

“Barnie”
The Labrador-Pitbull Mix Dog
(1980-1995)

By Dr. Sharon Greenleaf La Pierre
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This is a special chapter to this book because it changed the course of my educational pursuits and eventually made positive changes in research issues. Human beings think they dominate the corner on courage and strength, as well as inspiration. Not so. This chapter focuses on a dog, a mixed breed dog of no special kind, who we named Barnie. He struggled with immense pain for years in a research facility to finally end up in my



home as our companion. The pain imposed on him caused him to fight his fears to live a whole life because he wanted to be with us. This took courage for him to change his behavior and struggle to be normal. This is Barnie’s story and how his fortitude made a difference beyond being a dog.

One day I got a call to rescue this dog that was going to be put down. He was at a local hospital in Denver, Colorado which used many dogs for research. The woman who called me was the hospital photographer and a friend. She asked me if I could help. I was told that the dog had little time left because he had been taken home by one of the doctors for his family, but could not function so was returned. I went down to the hospital on a Sunday afternoon with the intention of placing this animal in a home. I was ushered into the basement of the hospital that was full of dogs being used for research. My heart just sank because I thought

there must be other ways to get at this data rather than using live beings. I had to maintain my focus to help this animal and others like him.

I put Barnie into my car and started home. He just shook with fear. For the next three years, my husband and I hand-fed him because he could not eat out of a bowl. I was unable to place this dog because of the trauma he had endured in the research setting. This beautiful Black Lab-Pitbull mix had been used for various kinds of research projects for almost five years, including food deprivation studies and lung transplant surgeries. This was the most I was able to discover about his past life when I picked him up. I searched for more details after bringing him home and watching his difficult behavior.

Barnie had been zapped with electricity every time he took food from a bowl. My understanding was the electrodes were hooked up to his testicles which were then larger than normal in appearance. We never had him neutered because of the trauma and chose to leave well enough alone. Barnie was only able to eat dry dog food thrown on the ground. He would grab a bite, run for safety, and then violently shake. In regard to food, every time he tried to eat from his bowl, he was electrified by researchers. I learned that he had electrical impulses hooked up to various parts of his body to test his pain level and explore how much pain he could endure. For five years this kind of experimentation consumed the daily life of this animal, being committed mainly by graduate students under supervision for the purpose of learning to do research.

After three years of hand-feeding and much love, we brought in an animal trainer to help us teach Barnie to eat from a bowl. This is called desensitizing or retraining him to be non-reactive to the treatment imposed on him, if that was at all possible. Within one week, he was feeding himself, but what a week! We had to leave him fend for himself and not offer hand-feeding. It was difficult to hear him cry. The turning point in this dog's life was when he got on the bed to sleep with us at night. He would snuggle with his legs around my husband's head....every night for 10 years. He felt secure and safe, transforming his behavior.



Barnie lived to be 15 years old and eventually had to be euthanized for testicular cancer. He was approximately five years old when I picked him up from the hospital. We were blessed to have had him for 10 years. He was sweet, joyful, and full of soul.

At the time of this rescue, I was working on my doctorate in curriculum leadership at the University of Denver and partly at Stanford University. I had to take research method classes as part of my degree qualifications. What I found was that I wanted to emphasize in research and be involved in ethical study methods for children and animals which emphasized the issue of responsibility in regard to methodologies and reporting. That is a mouth full, but this issue needed to be addressed by professors teaching research procedures. Responsibility for research design was a major issue in my mind. Barnie had so impacted my life, that I was determined to find other ways to accomplish ethical research and to teach graduate students other ways and what taking responsibility for methodology means. That became the emphasis of my studies.

Through the years I have directed a graduate program, sat on a university's research board, peer reviewed articles for research journals as an editor, served as President of a national research organization in my field, received a Kellogg Post-Doctoral Research

Fellowship, and wrote a research book on methods and methodologies for graduate level, always working to teach ethical treatment for animals and to discover other ways and means to accomplish studies. My writings and lectures included the practice of standardized methods for research studies. I always drove home the fact that the researcher must take responsibility for the safety and well being of the subjects being studied. This is how one special dog made a difference in my life and the lives of others.

Currently, the technological revolution has opened up explorative methods that do not require the use of animals, in my opinion. Many things can be accomplished by learning on the job through observational studies and experience. It has been hard to change the attitude of using animals for research by students because it is built into our educational system, our drug development system, and our belief system. My contention is that if animals are used we must be ethical and not just inflict unnecessary pain for the sake of it; and, there must be a time limit as to how long such experimentation can go on with one subject. At this time there are now several veterinary schools that do not use vivisection. We, as humans, believe we have the right to treat other living beings in this manner to save ourselves because we are better. I could not believe this way after knowing Barnie and his tremendous struggle and the gift of loyalty and love he eventually showed us. When an innocent being trusts, breaking this trust will have consequences within our society. We will lose our sense of what is right, in my opinion.