

## **A Tribute to Mr. Jazz**

*By: Lisa Mingo*



My husband Randy and I adopted Jazz in September of 2005 after reading a story in our local paper about a family that was fostering a hurricane Lab in our town. I went to the Labs4Rescue web site “just to look” and was drawn to a photo listing for a 10 year old black Lab named Jazz. I was smitten. There was something about him – a soulful dignity embellished by his salt and pepper beard (think Sean Connery wearing a silk smoking jacket with a pipe in his mouth!). Jazz was a former drug sniffing dog who just wanted a place to retire and relax. Instead, he ended up an elderly dog in a high kill shelter amidst hurricane chaos in Louisiana.

Sandy and Erin from the rescue group opened their hearts to him and sped him along to us in New England. From their brief time with him, they both mentioned to me separately that there was “just something about him” that captured their hearts. After all he had been through, he was still so grateful, trusting and proud.

He immediately settled in upon arrival to our home by finding the cushy dog bed in front of the sliding glass door and collapsing in the sun with a whoosh of an exhale. The next morning he was up at 5:30am (ugh) with his tail wagging in a circle(!) ready to start the day. Over the next few months, he chased the ducks in our pond, patrolled the edge of the woods for good smells, endured his first northern winter and got spunky enough to “counter surf” so to enjoy a loaf of bread, bag of peanuts, an iPod with headphones, and a pack of gum. I swore his age was a typo on the Petfinder.com listing and his white beard was spray painted on. His age only revealed itself around 7:30pm each evening when he would quietly sneak upstairs and climb onto his dog bed in our bedroom for the night.

After seven months with us, Jazz was diagnosed with cancer. He had become anemic and given his age and the depth of the tumor in his chest, surgery was not an option. We were strongly urged to think about putting him down sooner rather than later as his health would rapidly decline because the cancer had spread to his lymph nodes. We never had to make this kind of a decision for one of our animals before and were paralyzed by our emotions. In spite of our promise to Jazz that we would take the best care of him possible, we realized as the week went on he was losing his dignity and pride as his illness progressed. Our emotions ranged from hysterical sadness, guilt, anger and finally responsibility. We realized we owed it to him to put an end to his pain out of gratefulness for all the joy he brought to our home. That sounds kind of odd doesn't it? We had just experienced pet ownership full circle for the first time in our lives.

We were so blessed to have shared those seven months of his noisy sneezes, slurpy drippy water drinking, heavy pawed shuffling across the hardwood floor, and hard hitting drops onto the couch with a big sigh. The house is too quiet now without him.

To those who thought we were crazy for adopting a 10 year old dog and to those who hear of his passing and brush it off because of his age, I can't say strongly enough that you have absolutely no idea what you are missing. I urge you to open your heart and mind to the experience of adopting a senior dog. Being housebroken, trained, and mellow combined with the grateful companionship they have to offer pales in comparison to the possible short time they might have to spend with you.

Take the chance. You will not regret it.

