

# BAY WOOF

NEWS WITH BITE FOR BAY AREA DOG LOVERS

DECEMBER  
2008

## INSPIRATION IN OUR MIDST: RUBY

by Vicki Tiernan

*The following essay is excerpted from Almost Perfect: Disabled Pets and the People Who Love Them, ed. Mary Shafer, published by Enspirio House, an imprint of Word Forge Books, on October 1, 2008. The book is available at select bookstores and online. Visit [www.almostperfectbook.com](http://www.almostperfectbook.com) for more information.*

We are so very lucky to share the planet with them, they who are often our teachers mislabeled as “lesser beings.”

A recent sunny day drew me to Fort Funston, a stunning coastal oasis overlooking the bluffs of the Pacific in northern California, for a leisurely stroll and roll with Ruby, the twelve-year-old Canine American who owns my heart and my deepest admiration. Ruby now roller-commutes on wheels that stand in for rear legs. Those legs, once awesome in their power, are now ravaged by degenerative myelopathy (DM), a disease similar to multiple

sclerosis in humans.

On that stroll, we encountered a man who was entranced as he watched “RuRu” sail around on her wheels, ears perked excitedly so as not to miss a single note of the symphony she lives for: ocean, gulls, people.

“Well, nothing’s going to keep you down, now is it?” the man exclaimed, as she left him in the dust. He then smiled at me with great warmth and said, “Thanks for getting her out here. She inspires me.”

In vast understatement, I replied that she inspires me, too.

I get that kind of uplifting remark

a lot lately, and with all my heart I wish I could transmit the feeling it brings me to everyone reading this.

As Ruby rolls excitedly past—sometimes over—them along the path to nowhere in particular, folks often get the besotted look of those who have been gently reminded of something very important. Faces soften as they watch her excitedly going about her usual doggy pursuits, delighting in the simplest of things and refusing to yield a single iota of her joy to the horrific poison dart life has thrown at her.

“Ah, yes,” we remember, “When all else fails, there is still a day in the park, friends and new adventures.” There is always this.

DM is a dreadful predator, no question. Given the choice, I of course would have elected for Ruby to evade this horrific bullet, but the disease did strike. Yet, in its destructive



wake, we who are lucky enough to know Ruby have been offered a valuable insight on perspective from a most unassuming teacher.

Some folks are apologetic about asking questions they surmise—correctly—I’ve answered many times before. Truth is, I never tire of talking about Ruby’s struggle and how she has met it with plucky persistence

at every turn, free-wheeling over virtually every obstacle in her path and acting for all the world like she doesn’t even know she’s disabled. In the telling of Ruby’s story, my own sense of optimism and inspiration reawakens, and it happens each and every time.

In her younger years, Ruby—half Lab, half Dobie—was a blur of wind and rapture. She crested waves of dune at Fort Funston effortlessly, defying all laws of physics and gravity, sheer

DIRTY CONT PAGE ??

### RUBY FROM PAGE 6

joy filling every pore. Nothing made her happier than chasing down—at breakneck speed—any object that left my hand and landed elsewhere, anywhere.

When Ruby first became wheel-bound at the age of eleven, I worried that she might feel left out if she saw other dogs chasing Frisbees, her most cherished activity in former days. As it turns out, this is not an issue. Not in the least.

“I’m past that now, Mom,” her demeanor seems to say, “and my wheels are just as cool as any Frisbee.”

At the same time, Ruby is not above using her new station in life to mooch an obscene array of dog treats on every walk. She rolls on up to smiling passersby and flashes a look of “How can you not give cookies to a dog on wheels?” Works every time.

When we get home from our walks, we negotiate the two flights to my apartment with Ruby walking on front legs, hind end elevated by me, via a sling under her belly. I think about the level of agility and trust required for her to accomplish this, and it amazes me. Yet we do it at least twice a day every day, my awesome little teammate and I.

Prone to viewing the world all too often through the smoked lens of depression, I feel so grateful for the simple yet profound glimpse of other perspectives offered up by a creature who no doubt will glean gold from her life experience, however limited, to the very last day.

I know that at times, this valuable lesson will be lost in the quagmire of everyday life. The clarity I experience from a meditation sitting often lasts about as far as the ride home. Yet

I know also that the picture of the indomitable Ms. Ru rolling gleefully through life will become a golden thread within the fabric of my cosmology, a shining image that will resurface from time to time to remind me anew of what is—when all else falls away—important. In this and many other ways, my little friend and spiritual teacher will live on forever.

Meanwhile, back on the physical plane, I’m reminded often of late that we don’t get to play this game for keeps, Ruby and I. It gives me great comfort to know that she’s never happier than when exploring new worlds. I hope she will leave her wheels and me behind as easily as she discarded her Frisbees, as she completes her earthly adventure and moves on to explore whatever the next bend in the road might hold. I hope she leaves with the sense that

I’ve given her as much as she has given me.

Creating fitting final tribute to such an extraordinary spirit will be no small challenge. I hope I can find the most eloquent words that ever worked their way to paper. What comes to mind right now is simply to say: Thank you, THANK YOU, Universe, for letting her set with me a spell.

*Vicki Tiernan is a 35-year resident of San Francisco and an active member of SFDOG. Her current canine companion, Lula, came into her life via Grateful Dogs Rescue.*

DIRECT EXCERPT FROM “ALMOST PERFECT” - BAY WOOF NEWSPAPER