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Blind trust

Handicapped dog wins hearts

Published Sun, Aug 29, 2004

BY KAREN ANDERSON
Special to the Gazette

This is the story about a wonderful dog and the many lives she has touched.

AllicksBlindPup was born Nov. 1, 2003, and that's when I sprouted wings and flew to a world I never knew existed -- the world of the so-called "lethal white" in Australian shepherds.

A lethal white is a homozygous genetic defect and while I knew nothing of this world before Nov. 1, I now know more than most.

A lethal white occurs in about 25 percent of the merle to merle-bred births. These pups are routinely destroyed by the breeder before the first breath is drawn as they will bring down the value of the sire/dam and entire litter. We're talking show dogs, folks -- big money dogs.

Lethal whites continue to surface as some of them survive infancy, only to find they are blind or deaf or both. The word "lethal" comes from the fact that to be a lethal white is a death sentence to the afflicted pup. As people become more aware of the genetic defect,

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Karen Anderson snuggles up to Allicks. About 25 percent of Australian shepherds are born with a form of congenital disabilities and are labeled "lethal whites."

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Megan Lovett/Gazette

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it's hoped that the lethal defect will die out, naturally, through education.

Though 9-month-old Allicks is blind she's not mentally impaired; she responds to non-verbal touch commands for actions like "sit" and "lay down."

[+ Enlarge Image](#)

The story of Allicks began three years before her birth. Following the death of my mother, I did something I had never done in all my life -- I bought a dog. I didn't adopt from a shelter.

My Jason Dundee was a magnificent show dog and I was thrilled to finally live a life's dream, to show a dog. He was a red merle with icy blue eyes. At the age of 15 months, he was stolen and that began a nightmarish year. Six months later I bought another Aussie, his female twin. Jaycee Dundee was a beautiful deep red merle with hazel eyes.

Then, by the grace of God and the courage of the Beaufort County Sheriff's Office, namely Sgt. Patricia Wright and Cpl. Beverly Bush, Jason was rescued from a house full of dogs.

After spending weeks in a hospital recovering from every ailment known to dogs, Jason came home and I believed in my dream again. Then Jaycee went into heat. I didn't know it but Jason did. I had never had puppies and never wanted to have them, but here was another journey we had to take.

Allicks was the fourth pup born sometime before midnight, after 12 hours of labor by Jaycee. Allicks was the lethal white Australian shepherd and the only female in a litter of four, with three perfect, magnificent brothers.

The pups went in for their first shots at three weeks and the doctor confirmed my fears: Allicks was blind, and maybe she had a tumor on one eye. We went to another doctor who confirmed that "there is no way this dog can see" but the growth in her eyeball was merely a cyst, and not a tumor.

Allicks' adoptive family backed out when her blindness was diagnosed, but they did adopt her beautiful blue-eyed brother, Auzzie. All the brothers were adopted, and I looked for a home for Allicks, one with fewer dogs and a family who could care for her with the level of attention she could not get with all the dogs in my house.

In the meantime, Allicks began private puppy lessons in Bluffton. Joan Gormley, the trainer there, believed Allicks could be taught basic obedience, as she was quite bright and responsive. So, at the age of 3 months, Allicks began class.

Gormley and I were both in disbelief at the rate at which Allicks learned and retained. One or two demonstrations, and that little blind pup had it down! She was a beautiful white puppy and people stopped in their tracks to remark on her beauty. I had two offers for homes for her, one of which I accepted. With the heaviest heart, I packed Allicks' suitcase to go to her new home after class one Saturday. To my delight and relief, the new family did not show up! I cried all the way home, and realized I could never give up this miracle that I had been blessed with.

I found adoptive homes for my Australian shepherds in the mountains of North

Carolina, running with the horses. They are both living in Aussie heaven and I will never again fear the dognapping that has plagued me since Jason came home. Now they are free to run as they haven't been able to here where it is simply too dangerous.

Allicks is the first graduate of puppy school and she was feted with her diploma, flowers and cake and photos at her graduation, following eight weeks of private puppy lessons. Gormley believed in her, loves her, cares about her. It was so incredibly bittersweet, the pride in the accomplishment, and the moving on to bigger things, but Allicks is going to miss her Annie Sullivan so much.

The entire staff knows and loves Allicks. When she was injured, she got a get-well card from the staff wishing her well and praying for her recovery that brought tears to my eyes. They love my baby girl, and she loves them. That is the magic of AllicksBlindPup.

The world of the lethal white, as I have found is a magical place. It is filled with love, laughter, silliness -- oh, and love, ability and agility and did I mention love? I have the most wonderful gift in my life, AllicksBlindPup, who is very precious to me. She delights me, she gives me the most fantastic "proud parent" moments. My heart sings her song. She is a gift from God, and I thank Him for selecting me every single day.

Beyond mere words, mortals could never understand this place we inhabit -- Allicks' world.

I met another magical lethal white, Rosalie -- "Rosie" for short. She is deaf and blind. She roamed the streets for more than a week (never getting hit by a vehicle), survived a stay in a kill shelter and was rescued. She was covered in about 500 ticks.

The love Rosie has for her rescuerfoster mom is a wonder and privilege to behold. She smells "Mum" and stands on her hind feet for hugs and kisses. "Mum" pats Rosie's chest to say "Good girl, I love you," and Rosie sits at her feet.

Rosie swept my heart away and if I didn't already have a blind pup, I would beg her "mum" to let me adopt her. Rosie is still looking for her forever home.

Allicks and Rosie are but two of the most special dogs it has been my privilege to know. They are physically beautiful, they are emotionally tied to their families, they are capable of a wondrous love and loyalty -- in short they are "magic."

I believe Allicks happened to me so that I may spread the word: Beware, merle to merle is a death sentence to so many pups.

SUBHelp on the way

Also, if you meet a blind pup, or a deaf one, open your heart and your home. Don't live your entire life without the magic of a lethal white. There is a rescue organization, Aussie Lads in Arizona, devoted solely to educating the public and

rescuing the lethal white. It has been a wealth of information and education for me, and it is looking for homes for these miracle pups. It's story can be found on the Web, as can the special pups that have been saved.

I am sorry I lived my whole life before a blind pup came into my heart. I have to tell you -- I have been criticized for not "putting her down" -- for not destroying her because she wasn't perfect. All I can say, in response, is, hey, look in a mirror -- we'd all be at risk if we had to meet that criteria!

Yes, it's hurtful and hateful. Some people resent the time and money I devote to my heart's delight when I could be spending MY time and MY money on THEIR causes -- I was told this very thing. Others say, "Oh, the poor dog!" But until you have stepped into the world of the lethal white, you would never understand the wonder and enchantment we both experience every single day. I can't think of more than two humans I can say that about, and I ain't saying which ones ...

Well, I have some news. I have been asked to rescue a deaf/blind lethal white whose time will be short unless someone (and no one has) intervenes. I talked to Joan Gromley -- she was ecstatic at the idea of training another beautiful little lethal white.

I don't know how in the world I'm going to get him from Wyoming to South Carolina, but I'll figure something out. Looks like a calling has been found.

Karen Anderson of Beaufort will be getting a new blind pup for her household. Gabriel will be arriving soon to join a house full of cats and dogs.

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