

# Loving Victor

by Mary Montoya

My first dog as an adult was a rescued Rottweiler I named Victor. He was a year old, overweight, didn't know any commands and was completely devoid of manners. Being naïve, I took him anyway.

It didn't take long to find out all this dog needed was a lot of love and structure. Long walks took the weight off and playing in the yard with our young daughters taught him manners and gentleness. As Victor's personality emerged, I found myself falling in love with this dog. I took him everywhere with me and spoiled him rotten. Trips to McDonald's meant Victor could bark his order of two cheeseburgers. He even tried this tactic at drive-up bank tellers. The dog park was an endless supply of hugs and petting since Victor preferred the company of people. Camping, snow sledding and cross-country trips were all the more exciting with Victor around.

We moved from California to Minnesota taking Victor with us. He was great company during the long hours following my husband in the moving van. After buying our first house, Victor became well known in the neighborhood. He was so friendly people could not help stopping us and asking to pet him.

I trained Victor many tricks and he was soon a hit at local elementary schools. We started out going to our daughter's birthday parties at school. Victor would put on a great show sitting, rolling over, jumping and whispering. His big finale would be me pointing my finger and saying "bang". Victor would collapse to the ground with an audible moan "dying". This trick never failed to bring cheers and clapping. The parties soon progressed to teaching kids dog safety and training. Victor was a patient teacher and would follow the commands of every child, building their confidence. He dispelled many fears regarding Rottweilers.

After a few years, we added more rescue dogs to our family but Victor was my first so got special attention. His only quirk was an intense fear of thunder. This wasn't too big a problem in California but Minnesota was another story. Stormy nights meant a very large dog in our bed howling. It was a small price to pay for all the love he gave us.

One sunny winter day we were playing our favorite game, tag. Victor would playfully dodge me as I tried to tag his backside. As I lunged for the tag, Victor spun around to run and howled in pain. He was holding his front paw off the ground, unable to walk on it. My husband and I rushed him to the vet. There we got devastating news. Victor's leg had snapped in two. The cause; bone cancer. After many trips to the University of Minnesota, we had to accept that we had a very short amount of time left with our giant baby. Victor quietly endured weekly cast changes and blood tests. As the disease progressed, I applied morphine patches every other day trying to ease his pain and keep him with me a little longer.

Finally, the day came when I knew it was time to say goodbye. We called the vet and they said to come in when we were ready. Our daughter's each gave Victor a long hug showing him how much they loved him. We got in our van and took Victor to all his favorite places. A trip through the car wash perked him up and going to Mc Donald's revived his appetite. When we arrived at the vet, my husband took Victor for a walk letting him pee on every tree and pole.

We were brought into a quiet back room. I started to back out, changing my mind. He was doing so much better today. Karen, our vet, said we would have to go the car wash and Mc Donald's

everyday and even then he would quickly tire out. I sat on the floor next to my big boy and he lay down and put his giant head in my lap. Karen gave him the first of two injections. I panicked, my heart crying out. She quickly administered the second injection knowing faster was better. Victor took one final breath gently collapsing in my arms. I don't know how long we stayed there, Victor and me. It took a lot of gently persuading and the loving arms of my husband to get me to let go. This wonderful gentle giant was only six years old.

Not long after I went to the local shelter and brought home a dog. Some people asked how I could replace Victor so fast. I don't feel I replaced him. That space in my heart for loving animals was still there. Bringing new dogs into my life would not diminish my love for Victor it would honor it. By saving another dog or cat from a life in a cage or euthanasia I was keeping that part of me alive. We have lost more dogs to illness since Victor and we always bring home more, filling that space in our hearts and keeping our love for animals alive. I am a better person for loving Victor and I want to share that love with as many animals as I can.

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