel, Cade and baby Phoenix are in the caring hands of David and Carlene Gilstrap.

Sherri Kaye and Jericho are camped out with us.



Eliza Blue's kids, we are so sorry that life was so short for you. You won our hearts in such a short time.



Little Boys, GeCorey, Doodah, and Capitan, what little time we had with each you was wonderful. You were our hope for the future. You have become our new hope for the future.

Girls, I don't know what to say other than our hearts are so badly broken that you are not here.



Jenny Belle, you were so pretty and already had your majors.

Lottie Mae, we miss your preaching and your happy personality.



Chandy, you were so sweet and beautiful.

Dorothy Gayle, I so miss you every time I sneeze and you don't come running to bless me. We so miss your sweet personality.



Ellie Mae, you were our sweetness. You had produced beautiful babies; you were such a part of our success.

Lily, you were such a good mother. You have one baby with you. The other, we're praying so hard for. We named her Phoenix. Thank you for your selfless act.



Penelope, well you got that championship you so richly deserved. PP you made us so proud.

Cassie, you were so precious. I miss those good kisses of yours. You wanted to be a show girl so bad, I hear now they see your perfection, congratulations on your win today.



Megan, always our happy little girl, thank you for being our first ring girl. You were so much better than we were able to show you as.

Hannah, you were our first champion. We so miss coming in the door with you being the first to greet us, always smiling, always just wanting to be held.



Eliza Bleu, girlfriend you really had it. Your offspring were such a blessing to us. You had everything we ever wanted.

Sienna Sky, my NeeNee, my coffee buddy. You are so badly missed. You were the Pom I had dreamed of since I was a kid. We fought so hard to keep you and to be taken away the way you were just isn't fair.





And finally, My Maj, Her Majesty, I think I will miss you most of all. You will never know the joy you gave us. You always wanted to be by my side. The kennel will continue in your honor. The joy you brought will never be replaced.

Take care of everyone until we meet again.



You are all somewhere over the rainbow in that land that we dream of where troubles melt like lemon drops and blue birds fly, someday, someday we'll see you again over that rainbow. Until then, may God keep you all in his hand and we'll keep you in our hearts where you will live forever.

To EVERYONE, thank you for holding us in your hearts and helping us. Love your babies while you have them. They are so precious and the love they give in return makes life worthwhile.

We love you all,  
Randy and Chuck