

## **Cuddling Crazy (Excerpt)**

In the destructive aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, rescuers came across a whimpering figure in flood-ridden Louisiana. Sitting atop a roof, which was barely poking out above the high waters, they found a dog – Ginny. Alone, wet, and scraggly. Katrina wrecked New Orleans at the end of August 2005, taking lives, memories, and Ginny’s owners along with her. Among those lost to the storm, around 600,000 animals were either killed or stranded. Ginny was one in a half-million!

In August 2004, a year before Katrina made landfall, my husband Matt and I bought our first home and Cedric (a stray Australian Shepherd) to go with it. By Christmas, Cedric needed a playmate, and Harry (a Dapple Dachshund puppy) came into our lives. By April, we rescued two cats, Cheetara and Monk, from abusive homes. Fred and George (turtles) came to us by way of pet-sitting gone permanent, and we had just inherited a large aquarium from my uncle. I became known to my friends and co-workers as the Mutt Mother. By June, Spock (rescued from yet another pet-abuser) became the newest Gorman family member.

Suffice to say: Matt had had his fill. Although he married me with the intention that we would be a one child and one dog household, I had exceeded his expectations. Matt and I were the proud parents of one human child, Jennea, seven four-legged children and about a dozen swimming kids. We were a zoo.

By April 2006 I wanted another.

### **Enter Ginny.**

Ginny captured my attention during a routine visit at my local Petsmart. Dozens of silver cages lined the back of the store, put on display like an aisle of Tickle-me-Elmo’s. Among them sat an eager dog with a silky golden coat and a fluffy right ear that folded down at the corner. I was told this Chow and Golden Retriever mix (who had been licking my hand with her blackened tongue) was a Hurricane Katrina rescue; I didn’t need to know more. I knew she belonged in our family.

Without a hint of the aggression associated with Chows, Ginny and Jennea (then ten-years-old) became the Bonnie and Clyde of backyard shenanigans. Ginny would dig out a hole, Jennea would put it back in. Dig and

repeat. And many afternoons I would come home to find Ginny and Cedric curled around Harry and the cats in a group snuggle-nap. Although she had blended herself into our lives as if she had always been there, Ginny also had her quirks. She growled at the sight of a leash, and if I told her to sit – she would question me with arched eyebrows and a tilted head; the tip of her right ear perpetually folded. It took several overnight watch rotations (and questioning stares of my own) to instill in her that peeing was meant for grass and not hardwood floors.

Whether it was digging holes or chasing squirrels, Ginny was always on the move and seemed to have boundless energy. We soon realized that part of Ginny's vigor stemmed from nervousness. From the rumbles and beeps of the washing machine to the cats jumping on the floor above, she was skittish at anything that even remotely constituted a loud noise. Skittishness turned to anxious pacing when rain, sprinklers, or even gusty wind came her way. Ginny's true terror, however, emerged during the booming bangs of thunder and fireworks. Checking the daily (and often hourly) weather report soon became a necessity. It wasn't a tail-between-her-legs and cower in a corner kind of fear. It was an instinctual climb, chew, scratch or claw her way through any obstacle kind of panic.

The first time we realized the power of her terror was when I got a call at work from my neighbor Bob (a former policeman).

"Jaime, yeah uh...your dog is on the roof," Bob said. "She's just pacing back and forth, and I am worried she might try to jump off."

I sped home immediately. As I pulled into the driveway, Ginny was waiting patiently on the roof behind the basketball hoop with her tail tapping the shingles. She greeted me with a yip, and before I even got out of the car, she bounded out of sight. By the time I made my way from the car to the gate, she was already frolicking in the backyard.

"She jumped onto the roof from your railing," Bob called from across the fence. We have a raised deck and from there it is only a six-inch hop to the roof. It made sense, but I was still shocked. Ginny had never braved the deck before. I cried.