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# Dog Hero



When Eve and Norman Fertig rescued a sick, two-week-old half wolf, half German shepherd puppy from a breeder almost seven years ago, they'd never dreamed that the animal one day would save their lives.

When the 81-year-old Fertigs were treating injured animals in the forest sanctuary on their property. One such animal is a near-18-year-old raven, while another is a crow who was shot, blind in one eye with two broken legs.

It was routine for the couple to feed and exercise the dozen or so animals there around 7 p.m. every night. While we're in there, the lights go out and I realized something's wrong," Eve Fertig said. "We go outside to see what's happening and down comes one massive tree, the trees came down across us."

The massive storm that hit upstate New York that night felled trees, blocking the Fertig's path to the other sanctuary buildings — such as the school and storage building — and to their home, which was at least 200 feet away.

We were in big trouble. I said to my husband, 'I think we could die out here,'" Eve said.



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**The average dog is  
a nicer person than  
the average person.**

**-Andy Rooney**

*...more on back page!*

The Fertigs huddled in a narrow alley between the hospital building and the aviary, where they were sheltered from falling trees. They couldn't climb over the trees without injuring themselves. Neither had warm clothes on since it was a clear, crisp day just a few hours ago. They hugged each other for warmth, since by 9:30 PM, temperatures had dropped. "I wasn't prepared for this. I thought, 'we're trapped, we're absolutely trapped,'" Eve said. "That's when Shana began to dig beneath the fallen trees."...

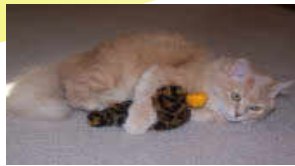
The 160-pound dog that habitually follows her owners around — Eve likens it to "Mary had a little lamb," when the lamb went everywhere Mary went — eventually found the Fertigs and began digging a path in the snow with her teeth and claws underneath the fallen trees, similar to a mineshaft, and barking as if to tell them to follow.

After Shana tunneled all the way to the house — a process that took until about

11:30 p.m. — she came back, grabbed the sleeve of Eve's jacket, and threw the 86-pound woman over her back and neck, which Eve described as "as wide as our kitchen shelf." Norman grabbed Eve's legs, and the dog pulled them through the tunnel, under the trees and through an opening in a fence to the house, at which they arrived around 2 a.m. "It was the most heroic thing I've ever seen in my life," Eve said. "We opened the door and we just fell in and she laid on top of us and just stayed there and kept us alive ... that's where we laid until the fireman found us."

There was no electricity and no heat in the house, so Shana acted as a living, breathing generator for the exhausted Fertigs until the local fire department arrived the next morning.

### Senior pets may require more care



It's hard to pinpoint when a pet becomes a senior. With the available quality

of care, our pets now live longer, which means we need to be aware of the changes in behavior and the type of care they will require from us.

Aging pets go through a lot of the same changes we do. Their hair turns gray and eyes and ears don't work quite as well as they once did. Their teeth start to decay and may even need to be pulled because infection is setting in. They get arthritis, joint pain, kidney and liver disease and cancer. Some pets get a form of dementia and tend to forget where their litterbox or food dish might be. Aging pets can become distressed when big changes occur, because by the time they reach their senior years, they love routine, much the same as an elderly human does. Change can create stress and impact health and so emotional well being becomes as important as the physical health of an older dog or cat.

I also believe in the quality of life, rather than in quantity. I have given some of my most beloved pets the gift of death when I felt they could no longer live with dignity. On the other hand, I have had cats do perfectly well way into old age and peacefully go to sleep and just not

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wake up. Your senior pet will tell you what it needs if you just listen.

Keeping your older pet healthy may take a little effort, but is well worth it if you can increase his or her life a few years. Start with good nutrition. Senior diets provide better nutrition with fewer calories and might be softer for senior teeth. There are specialty diets for kitties who have kidney disease, cardiomyopathy or diabetes. Many of these diets are rather bland and your older kitty may refuse to eat it, but you can add in some home cooked dietary supplements to make it more palatable. Older pets still need exercise. A 10-minute stroll for an aging dog or a game of teaser on the floor for a senior cat, will give you and your pet some time as well as a proper amount of exercise for the animal.

The biggest changes are those you might have to make in your home. For instance, if your pet has lost its eyesight, try not to change the furniture around every month or perhaps you need to put a baby gate up in front of stairways. Keep things familiar for your pet, make sure they have soft, warm beds and perhaps a ramp to help your pet get up to its favorite resting spot.

There are many cats who have stayed with their people for 20 years. They have seen children grow, been there to help through difficult times and given comfort when serious loss is felt. They have loved unconditionally. Hold your senior pet close to you; tell him how wonderful he has been and remember when he first came into your life. And then make sure you give him the best of care in the winter of his life.

## Tip:

### Blood tests important for older pets

Most dogs and cats live for about 14 to 18 years. So it is important for pet owners to know how to care for senior or geriatric animals.

Depending on the size and breed of the animal, a pet may be considered "elderly" around 8 or 10 years old. At that point, the pet will have special needs.

One of the things that veterinarians do for older pets is blood work, which looks for problems before they display themselves in the form of symptoms. Blood tests can identify early stages of kidney disease, liver disease, diabetes and thyroid problems. Once a problem has been identified, the appropriate treatment -- whether it be medical therapy, fluid therapy, or special dietary needs -- can be initiated.

If your pet is a mature senior or a geriatric, ask your veterinarian what you can do to make the latter years of its life some of the best.

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