

Chapter 7:

Joy at Lake Arrowhead

Getting ready to go.

Out come the suitcases, so Jamie starts to worry. “Do I get to go on this trip? Or are Fred and Barbara going to leave me with Carter the Conscientious?” Jamie’s ears go back and she gets a puzzled and worried look on her face. She lies down in the main hallway to watch the packing and assembling of suitcases. When her leash and puppy car harness join the pile, she jumps up and barks, “I get to go, don’t I! Let’s get this show on the road.” Excited puppy barking!

“I don’t like my harness, but I know it means I get to go to the Lake.”

Jamie’s puppy car harness is a wonderful invention. It’s a seat belt for doggies that was invented by a friend of ours who turned it into a commercial product. It straps under Jamie’s tummy and around her chest. A normal car seat belt passes through a metal loop in the harness, and voila, no flying puppies. It’s a wonderful invention.



When Jamie sees her harness she seems to have mixed reactions. She stands up, knowing that the harness is coming, like it or not, and she’s excited, because she knows she gets to go to Lake Arrowhead. But her ears drop back to say, “It’s a nuisance, putting this thing on, but I know we have to do it. So get it over with and let’s get out of here!” Then she waits patiently to be invited down

the stairs and into the garage. Once Jamie's buckled into a rear seat, she snuggles down on her puppy pad and gets comfortable for the two or three-hour drive.

“We’re getting close, aren’t we?”

Jamie's harness gives her enough moving room to sit up and look out the rear window of our Toyota 4Runner. She must smell the pine trees when we get within a few miles of our lake home. The mountain air does have a dry, pine needle scent. At 5100 feet, the air is a little rarer, too. Maybe puppies have built in altimeters. Anyway, Jamie starts to look out the window more, and she takes on an excited “lake buzz.” Her breathing gets faster, and she pays more attention to what's happening outside the car. “Maybe I'll see one of those damned coyotes. Man, I hate those guys. They could probably eat me for breakfast. Yuck.”

“That damned CO monitor is squealing again. I’m outta here!”

We remodeled our Lake Arrowhead house in 2002, by building out part of a third level under the original two levels. We added a master bedroom suite, bathroom, outside deck, and Jacuzzi. In the bedroom, we couldn't have a wood-burning fireplace, so we installed a gas fireplace, which, of course, required the installation of a carbon monoxide (“CO”) monitor. Well, once in a while, the CO monitor goes crazy (because it's backup battery gets weak, or its sensor gets lame) and it emits a deafening series of high pitch squeals. The squeals must really hurt Jamie's ears, because she freaks out. She throws her ears back against her head and runs up two flights of steps faster than a puppy chasing a squirrel. If she hears the chirping when she walks into the house, she stands at the top of the stairs shivering as if she were going to the doctor's office. But she can be brave about the nasty chirper. One time, she led me down the stairway to make sure I fixed it properly.

“We’re going to the Wishing Well, right?”

One of our little pleasures at Lake Arrowhead is to ride our boat, the Venture 4th, across the lake to visit Lake Arrowhead Village, home of numerous factory outlet stores, restaurants and quaint antique and “stuff” stores. One of the stores, where Barbara loves to buy presents for family and friends, is called the Wishing Well. The Wishing Well also has a special place in Jamie’s heart, because there’s a puppy water dish out front. But, even more important, the lady at the Wishing Well has a stash of really big (three inches long) mega-puppy treats, and (unlike home) she doesn’t break them in half; she gives a doggie the whole thing.

When we first arrive at the village, Jamie heads straight for the Wishing Well. If there are other errands to be run, that’s OK, but when we get within a hundred yards of the Wishing Well, Jamie tugs on her leash and drags us to the store. If she’s thirsty, she’ll take a quick shlurp or two of water from the store’s doggie dish, but then she rushes to the sales counter for her puppy treat. (Doggies are permitted inside the Wishing Well.)



“I see the boat keys; that means I get to go swimming in the lake! Can we go now, please?”

Jamie loves to swim in Lake Arrowhead. When we get to our house, she knows there’s a swim in the near future. But she’s a patient puppy. She likes to lie and watch the squirrels run around the deck finding the peanuts that Barbara always puts out for them. But if I go to the kitchen drawer to get the keys for the boat and “dock box” (one of the two storage boxes on our boat dock), Jamie starts to get excited. Lots of “woofing.” She stands by the front door and tries to get us organized to drive the short distance to our dock and boat.

If Ishka is visiting, she gets just as excited about getting to swim in the lake. The two doggies wait together until it’s time to head for the dock.

But the real excitement starts when the Green Backpack comes out of the front hall closet. The Green Backpack is the holder of all things for the lake. Flashlights, sunglasses, fishing licenses, sunscreen, wine opener, church key, and a few slightly used plastic fishing worms. When the Green Backpack comes out, Jamie explodes in a fit of



woofing and barking. “I get to swim! I get to swim!” She takes a big drink of water and then she starts barking and panting frantically, wishing her people would get their act together. “Come on, you guys!”



“Come on! Let’s get to the dock.”

“OK, I’m out of the car and ready to go. I know the way; follow me!” Jamie always wants to be in the lead. So off we go. She stays on her leash, because it’s the law. Jamie pulls us quickly down the path leading to the dock, stopping at her usual place to pee. Then off we go again. Along the way, there’s a beautiful patio and cucina with a little pot that was once home to a lizard, so Jamie always needs to check it out. “No lizard today.”



Jamie knows the way to the dock, and she knows exactly which dock is ours. As soon as we get there, she runs right to the far end of the western dock box, where her cloth puppy Floppy is locked up.

“What are you waiting for? Could you please open the dock box?”



“My Floppy is in the dock box. Will you please get it out so I can go swimming?” More frantic barking. “Woof! Woof!” The dock box lock is a little hard to operate, because it’s recessed in a metal housing. (To make it practically impossible to break, or cut through, the lock.) So it takes a few seconds to get it open. A few seconds filled with loud “woof” after “woof.” Finally, I lift the heavy lid.

This all happens one step at a time. Once the dock box is open, Jamie needs someone to reach in for her Floppy. “Thanks for opening the dock box. I see my Floppy, but I still need your help getting it out. C’mon, I want to start swimming!”



“Please open the gate!”

One last obstacle — the gate. “Could you please open the gate so I can run down the gangway and jump into the lake?” Jamie is patient even though she desperately wants to start swimming. One

of us opens the gate, and Jamie flashes down the gangway to the floating part of the dock. She drops her Floppy on the dock, inviting Barbara or me to toss it into the lake.



“OK, you can throw my Floppy now.”

Sometimes, Jamie just runs and jumps in the lake. Then she looks to see which direction the Floppy goes. But most of the time, she waits at the end of the dock for Barbara or me to throw the Floppy before she jumps into the water. She looks back over her shoulder and waits patiently for one of us to pick up the Floppy and give it a toss. “Would someone please throw my Floppy?”

Once Jamie spots the Floppy on the water, she swims as fast as she can, right to it. She’s a strong swimmer. Sometimes, if the water is choppy, she loses sight of the Floppy for a moment. When that happens, she swims in a circle until she finds it floating on the surface, and then she’s off again. Once in a while, I have to throw a rock toward her Floppy, so she will see the splash and know where to go.



For some reason, Jamie doesn’t just “retrieve” the Floppy. When she gets to it, she “stabs” at the far side of the Floppy like a kingfisher spearing a fish. It’s as if the kingfisher swims up behind the fish and then reaches across the length of its body to spear it in the head. It’s a very quick, downward stabbing motion. But she always comes up with the Floppy firmly clutched in her soft Golden Retriever mouth. “At last. This is pure joy. There’s nothing I’d rather be doing. It was worth all the waiting. Thanks for your help!”

“That was great; let’s do it again!”

When Jamie gets back to the dock, she swims beside the dock to the shoreline. Then she hops up on the gangway, Floppy still in her mouth, and runs back onto the dock. Now this part is really well coordinated. First she drops the Floppy so that Barbara or I can pick it up for another throw. Then (and only after we’ve picked up the Floppy) she shakes a huge puppy shake, which, of course, gives the Floppy thrower a refreshing, cold shower. Then she runs to the end of the dock again, looks back over her shoulder, waits for the throw, and jumps in, eager for another retrieve.

For several years, because of a serious drought in the western states, the level of Lake Arrowhead was twenty one feet below its normal level. Then, the dock and the steps didn’t connect the way they’re supposed to. It only took Jamie a minute to figure out how to run from the shoreline directly to the gangway, so she could retrieve her Floppy again.

“No way I’m going to stop swimming!”

Jamie would literally swim herself to exhaustion if we let her. She loves to swim and retrieve the Floppy so much that she doesn’t want to quit. If we didn’t throw the Floppy, she would just swim in circles. So we have to intercept her on one of her dashes along the dock. To do this, one of us stands right where the gangway connects to the dock. So, here comes Jamie, Floppy in her mouth, out of the water and onto the shoreline. But now we have a very smart puppy and a test of wills. As soon as Jamie sees one of us standing by the gangway, she freezes in place, as if she had turned into an ice statue. “Oh, no you’re not. You’re not going to stop me now; I’m having too much fun. So just watch this!” Then she drops the Floppy, runs to the neighboring dock, and jumps back into the lake before we can catch her.

This war of wills plays out in different ways. But no matter how we try to outsmart Jamie, she’s like a virus that mutates to resist the

vaccine. We try waiting on the dock with Jamie’s leash hidden so she can’t see it, but then she switches to the other pier and jumps back in the lake. We try looking the other way, as if we don’t care, but somehow Jamie can tell when we want her to stop. Our last resort is to argue and reason with Jamie. Which sometimes involves shouting a very loud, “NO! NO MORE SWIMMING!” or, “Jamie, Come!” Eventually, Jamie listens to reason.



“It was fun while it lasted.”

After her swim, Jamie is tired. She’s content to rest on the dock and wait for the drive back to our mountain house. If she’s feeling well exercised, she adopts the “tired puppy paws” posture. “Tired puppy paws” works like this: If you wanted to lie down on the ground and use your arm as a pillow, you would probably fold one arm at the elbow and cradle your head in the “V” formed by your upper arm and forearm. Well, “tired puppy paws” is sort of the reverse. Imagine that you could fold your elbow the other direction. This would make a really nice “puppy pillow” for a nap. That’s what Jamie does. It’s easier for dogs, because they have an extra ankle joint. Jamie flops down with one leg flat on the floor and her paw curled away from her body. Her head fits right into the “V,” and she can rest like that for hours.

