



Why senior dogs, often the last to be adopted, make great pets

Alice Mayn, inspired by a 12-year-old golden retriever named Lily, created a senior dog sanctuary and launched Saving Senior Dogs Week, which runs Nov. 4-10.



Alice Mayn, the founder of Lily's Legacy Senior Dog Sanctuary, says that dogs aged 7 and older offer distinct benefits to adopters.

Courtesy of Lily's Legacy Senior Dog Sanctuary

Nov. 6, 2019, 11:02 AM PST / Source: TODAY
By Jen Reeder

Alice Mayn only knew a golden retriever named Lily for about four months, but the time they spent together was life-changing — for the dog, the woman and countless other senior dogs.

Back in 2007 when Lily was 12 years old, she landed in an animal shelter in Sonoma County, California. Mayn volunteered to pick her up and foster her for a golden retriever rescue organization.

“She came out of the kennel and gave me a kiss,” Mayn, now 74, told TODAY.



At age 12, Lily exuded joy despite health challenges.
Courtesy of Lily's Legacy Senior Dog Sanctuary

Lily charmed Mayn and everyone who met her. She had a zest for life despite a host of health issues, including a nasal infection, tumor on one eyelid, seizures and a blood disorder. She even survived a case of bloat. A photo of Lily rolling on her back sums up the dog's personality, Mayn said.

“That's the epitome of who she was: just constant joy,” she said. “You know, 'Life is good. I may be really sick and I may be really old, but this is great. I love this.'”

Lily died in her sleep one night in 2008 with Mayn lying next to her, hand over the dog's heart. The next day — just six weeks shy of

retirement — she had the idea to create a nonprofit to help rescue and re-home senior dogs like Lily.

The name came to her immediately: Lily's Legacy Senior Dog Sanctuary.



Alice Mayn created the nonprofit Lily's Legacy Senior Dog Sanctuary in 2008 to honor her late dog, Lily. Here, she hugs another beloved dog, Max.
Courtesy of Lily's Legacy Senior Dog Sanctuary

It's quite a legacy. The nonprofit sanctuary spreads across five acres in Petaluma, California. The barn resembles a living room, with sofas, carpets and tables. Volunteers are on-site 24 hours a day to supervise the dogs, most of whom roam freely, and dedicated "cuddlers" spend time doing just that with the animals.

"We think these dogs should be treated like family pets and we get as close to that as we possibly can," she said. "It's a happy place."



Amy lived at Lily's Legacy Senior Dog Sanctuary before being adopted into a forever home with another standard poodle. The two "sisters" love each other.
Courtesy of Lily's Legacy Senior Dog Sanctuary

To spread awareness about the “joys and rewards” that senior dogs can offer, Mayn launched this year’s inaugural Saving Senior Dogs Week, which runs Nov. 4-10, in partnership with 10 other senior dog rescue groups across the U.S.

The nonprofits working together on the initiative include Albert's Dog Lounge in Whitewater, Wisconsin; Grand-Paws Senior Sanctuary in Acton, California; Homer J's Senior Dog Sanctuary in Reno, Nevada; Izzy's Place Senior Dog Rescue in Fort Collins, Colorado; Lionel's Legacy in El Cajon, California; Muttville Senior Dog Rescue in San Francisco; Old Dog Home in Conyers, Georgia; Peace of Mind Dog Rescue in Pacific Grove, California; Senior Dog Haven & Hospice in Wilmington, Delaware; The Roland Senior Dog Rescue Gang in Melrose, Florida; Vintage Pet Rescue in Foster, Rhode Island; and Vintage Paws Sanctuary in Sarasota, Florida.



Gunner, an 8-year-old Labrador retriever, was a stray who found a forever home through Lily's Legacy Senior Dog Sanctuary.

Courtesy of Lily's Legacy Senior Dog Sanctuary

Mayn hopes Saving Senior Dogs Week also draws attention to the fact that senior dogs are often the last to be adopted from shelters, though dogs aged 7 and older offer distinct benefits to adopters, she said.

“For the most part, they’re very easy to bring into a household because they’re settled. A lot of them are well-trained,” she said. “They’ve been through their puppy stages — they’re not chewing anymore; they’re not running.”



Rumour, a mastiff mix and "gentle soul," found a forever home where he is loved and spoiled.

Courtesy of Lily's Legacy Senior Dog Sanctuary

Some dogs wind up needing new homes because their owners can no longer care for them, like the 15 1/2-year-old pooch ("She acts like she's about 10!") whose elderly caregiver broke a hip and moved into an assisted living facility. Others are dumped on the streets. But no matter their backstories, the dogs tend to exude gratitude, Mayn said.

"You look in their eyes and you can see their behavior and you just know how grateful they are," she said.



Sara came to Lily's Legacy with some behavior issues in 2014. By the time they were corrected, she and Mayn had bonded; now she's a permanent member of the pack at Lily's Legacy Senior Dog Sanctuary.

Courtesy of Lily's Legacy Senior Dog Sanctuary

They're also resilient optimists. One dog named Stella has advanced heart disease because her former owners neglected her for several years, but she still wags her tail constantly. In fact, many Lily's Legacy dogs have had short life expectancies due to health issues but defied the odds and lived much longer thanks to medical care and love, she said.

“That’s the thing you learn from these dogs: No matter how bad things are, there’s something good out there. Relax and you’ll feel better,” she said. “What we get from these dogs, it’s just amazing. ... They deserve love and good care and happiness.”



A border collie named Charley came to Lily's Legacy for hospice care due to advanced kidney disease. Mayn says Charley didn't know he was sick and thrived for about eight months longer than expected, playing ball right up to the end. "He was an inspiration," she told TODAY.

Courtesy of Lily's Legacy Senior Dog Sanctuary

Mayn hopes Saving Senior Dogs Week leads to increased collaboration among senior dog rescue organizations so that more people consider adopting them as pets.

"None of us can do it by ourselves. None of us can save all the dogs," she said. "There are a lot of dogs out there that need to get saved and we just need to help each other and get more people involved. That's the only way it's going to work."

- Jen Reeder

<https://www.today.com/pets/saving-senior-dogs-week-celebrates-adopting-older-pets-t166558>

