

## **Schnoodles**

by Betty Rogers

In the summer of 1993 I'd come home from vacation to the disaster of being told my dog had died. In shock and grief, I somehow knew I needed to look in the newspaper and see if I could find another one.

And there was the ad: "The cutest!" Two little sisters, poodle mix. I called and the nice woman who answered said they were black, about 12 pounds, maybe a year old. She'd rescued them from the pound. "Oh," I said, "kind of small. And I've always had white dogs."

Wisely, she didn't reply and I decided it wouldn't hurt to look at them. So we made an appointment for the next morning. I was also in the process of buying a car, and needed to arrange to get poor Ramona back from the vet and buried.

I still remember meeting them so clearly. The rescuer was very pregnant. She said she worked with poodles and poodle mixes. When she'd first met her husband, he rescued German Shepherds. Something had to give, so they settled on poodles. She'd placed over 100 dogs and was a trainer in addition to her day job.

She said these two had been left at the pound for being "unsociable," but that she'd had them for a week and couldn't find anything wrong with them. They played with the cat and were very friendly. Did I want to see them?

Yes, please. So she went and got one of them, who came out wagging her tail and making a beeline to me. She was shy but game. Then came her twin, who danced up and started licking me enthusiastically. They sat together at my feet, watching me expectantly. "They look like little fire plugs," I said. Small but solid. In a word: adorable. I was hooked.

The rescuer asked me which one I liked better. I looked at her as if she were crazy and said, "How could I possibly break up this set?" We both laughed as I hugged the dogs happily.

Two mornings later, after putting Ramona to rest, I drove up in my new car to take them home. I remembered to ask what other breed they might be mixed with and the rescuer thought Schnauzer. Schnoodles! I was delighted by the word and it became their calling card.

I stopped at my brother's house so my five-year old niece could meet them. She was entranced and immediately picked up the shy one by her front legs. The little dog dangled resignedly until I snatched her back. Within an hour all three of us were snuggled in for a nap on the couch. So much for being unsociable, I thought drowsily.

I canvassed books and friends for names. They'd originally been called Skipper and Nipper and of course deserved better. From the beginning I'd thought of Nicki and Norah, since I was a fan of the old *Thin Man* movies. Too easy? I'd also liked Olive and Onyx, since they were black, but that sounded a little upscale somehow. Finally my niece said, "You can call them whatever you want, but I'm calling them Nicki and Norah." So that was that.

Well, they were perfect. Sweet tempered, funny, willing to go anywhere and try anything. Not rocket scientists, but they understood the dog door right away. They'd be waiting at the side gate when I drove up, then would race back into the house to meet me at the door, barking their unison greetings. We took road trips and innumerable walks together. They were a hit wherever they went.

Norah was the Show Dog: she could sit up on her hind legs, swaying gently. Nick was the Circus Dog who would jump repeatedly straight up into the air. Norah was the Leader of the Pack, although I never saw how she made that known. I always thought she might have been Nick's mom, rather than sister. She was the planet and Nick was her happy little moon.

Favorite Norah story: we were visiting friends at a lake house and were all out on the boat dock. Norah had trouble seeing, so I let out a small scream when she either fell or jumped off the dock. About half a dozen of us jumped in after her, calling her name. Ignoring us, she swam calmly and stalwartly to the shore. Nothing ever stopped her: she taught me much about courage and tenacity.

Favorite Nick story: one evening I changed clothes and uncharacteristically left my discards on the floor as I dashed out of the house. When I came home later, Nick was literally wearing my hot pink underwear. Somehow she'd gotten her head and one leg into them, and they wrapped her back like a bright bandana. This outfit was completed by a plumbago flower dangling from her ear. I'm not sure I've ever laughed as hard in my life.

At the end of 2000, I inherited another small dog from a friend. Mattie was also a Schnoodle, although much more of a silvery Schnauzer than my little black wavy-haired buddies. Mattie was their age and had ruled the roost as an only dog. I worried that there would be Issues, but Nicki and Norah gently made way for the newcomer. They taught Mattie about the dog door and how to go for walks without getting tangled together. They tried to show her how great raw vegetables are, but Mattie never bought that one. She had the good sense to know how lucky she was and settled in quickly.

Norah lived to be 12; I lost Nick when she was 14. I miss them immeasurably but take some comfort knowing they're together again. I read a quote by Will Rogers not long ago. He said if dogs didn't go to heaven, he wanted to go where they went. I like to think he's got his pals now and someday I'll see mine coming racing to meet me.

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