

# A Breeder's Rescue Story – Of Hope

By Club Member Patti Conroy

*My recent litter of Golden puppies had gone home just a couple weeks ago. The puppy room had been cleaned and disinfected, though the whelping box was still up. I just needed to put everything away until next year. Then came the call. Little could I anticipate what the months ahead would bring... the horror...the pain...and the hope.*



It came in the afternoon while I savored a rare moment of relaxation. A local Golden rescue group phoned, asking me to care for a mother and five surviving babies (of eight) found 300 miles away in Buffalo. A backyard breeder had purchased male and female Golden Retrievers to make some money, with no concern for the dogs. How many times have we heard this? How many times does this happen that we *don't* hear about? He'd allowed the two to breed at will, and when the mother and puppies became ill, turned them out to fend for themselves...or perhaps to die. A neighbor, alerted by the crying puppies, asked the rescue organization to pick them up. Otherwise, she'd take them to the local shelter.

The rescue volunteer offered to drive them cross-state to my home near Albany. My first reaction was, "Why me?" I asked why someone in Buffalo, or a "rescue person" in my own area, couldn't take them. She quickly explained the Golden mother was very thin and "not in good shape," and the babies, too, were going to need medical care. No one anywhere could make this magnitude of commitment. Those who might, were already filled to the brim with other foster Golden Retrievers.

I remembered the box was up, clean and ready. If I were ever in position to do something like this, it was now. Just recovering from the ones gone home, I dreaded the thought of more puppies. I dreaded trying to explain this potential major life-interruption to my husband and son...both very happy the recent litter was gone. I asked the young woman to call again with more details, and told her I would consider becoming involved. I hung up, feeling I must be nuts. What was I thinking??? If I said "No" — surely *someone* else would do the right thing and take them in.

But no one could. Or no one would. I received more details. Mom weighed about 32 pounds. She had little if any milk, and was suffering severe mastitis. The five rescued babies (one girl and four boys) were in serious condition. Several would need legs and tails amputated...if they lived. Decisions needed to be made. The young woman on the phone sounded obviously shaken in the presence of what she was viewing in Buffalo. No, her voice was more that of someone in shock. She wasn't prepared for what she was seeing, and realized the puppies wouldn't last the night if delivered to a shelter.

I came to the conclusion that if decisions had to be made for these little ones and mom, I could at least commit to that.

I told her to bring them to me.

Reality didn't set in until a stressed and exhausted young woman arrived and began to carry in what appeared to be day-old pups (actually 2-3 weeks old), hanging limp like rag dolls in her hands. I thought I was totally prepared for a litter of puppies and a mother. Whelping box cleaned again, papers down and clean lamb's wool blankets on top. Heating lamps and pads were in place, ready to do their job. Dishes were down in the puppy room, ready to be filled with whatever mom was eating. My baby scale and notepad were out. I had colored ribbons snipped and waiting to code each baby. I was ready to do this...until I saw those little rag dolls. My God...were they even still alive? My God...what had I committed to? Oh My God!

I took the first, a boy. He was alive, but with horrible wounds to his cheek, ear, legs and tail. What the *hell* had *happened* to these babies? Next came the other boys, each weighing from two to three pounds. They were supposed to be *three weeks old!* My husband, who usually "tolerates" this doggy-rescue business at best, stepped forward with his mouth open.

Last came the little girl, hanging limp, not moving. One look told me to not even bother weighing her. I heard Hubby's voice, telling me to note the gray feet and gums...and a tail so rotten-looking, as though it was about to fall off. We told the young woman to rush her immediately to the Capital District Emergency Clinic, but she would likely not make it through the night...certainly not here. Off she went, still shaking from her long and stressful trip across upstate New York.

I felt so sorry for that dear child this night, certain she'd be returning...*without* the little girl.

Next, the mom Golden came down the stairs to meet me. That's when I couldn't maintain my composure any longer. I simply broke down and cried. I caught glimpse of a tear in my husband's eyes too, this man that rarely can cry. Kallie was her name, and she immediately came over and nuzzled me...as if to assure *me* everything would be all right. At that moment, as I looked into her face, I felt as though God was truly testing me. Kallie had the face of a saint. She looked at me with wisdom far beyond her years. My eyes wandered down the rest of her body and I began to sob out loud. She was a skeleton with skin and fur. I could see no mammary glands full with milk. All I saw was a very young, starving, female Golden Retriever with the face of an angel. Then and there I promised her I would do all I could for her and her children... no matter what.



**Only five Golden puppies from a litter of eight survived abandonment by a backyard breeder.**

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# A Breeder's Rescue Story...

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I finished weighing the babies, noting all their wounds. I filled Kallie's dish with puppy food and added supplements for her grossly malnourished condition. I got out the milk replacement and weaning formulas for the puppies. I knew immediately the pups would need to be force-weaned for their own survival, as well as for Kallie's. I was preparing the four boys' dinner when the young rescue volunteer returned with the little girl...*still alive!* And moving a bit now. Loaded up with sub-q fluids and antibiotics, the vet had said she'd make it through this first night, but at the very least would lose her tail.

My dear girlfriend came and, after viewing the horrendous sight, promised to help me through this. No — to help *Kallie and her babies* through this. We vowed that saving all legs and tails would be our ultimate goal.

I placed down the weaning formula mixed with a little warm water and milk replacement. The puppies dragged themselves over to the dish GI-Joe style, and it was quickly lapped up, even by the weak little girl. There would be no "force weaning" needed here. They were starving. About then I realized a possible cause of their wounds. I came to believe these babies had been sucking each other's legs and tails in starvation. I think the other three had simply starved to death. I wished we could have found them all a day sooner.

I awoke two hours early and went to bed two hours later every night. I went through my day at work like some zombie, doing exactly what I was supposed to do but just making it through. If I told them at work, they would never believe me anyway. Clavamox, morning and evening, for each baby and mom. Novasan soaks at least twice daily (three on the weekends). Every puppy would need each wound soaked in warm water mixed with Novasan solution for 15 minutes, until it ruptured. Then each would have to be squeezed and drained. I cried...and Kallie cried...and each puppy cried. We all cried together each morning and evening. But at least we were all still able to cry.

Day after day it was the same, not knowing if I would come down those stairs and find living or dead puppies. Day after day, my only thread of hope was their weight gain, the scales tipping heavier each morning and night...a fraction of an ounce at a time. A glimmer of light at the end of a very long tunnel, a sign I'd made the right decision to do this instead of putting them all down as was recommended by some breeder acquaintances.

Arriving home from my 45-hour per week job, the most wonderful "vision" was that of my friend's behind sticking out of the whelping box — cleaning up puppy papers, preparing for medication and soaks, holding and rocking babies. And loving and feeding and medicating Kallie. I don't think I could have done this without her help. Certainly I couldn't have done it without her moral support.



**With three weeks of intensive foster care, Kallie and puppies began to exhibit signs of recovery from the trauma of near-starvation.**



Late one evening, as I soaked the little girl's tail, she screamed and began to shake terribly. Her tail had zipped open from base to tip. The bone was exposed. It drained completely, all at once. The pain was obviously horrible and unbearable. Again I cried, Kallie crying by my side — but realizing I was helping her child, as I walked and rocked the little girl until she stopped shaking. I packed her tail with antibiotic cream and moved on to the next puppy. It was after midnight and I was exhausted. If she lost the tail, then she would lose the tail. I was losing it...too tired to care any more.

I went to bed...stomach sickened at the sight of the puppy's tail split from end to end, and her pain-filled face — a face that shouldn't have to know such pain. The sick feeling deep inside me wasn't about being nauseated at the puppy's physical condition but rather the horror of what this little being had to endure. I struggled through another sleepless night with that image. Dear God...had I made the wrong choice for these little ones?

Next morning, with little spirit, I went down to check on the baby girl. Dreading the sight not only of the disease-severed tail, but also that gut wrenching look in her eyes, I approached the whelping box. She

was there, where I had left her the night before. But that was about all that was the same.

That little puppy stood upright. Life and joy filled her eyes as she *wagged* her now-healing tail! Refusing to surrender, driving not just to survive — but to thrive.

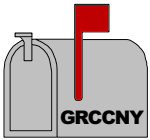
That moment crystallized my view of things.

I broke down again, though this time with happy tears, and christened "Hope" — for the hope I had for her, the hope she gave me that morning, hope for the entire litter, and Kallie too. Kallie's mammary glands were becoming less inflamed and it appeared she might be getting milk. I found her lying-in with her children. Her wise eyes pierced my soul. This was the beginning of *their* healing...and mine. Yes, we were *going to do this*.

As the weeks wore on, my dear friend showed up every day to help, even when she was sick. The rescue volunteer came as often as she could, at least a couple of times per week, to help and see how all were doing. She was surprised and extremely excited to see Hope still had her tail, and the boys — now named Tyler, Ace, Monte and Blue — still had their tails and legs too. Kallie had put on several pounds but nursing was slowing her weight-gain. I began to limit her time with the babies, and began introducing her to my family, both canine and human.

Kallie behaved the way I expected her to behave with the introductions. She was totally submissive to all my Golden Retriever and Cavalier King Charles Spaniel girls. She allowed each to visit her children. She stood watchfully nearby, permitting them to actually tend to her babies, licking ears, eyes, and behinds. My girls seemed to *know* these weren't just ordinary puppies. They knew they were in trouble and were ill. It was quite an experience to witness these interactions. All went well

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## Members write...

I just had to write and thank all involved in making a wonderful first time venture for us at Fun Day. It was a great experience for my son, Steve, "Phoebe," and me. We couldn't have had a lovelier day — perfect!

**Sue Whiton** - Cazenovia, NY

Just dropping a note to let you know what a wonderful time I had at my first Fun Day. The games were lots of fun (except for that raw egg...yuk!). The treats were yummiie, and I was just so proud to march in the Rescue Parade. Next year I'm going to try to become a Canine Good Citizen. I can't wait!

**"Topper,"** owned by **Terry Pelose** - Syracuse, NY

## A Breeder's Rescue Story...

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and we continued to heal and grow.

Kallie began spending peaceful nights in our bedroom, knowing her children were fully tended-to and content. We received word from the rescue group that Kallie's young "husband" was in a foster home here in town, receiving medical care, lots of love and gaining weight. As soon as he gained sufficient weight and strength to be neutered, the foster family would adopt him. They just couldn't let him go.

As time passed, the chores increased. Healing scabs turned into "chew toys" for the puppies, now each sporting quite the set of baby teeth. This became a new source of infection and several more trips to the vets were necessary. Changes in antibiotics and additional assessments of legs and tails were required since the vets felt amputation may still be the end result for some.

I kept clinging to the fact that as long as the limbs were warm — there was circulation. Where there was circulation — there could be healing. The vets were amazed at the puppies' progress and still in disbelief over Hope's tail, which she could now wag almost to the tip.

At seven weeks, the puppies were fully weaned and their weight up to normal for their age. The phone began to ring off the hook with honest, well-intentioned prospective adopters, and some just wanting a "cheap Golden pup." One woman, after hearing their history, said if they'd be scarred anywhere, she wasn't interested. I responded curtly that she was certainly not worthy to own one of these special puppies if a scar was even an issue, and quickly hung up.

One by one, each of them went...to the most wonderful and carefully screened homes. Tears filled new owners' eyes as they heard the story. One little boy cuddled his puppy and promised in a whisper that he would take care of him "forever and ever and ever!"

Last to leave were Hope and Kallie. Unconsciously, I'd become fiercely protective of them both. Only the most perfect homes would do.



**Love Given and Received: Kallie and Patti Conroy's son, Joey, in an embrace.**

## 🎀 BRAGS! 🐕 BRAGS! 🎀

### NEW AKC CD WITH OUTSTANDING SCORES

**Ann Lynn** reports Riker (*Regina's Number One Am/Can CD JH WCX*) completed his American CD at the SOTC trial June 9. In typical modesty she wrote, "He did a very nice job for an undertrained dog ... finished his title with good scores: 196.5, 195, 197."

### THREE NEW AKC TITLES

**Maxine Clark**, participant in the Club's recent field workshop series, and Minnie (*Adirondac Miss Minnehaha CDX JH OA NAJ*) quickly put newly learned skills to work and earned a Junior Hunter title. Same weekend the pair also completed an Open Agility title. Just one week later Maxine, this time with Polly (*Adirondac Polliwog JH CGC*) earned yet another JH title.

A lovely couple from New York City, with an older rescued Golden boy, was selected for Hope. They knew her story, accepted the responsibility of continuing her intensive medical care — including morning and evening tail and leg soaks, oral antibiotics and consistent vet management. Otherwise, she was a beautiful and well-adjusted puppy. I loved the couple as soon as I met them, and cried for a solid hour after Hope left. Not until they called upon arriving home did I begin to relax.

Kallie now lives locally with a single professional woman and her son. She goes to work every morning with her new owner and provides canine therapy to dying hospice patients. Her angelic face, combined with her mature manner and natural understanding, now renders comfort to others. How ironic is that? Soon, she'll have gained enough weight to be spayed, and I'm optimistic she'll live out her life in this home she so richly deserves.

It's seven months since they all went home, and I've heard often from all the new owners. Everyone is doing super, each finding very special places in their owners' hearts. I often think of Kallie, Hope, Ace, Monte, Tyler and Blue. Kallie's face still haunts me. Unnerved in recalling I'd almost said "No" to taking her in — I wonder now if I passed the test I'd been given.

I hope my continuing efforts to educate dog owners will help prevent even one person from doing what was done to Hope, her mother and siblings. I pray we all will find the time to help... all the other "Hopes" of this world.

*Thank you Patti, first for sharing this story — and even more so for the incredible miracle you performed in saving these Golden lives. Your selfless deed of mercy epitomizes the meaning of the oft-used phrase, "Giving Back" to our Breed. We're proud to have you as a member!*

*For those who may be wondering — this rescue occurred in October 2000. Patti continues to stay in touch with all adopters. The puppies are now nine months old and thriving; Kallie attained her rightful weight of 65 pounds and has subsequently been spayed. Patti promises photos for a follow-up story in the future. -RC*