

A Dog's Life

In the part of Wisconsin Lands' End calls home, one thing we have in abundance is wide open space. Here and there, amidst the gentle roll of the hillsides round about, you may have the luck to meet a few of those rare folks with hearts big enough to fill that space to bursting.

Our Wisconsin neighbor Andrea is one of those. She's the resident manager of a 90-acre horse farm a few miles distant from our Lands' End campus. All that acreage forms the pleasant backdrop for her activities as a volunteer with Golden Retriever Rescue of Wisconsin (GRRoW), an organization that places surrendered Golden Retrievers into loving, lifetime homes. For dogs awaiting suitable placement, Andrea opens her door - and her heart. She's had as many as seven Golden Retrievers under her roof at once. "I live in a big dog house," she tells us. "I'm just one of the pack."

Visit Andrea's place and you'll be swept along in a waist-high tide of bobbing heads and wagging tails and shaggy yellow fur. "I clean up a lot of dog hair," she laughs. For the Golden Retrievers, it's doggie heaven. "You step out the front door and... the hills are alive!"

In her role as foster "mom," it's Andrea's job to make sure the dogs are good candidates for adoption. Sometimes that involves playing doggie therapist. Some dogs give in to destructive tendencies when they're overcome with anxiety - say, if their owner is away from home more than they can bear. One dog made a chew toy of her cell phone when his worries got the best of him. But patience and love seem to carry the day.

"There are no bad dogs," says Andrea. "It usually boils down to one of three things - not enough training, not enough love or abuse by humans."

Right now, four Golden Retrievers are in residence - Lacy, Rowdy, Moby and Abe. Abe is short for Captain Ahab, a name he earned with his relentless chasing after Moby. To hear Abe's story is to appreciate the rocky road some animals travel.

When Abe was about 10 weeks, he picked up the bad habit of sleeping under cars. When the inevitable happened, his owner - reluctant to spend money on veterinary care - relegated Abe to the basement. When Andrea caught wind of the dog's plight, she persuaded the owner to surrender him. Even so, a month had passed and the pup's helpless hindquarters now dragged behind him. One thing came through unscathed, though - Abe's perky, tail-wagging disposition wasn't dented in the least. He was quickly scheduled for surgery with a local vet; misaligned bones were reset and his hindquarters patched up with wires and pins. A week later, he couldn't be kept off his feet - or away from Moby.

Abe is two years old now. And Andrea has decided he's a keeper - she adopted him herself. On the day we visited, he was happily romping chest-deep in snow, eager to keep up with his buddies. And still chasing Moby.

If you'd like to help the folks at GRRoW, we invite you to visit their Web site, www.grow.org. You can even donate online. Or, you may want to check out breed rescues in your own community. And, yes, some rescues even specialize in mutts!