

The Gabriel Chronicles

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could not sit still. Gabe is not like that. He seems to enjoy coming over and sharing a small space together. About that time, a gentle breeze began to stir. The sweat on my shirt began to feel cool. Gabe lifted his nose, testing the breeze for any interesting smells. We never saw the coyote, but it was hard to leave that peaceful spot. The breeze continued to cool us while birds flitted back and forth across nearby brush. I had noticed that some old-fashioned climbing roses were blooming in the distance, a remembrance of the old home place that was once here. If I had thought about it, I suspect that I could have felt my blood pressure drop. We enjoyed our spot for a while and then headed back. Somehow, I felt a little better for it.

CHAPTER 9

Swimming Lessons

It's true. I had been grievously derelict in my parental duties. Gabriel made it to almost seven months and had not been swimming. We had dabbled around the edges of lakes and ponds. He would cautiously wade out until he was about chest deep and then run back to shore.

It was time. He was a duck hunter. He needed to swim. Knowing Gabriel, he would have preferred to have his own doggie sized kayak, but that was more than my pride would allow. I have several hunting buddies who already think that he may be getting "a little" spoiled. So I loaded him into the truck and off we went. Riding in the truck is one of Gabe's favorite activities. For Gabe, every truck ride is the beginning of a new adventure.

We reached the lake and Gabe bounced from the truck running back and forth along the shore. There is a small beach by the boat ramp. It is approximately two hundred feet long and is covered in small gravel. It slopes gently into the lake. At one end of the beach is the boat ramp and dock. At the other end there is a bed of water reeds that forms a natural blockade. Gabe ran up and down the beach splashing happily in the shallows. It became apparent that, while he was having a great time, he wasn't going to venture into the deeper water. I called him over and gave him some petting and a few encouraging words of "good dog." At that point, I grabbed him gently around the body, held him parallel to the water and waded out to where it was approximately three feet deep. As I lowered him into the water, his legs churned madly. He seemed a little startled and frightened as he thrashed wildly and headed for the shore. He was approaching the beach when a transformation occurred. The legs began mov-

ing confidently. His head slipped through the water and he looked around him. He walked out of the water and onto the beach a different dog. I'm not sure when I have seen something "click" the way swimming did for Gabe. He shook himself off. His tail wagged. "This is not just fun, this is great fun." He turned back to the lake and attacked the water. As the depth increased his head plowed ahead with his chest pushing water aside like a tug boat. He swam out approximately thirty feet and I called him back to shore. He reached the shore, turned around and charged out again. This went on for about twenty minutes and I could tell he was getting tired, but he couldn't seem to stop himself. He was ecstatic. I finally waded out and hauled him back to shore. He did not want to leave the water, but regretfully followed me up the trail. When we reached the top of the hill, he had just begun to dry a little. This was nice since I had forgotten to bring a towel. My seat covers might yet be saved a complete soaking. If you have met Gabriel in previous articles, you realize the chances of that happening were nil. He turned to look at the lake and before I could grab him ran madly back to the beach and appeared to be heading for the other side of the lake – two hundred yards away. I hollered, called, cussed, pleaded and was preparing to swim after him when he turned back. It was a long distance and I was concerned about his strength. I waded out about fifty feet to meet him and held his collar until we reached the beach. I heaved him into my arms and carried him dripping back to the truck where he was unceremoniously pitched into the back seat. So much for the seat covers. By that point, I was exhausted while he seemed only disappointed. He sat against the window gazing longingly at the water. A gentle whine was followed by a resigned huff as he lay down.

We will return to the lake, but this time I will be prepared. I will have my "boogie board" in case I have to initiate a rescue mission. In my youth I was trained as a lifeguard, but, given the variety of detritus that Gabriel eats and chews, the idea of mouth-to-mouth resuscitation is.... Well, you get the idea.

CHAPTER 10

The Great Lee County Chipmunk War

By now you may have heard about this. I feel sure that, at some point, its fame will rank with the Hatfield/McCoy feud and the gunfight at the OK Corral. The combatants have assumed those rigid, inflexible positions that always lead to prodigious conflicts.

On one side you will find the army of the righteous – a nine month old Boykin pup appropriately named Gabriel. The op-

posing forces are intimidating. An army of striped villains has created a network of tunnels probably threatening to engulf house, yard, and no telling how much of the neighborhood. They ravage the bird feeders. No matter how often I spray the poles with Pam or WD-40 they continue to climb. They race across the yard and driveway with impunity. They build nests and crap in my boat during the winter. But, since they are also cute, I have tolerated their nuisance. The idea of stalking down this six inch long pest has not stimulated the hunter instinct in me. Not much meat anyway (but I bet they taste like chicken). They have had no fear – until recently.

Enter Gabe. And it is often an impressive entry. He's not selective. Doves, squirrels and, of course, chipmunks get his attention. He learned early on that a brazen charge through the doggie door did not produce results. The critters heard and saw him coming. Thus, he learned to stalk. The body flattens and crawls across the back porch. He gently pushes open the doggie door and eases out, keeping as low to the ground as possible. He slithers forward and, at the last second, charges. Round and round the yard whirl the protagonists. To date, there has been no mortal combat, but it has come really close. Gabe was hot on the trail of a feeder-robbing squirrel. The squirrel should have made an easy escape, but it executed one of those tactical errors that occasionally happen. Rather than jumping on the closest pine tree, it made a dash across the yard. Wrong choice! Gabriel's short legs are deceptive. He is really fast. He was rapidly closing on the squirrel. The squirrel made a desperate leap for the fence, avoiding Gabe's snapping jaws by a hair. A similar chase occurred when a chipmunk, cheeks packed with bird seed, chose to try and run across open ground. It was saved by a quick turn and the wet, slippery grass that sent Gabe rolling.

It has been fun. I can close my eyes and hear the fox hounds baying across the hills. Beagles bellow in joyous choruses. I know that it's only Gabe barking at a squirrel, but it is still sweet, sweet music to me. So, I hope you will stay tuned for the next adventure or misadventure with Gabriel. I do enjoy sharing them. It's kind of like therapy.



My Fearless Protectors

Karen Estes Lowry

A while back I left the big city and moved with my two Boykin Spaniels to live with my 85-year-old dad at his home in a beautiful National Forest. The quiet life in a Forest is not without adventures. Two very large owls share the yard and they keep surprising me with how well-hidden they are when sitting in the trees and how startling they are when they suddenly take flight. Several neighbors have seen a pair of foxes. He hasn't been by lately, but a while back there was a black bear making the rounds. A few weeks ago Dad killed a small, non-poisonous snake that had somehow gotten inside the house, and a few weeks later he killed a medium-sized very poisonous water moccasin way too close to the house. There's almost always at least one lizard on the outside of the porch screen. And Thursday afternoon when I opened my car door a little green tree frog tried to hop inside.



This morning Bean saw a movement and heard a flutter under a chair in the bedroom. He started barking like crazy and I came close to panic. Both dogs stared at the space under the chair, sniffing, barking, and growling. I located a flashlight, terrified of what I might find. Even with a flashlight, I couldn't see anything, but the dogs were sure something was under there. Bean is by no means aggressive, but I reluctantly gave him the OK to go in and get whatever it was he sensed under the chair. With the same caution he had used the day he found the water moccasin, Bean went in and pounced. Then triumphantly gave me the offending plastic bag. Evidently, the breeze from the ceiling fan had blown it under the chair. I praised both dogs for their bravery and gave them a treat.

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In Loving Memory of Gus





UWP GRCH Hollow Creek's Gus CGC
 Otis the Boykin Spaniel and his parents, Magda and Greg, send a special thanks to the grand Gus, who recently passed to the Rainbow Bridge. It was this web picture of you, Gus, that led us to Pat and the Hollow Creek Kennel, and then ultimately to our beloved Otis. We are eternally grateful to you, Gus!

In Loving Memory of . . .

Bozz

