



A Golden Rules

Biking buddy goes into high rescue gear

text by RUTHANNE JOHNSON ■ photos by ED LALLO

Lying face down on the pavement and unable to see anything but asphalt, blood, and his golden retriever, Paul Horton knew he was paralyzed.

The cool morning had started out as the perfect time for a leisurely bike ride after a long, hot summer. With a quick goodbye to his wife, the retired engineer had pedaled off with 4-year-old Yogi loping happily alongside.

The pair had always enjoyed a special bond. Yogi, named for the baseball legend, joined the Horton family as a pup, just before they moved from Katrina-devastated New Orleans to Austin, Texas, for retirement. He's provided sailing company for Horton and musical accompaniment for his wife, singing along to Shearon's piano-playing.

On this morning in late October 2010, they started on their customary circuit, which crossed through neighborhood woods and paved areas. Normally during these journeys, Horton would stop and throw sticks for Yogi to crash through the trees and retrieve. But this time, it was Horton who crashed. Failing to jump a curb he'd cleared more than 100 times, he flew over the handlebars and broke his C7 vertebra.

The wooded area off a dead end road was obscured from passersby, and Horton's wife wasn't expecting him for some time. Lying immobilized less than a mile from home, Horton remembered a wheelchair basketball game he'd watched 30 years before—and the gritty determination one of the players had shown when descending the long flight of steps outside the gymnasium. "I thought, 'Well, this won't be so bad. ... I can do this.'" But first he needed help.

He told Yogi to go home, knowing his wife would realize something was wrong if their dog returned alone. "He knows what 'Go home' means and what it means when I say 'Go find Shearon,'" Horton says. But he could still feel Yogi's presence.

As it turned out, Yogi kept running up the hill to a road open to traffic, then dashing back to check on him. When Yogi finally spotted Horton's neighbors walking their dog, he went into action. "It was completely out of character for him, this frantic barking," Horton says. "He didn't want to play with their dog or be petted. ... He would run up and bark, bark, bark and then give this look and action that dogs give that says, 'Follow me.'"

After finding Horton, the Tates called for help. But even after the ambulance sped off, Yogi refused to leave the scene until they lured him away with Horton's bike shoes.

Yogi stayed with the Tates while Horton was in the hospital. To cheer the moping pooch, they kept Horton's shoes. "I think it was important for him to have them here," says Maggie Tate.

Partially paralyzed, Horton now wheels around his neighborhood with a vigilant Yogi by his side.

Since their story hit the media, Yogi has received gifts from family, friends, and even strangers: gift cards, treats, ball throwers, window decals in his likeness, and a bed with the embroidered words "Our Hero." In The HSUS's fourth annual Dogs of Valor Awards, Yogi took Valor Dog of the Year and People's Hero honors. The couple proudly displays his trophies on a front table. "Most people ... come in and say, 'Oh, these are Yogi's trophies!'" says Shearon Horton. Then they can't help but pet the family's four-legged angel. ■



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