

In Honor of ONYX, An Unsung Hero Who Had to Die Another Example of Society's Failure to Care

By Maggi Hall, January 2019

More often than humans realize, extraordinary animals are born whether domesticated or wild. When people find these amazing creatures, they are surprised like - "Wow an animal can think or feel or care or have compassion or do something totally unexpected and amazing?" The one answer is Yes, Yes, and Yes.

Such was the case with Onyx, a sleek black mixture of Weimaraner, Lab, and Pit. He lived in an apartment the first year of his life – caged. At night the owner allowed him out for a walk and rough play. Onyx was never allowed to expend the high energy these breeds require. But he never hurt another animal or human. His one wish was to roar free like the wind. No one gave him that dream. Even I didn't realize his needs when Onyx was dumped at FloridaWild Veterinary Hospital in DeLand FL, tossed out like garbage; a plaything worn thin.



He spent the first month in a large outdoor kennel at the hospital receiving exercise, healthy food, and play time. I introduced him to several families who felt he was too energetic. After a month with no one wanting this sleek creature I took him home to a family of 5 dogs with a two-acre fenced yard. It was then Onyx's personality bloomed. His one fault: food aggression. He was underweight when brought to FloridaWild evidently from the owner's refusal to feed him adequately. I concluded his food aggression stemmed from that.

I'd recently rescued a Great Pyrenees an idiot in Gainesville FL adopted as a puppy to live with her in a small apartment. Obviously, the owner hadn't researched the type of dog that does well in small surroundings. Crosby was wild, the most out of control spirited dog I'd ever met. My older dogs were overwhelmed by his presence and slunk far away from this 120-pound beast.



Not Onyx. When Crosby entered joined the family, Onyx addressed Crosby's excessive energy by demanding the gorgeous white snowball keep up with the sleek black runner. Literally from dawn to dusk they stayed outside wearing each other out. Crosby became more manageable and better behaved, minding when requested. Onyx retrained Crosby using dog-on-dog secret techniques. Within a month Crosby was able to be rehomed. Mission accomplished Onyx silently transmitted to me.

Onyx's next unspoken challenge was Bella, a worn-out downtrodden unloved female found wandering a busy highway. By her condition it was obvious she'd been used as a breeder then trashed to the roadside. FloridaWild found her in poor condition and with heartworms, underweight and fearful; another of God's creatures deserving affection and nutrition.



Bella was the first dog I'd ever met who was afraid of grass, finally realizing she'd been a kennel breeder never allowed the exquisite delight of romping or rolling in grass. I had a long asphalt driveway and large concrete patio so Bella got exercise on hard surfaces. However, Onyx ever astute, refused to give in to Bella's fears and took charge. He began by tormenting her in the driveway, weaving in and out, round and round until eventually she caught on to the play and joined in. From that point on they were best buddies. Onyx then trained her to chase him across the patio and into the yard where eventually rather than tip-toeing through grass she was rolling with pleasure.

Mission accomplished Onyx silently transmitted to me. Bella's adventures will be shared in another story: Bella to the Rescue.

I'd fallen in love with Onyx and decided he was mine to keep, that I'd grow old with him because he was the youngest of my dogs. His energy knew no bounds, he'd retrained two dogs so that they were adoptable, and he'd become the Energizer Bunny at my house. All went well for a year until he had an encounter with an elderly dog over an empty bag of food. He bit Brewer's ear and refused to let go. After I threw a bucket of water in his face he separated. Six months passed and he again attacked Brewer over a scent on a dog bed donated to me and that I'd brought into the kitchen. Since I knew no one would adopt Brewer after he'd been returned twice, the last time obviously abused, I determined Onyx needed a new home.



Back to FloridaWild he went amid my tears and broken heart. I'll never get over having to give him up though. Two months later a lovely woman fell in love with Onyx and off he went to live in luxury; spoiled rotten with a bed that replicated a throne. He idolized her small grandchildren gazing lovingly at them while they bathed. He took over the sofa, was well mannered and caused no problems. He attended the dog parade, a Halloween event, visited Santa, and enjoyed frequent walks. One of his adventures was cornering an armadillo in the yard trying to figure out what the curious creature was. His new mom updated me with delightful photos.

December 31st, 2018, after living with them for 14 months, Onyx, without provocation, attacked his owner's husband, biting his arm, refusing to let go. Beautiful Onyx was surrendered to animal control and transported to Halifax Humane Society. When his owner called me my heart broke. After calling Halifax it was agreed I'd pick him up after his 10-day quarantine and take him to FloridaWild. When I arrived at Halifax, I found him quivering uncontrollably in his kennel, whining, a look of torment in his piercing eyes. I wept, he remembered me and licked my hand as I placed a collar around his sleek neck. We walked to the car, he pulled, anxious for freedom. He enjoyed two large hamburgers before we arrived at FloridaWild where I left him in good hands, petted him, and cried all the way home. Staff promised he'd receive love, nutrition, and hard exercise – something he was not given at Halifax.

He couldn't come to my house because I still had three other dogs and Brewer, who by that time had only a few weeks to live. I was tormented and frightened fearing this magnificent animal who saved two lives would be killed by injection. I called several training facilities, tried to find someone without pets to foster Onyx – anything to buy him time. No one cared. I researched this type of unprovoked behavior and read about idiopathic aggression or rage syndrome. The symptoms seemed to fit Onyx. The article stated there was no medication for this horrible situation and brain scans wouldn't prove it existed – only observable behavior. The proper training could possibly be able to save him; one in Daytona wanted \$3,000.

No one would help Onyx; no one would chance working with him. No one wanted to put themselves out to save his life. Brewer died January 10th; Onyx died Monday, January 14th, 2019, my 74th birthday. I chose that day because I wanted to honor him and always be reminded on my birthday how much he meant to me. I didn't want him kenneled another day of his magnificent life.

He was an inspiration to abandoned dogs. He thrived in my yard romping with his buddies and later being spoiled by his new owner. She visited him at FloridaWild where I'd asked that thirty minutes prior to death he be allowed his last wild romp. He was then escorted into the Grieving Room where he quietly allowed the liquid to run through his veins. I sat at home with a broken heart, tears streaming down my face as they are while I type.



Was it a coincidence Brewer and Onyx died a few days apart? Maybe. I do know that when I bring their ashes home, I will mingle them in the hopes that they are good buddies running in the field near the Rainbow Bridge – waiting for me.