

KAYLA : Love + Patience + Assistance = Success

BACKGROUND:

In January 2009 AMC UK Malamute Rescue were called upon to help save another special dog's life. Kayla's previous owners purchased her for their eight-year-old son because he "liked wolves". They'd never had a Malamute before and knew nothing about the breed, how to socialise her and, importantly, how to integrate her with their existing dog.

After two years or so, the children started to lose interest in the dog and there were several fights with the family's Rottweiler. In addition, the mum in the family was taken ill.

After another fight with the Rottie, during which she was injured (though not seriously), the family decided to have Kayla put to sleep (PTS) at their local vets.

As with most vets in the UK, this knowledgeable professional refused to put down an otherwise healthy dog and called Many Tears Shelter, which was full, and finally the Dogs Trust, who ultimately contacted AMC UK Rescue through Julie Cox, a former Rescue Coordinator.

Unfortunately, Kayla lived in Aberystwyth, Wales, at the time—many, many miles from the nearest AMC UK volunteers. There were no shelter spaces available and, as usual, time was of the essence.

How to save this lovely girl? It wasn't going to be easy... ■



Dawn Williams writes:

When Cynthia from Malamute Rescue contacted us and asked whether we could foster Kayla "for a couple of days, naturally we said yes! We drove a few hours to what seemed like the middle of nowhere to meet the owners and collect Kayla from them. After getting lost a couple of times (who says satellite navigation is good?), we finally found the address and saw Kayla waiting for us patiently.

She was adorable. After a few teary 'goodbyes' from her owners, Kayla followed us to our car, jumped in the back, had a sniff around then looked at us as if to say "Right, where are we going then?"

When we finally reached our home late that evening, we took Kayla to her new kennel, fed her and let her settle for the night. My heart went out to her immediately. Her coat was filthy and stained with urine, but she had the most beautiful deep brown almond-shaped eyes, and a whopping big smile!

During the next few days, as Kayla settled, her behaviour proved to be worrying. She had both dog and cat aggression and she also had guarding issues over food, bed and toys. This meant she needed to find a special home, one with an experienced/dedicated new owner, so this delayed the re-homing process and we naturally agreed she

could stay with us until one was found.

January 2009 – May 2009

Kayla settled into her new routine and respected that Gwyn and I were the pack leaders - not her. We soon taught her to stop guarding her bed, food, toys and bones. She formed a bond with me in particular and loved nothing better than to go for a short walk or lie on the grooming table to be groomed.

The whole time we had to keep her separated from our other three dogs, as sadly each time we tried socialising, she just wanted to dominate and this led to a fight. Each time we went on a dog walk, we had to do it twice to separate Kayla from the others (we did this as Kayla was only 'a short-term foster' at the time, and we didn't want to risk upsetting the dynamics of our own pack).

Kayla had been with us for a

few months when Gwyn and I had to go away for the weekend. Rather than leave her at home while my family house/dog sat (and run the risk of a dog fight), we decided to book her into a reputable boarding kennel.

We thought this would be the safest option all-round. But when collecting Kayla at the end of the weekend, the kennel staff reported that she had terrible aggression issues, could not be trusted around people. We were shocked. Lots of questions went

continued overleaf...



KAYLA : Her Story (continued)

through our minds - why did she behave like this in the kennels but not at home with us? We had also asked the kennels to trim her nails while she was there too (my clippers aren't very strong), but they were unable to muzzle her in order to trim her nails—so that shows just how aggressive she was.

The only conclusion we can think of is that Kayla became very dominant-aggressive and guarded her kennel space - a very naughty girl - as this put the kennel staff in danger. We did feel sad when we heard their report, we thought her guarding had improved with the basic training we had given as a temporary foster home; sadly it seemed she hadn't learnt enough.

We updated Malamute Rescue of course, and explained Kayla's recent aggression in the boarding kennel. It was disappointing news; there are limits to what Rescue can do, particularly based on being as certain as possible that a dog can be safely and successfully rehomed. Sadly, there *are* cases which end in PTS "for the public good". But we couldn't give up on Kayla - we knew there was a calm and loving side to her and we believed that we could get her through this—could, once again, give her another chance at a successful life.

THE PROCESS BEGINS

It was such a stressful time for us. Kayla obviously didn't have a clue, and carried on enjoying her walks and grooming – but it's us humans who suffer the anxiety, isn't it? These magnificent dogs depend on us to know what to do—and we'd do anything not to let Kayla down.

To cut a long story short, Gwyn and I insisted that Kayla deserved a proper chance and that she stay with us (stubborn, I know!). After all, we had only fostered her on a short-term basis, but (a) she had already built a relationship with us and our family members, and (b) we had already achieved some positive results from the basic training we'd given as a temporary foster home. But, clearly, despite improving Kayla's



guarding issues, we hadn't totally eradicated them.

We wanted some extra time to thoroughly work on her, get professional advice, see what makes her tick, and see if we could train her properly. Malamute Rescue fully supported us. At the start of this journey, we weren't looking for another malamute, but seeing as Kayla so desperately needed another chance and she had bonded with us, we couldn't turn our backs on her.

After several calls and a few emails, Cynthia suggested that we contact Terry Bogue (Celticwolf Alaskan Malamutes) as he had experience with dog aggression and often consulted on difficult Rescue cases.

A phone call later, we loaded up our car, and took Kayla on the 300 mile round trip and overnight stay in South Wales (Kayla slept on the floor by my side all night, bless her). The following day Terry carried out an aggression-assessment and gave us his opinion. He also taught us how to react and deal with aggression. By the end of the session Terry took Kayla (on-lead) for a calm pack-walk with his five border collies (off-lead). We are ever so grateful to Terry for the time he devoted to us. Kayla probably wouldn't be here today without all his efforts.

We left Terry's with mixed emotions. We cared about Kayla, but it wasn't going to be easy; she needed a lot of training. And neither of us wanted to put our own dogs at risk. We agreed that as long as she accepted wearing a muzzle when needed, and continued to achieve positive results from our training, we would give her 100%.

FAST FORWARD: April 2010

There's no question: it has been a steep learning curve for all of us. But Kayla is now fully integrated into our pack and runs free and snoozes with the other dogs. We are over the moon with her!

She has taught us as much as we have taught her, and the bond between us is fantastic. We are not dog experts, but we also knew Kayla needed a confident, calm and consistent approach over a long period of time. We adapted our home routines and learnt quickly for her sake. Our other dogs have benefited from this also; they needed to know that we (as their pack leaders) were in charge and would stop any dominance from Kayla.

One thing we learned above all: never underestimate the 'power of the pack'; our other dogs have played a huge part in rehabilitating Kayla – they have welcomed her in their own ways and taught her how to behave in a pack – something she was not used to in her previous home.

Twelve months ago, we truly did not know how Kayla's story would end. I knew we wanted to help her all we could, but we did not know if we had what it takes.

Today we have a beautiful,

strong, independent and loving girl who is firmly part of our family. There will always be a side to Kayla that will keep us on our toes, but she is our special girl and we love her for that. ■

CONCLUSION: Well done, Dawn and Gwyn! Kayla's story is all too common and many dogs who come into Rescue arrive there with similar reasons—fortunately, nearly all can benefit from a loving home, the willingness of the adopter to grow with the dog and professional support as needed. —CR



Kayla (left): just one of the pack now, and loving it, Malamute style!