

Sadie & Jake



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Sadie & Jeana



Sadie's last day



Vehicles and dogs reaching a good old age.

Written by Jeana Babcock

Photo and Text credits: Jeana Babcock

Did the snow on October 14th take you by surprise? It's the earliest snow has fallen in Rochester that I can remember and it seemed everyone I knew was complaining about it—until I figured out why it came. I'll share my theory at the end, but first, let's switch gears so I can tell you about someone special in my life.

On April 2, 2008, shortly after we moved into what my kids called "the woods," my husband came home from work and the strangest thing happened—my small children, ages 8, 5 and 3 at the time went running to him excitedly. They had always greeted him in the past but this was different and I wondered what sort of treat he was offering to get so much attention. When I walked closer to the action and my children parted, what I saw took me my breath away—it was a jumping, exuberant black lab puppy!

As my husband stood there with a mischievous look on his face, he began to tell me about how one of his employees had found her that day tied to a fence with a bag of food next to her and she needed a home. I was apprehensive at first, but within a short period she won over my heart and made it clear that she was the dog for us. So we welcomed this sweet girl into our home and called her Sadie May.

Over the years our Sadie has been everything you can ask for in a family pet and more—creating so many fond memories. Every year on Christmas morning, we would pull her gifts out of the big bone stocking I made and she would get to open hers first. As she pulled the paper off with her teeth and spit it out we all giggled with pleasure as she anxiously worked to get to the prize. When finally she reached the center we would try to take it away so she could open other gifts, but she would not have it. Needless to say, we learned quickly to have her unwrap the best smelling one last!

From the very beginning, Sadie and I had a very special bond. Over the years she would lie by the stove as I cooked. She would lie by the laundry basket as I folded clothes. If I was sitting on the couch she would come to the edge, put her snout under my arm and flip it up so that I would pet her. When I came through the door and yelled "momma's home" she would run from wherever she was to greet me. She followed me around inside and out, always the perfect companion. This sweet soul has always been by my side and has also gotten me through some of the most difficult times of my life just by loving me always.

Sadie also had an immeasurable love for the rest of our family. She took our oldest son through his teenage years. She took our other three through childhood and much of their teens. And she filled a dog-shaped hole in my husband's heart as well. Thanks to his decision to bring her home over 10 years ago, we've all been well loved by Sadie. And we loved her right back, taking part in the things she enjoyed most—going for walks, playing in the yard/woods, feeding her snow in the winter and

letting her outside to chase squirrels.

Over the years we called her many names besides Sadie—"sweet Sadie," "May," "girlfriend," "love," "baby." But a few years ago, our second son (who was in his early teens) gave Sadie a new nickname. I still shake my head remembering the day he first called her "Sexy Sadie." I told him that dogs aren't sexy and it wasn't a very appropriate name. But before long, he enlisted his friends and his brother's help and the whole crew was referring to her as Sexy Sadie. To my disbelief, I found myself occasionally calling her that too! It has been so silly but it's also created a memory that will always be tucked away in our hearts.

What about you? Do you have a dog, cat or other pet that you adore and who adores you right back? What kind of memories have you created with your family because of the impact pets have made on your life? Have you or others given them silly names that eventually stuck?

Just like with pets, many also tend to name their vehicles. And just like my children changed my dog's nickname, they have also changed the names of some of my vehicles. I had Betty White, my first minivan—a vehicle I said I would never get but found myself loving. Betty was mine for 11 years and because my kids didn't care what I drove at that time, they let me keep her name. Then there was "Rhonda the Honda" (Odyssey) which they changed to "Big Bertha" because she was a massive minivan. And now, I've just given up and allowed them to name my current vehicle, a white Ford Expedition that apparently looks like a big white marshmallow and goes by the name of "Marsha."

Have you named your car, truck or SUV? Isn't it great that the longer you have the vehicle, the more you care about it? Betty White was a real trooper and, just like Sadie, she got us through many years and hundreds of thousands of miles. But how did she last so long? Don't cars start to go downhill at around 100K miles? At best, do you think you can limp them to 200K miles? This is what dealerships want you to believe so that you will buy a new car when yours is "old and outdated" by their standards, but there is hope for those of us who want to have ours to a ripe old age—and it starts before you even buy a vehicle.

What's the average?

Due to significant improvements in technology, lubricants, rust prevention, etc., durability and reliability have greatly improved over the years. Statistics show the average age of a vehicle back in 1995 was around eight years. This changed to eleven years in 2017. Do you realize the long-term financial benefit of such an increase—keeping your vehicle to at least 200,000 miles? Research suggests that it could result in a saving of \$30,000 or more!

What's the first step?

Sure, the majority of cars can probably get to

200K+ but the cost to get there will vary. This is why your first step should be to buy a safe, reliable model—whether new or used. Do research on the various models of the type vehicle you are interested in and their track record for safety and reliability. A less reliable vehicle may cost you much more in repairs as it reaches seniorhood, so this is a step you will not want to skip.

Do you like it?

This may seem like a silly question, but if you are looking for a long-term vehicle, you don't want buyers remorse thinking about all of the "should haves" after you purchase it. Make a list of the features you really want and consider which things on your list you can do without.

Last year when I was shopping for a new used vehicle, one of the big "must haves" was a heated steering wheel. We live in Rochester, Minn.—and surely that means I should have warm hands while I am driving, right? Well, on my hunt, I found a Ford Expedition (AKA Marsha) that had almost everything that I wanted—except the heated steering wheel. So I had to make a choice—do I keep looking to find everything on my list? Or do I buy that used SUV with 4,000 miles on it and \$17,000 off the new vehicle price? For me, it was a no-brainer. I have gloves.

What's the history?

If it is a used vehicle you are seeking, be sure to look for signs of neglect or abuse—check for rust, dents, a mildew smell on the inside, etc. If the vehicle passes the visual and sniff test, it is still imperative that you check the maintenance record. Any vehicle can look good on the outside, but the inside may be a hot mess. A maintenance record will give you a clear picture of how it was cared for and if quality repairs and maintenance have been performed so that you have a better chance of keeping it for many years.

Are your eyes enough?

Just as you seek out a professional to inspect your house before you solidify an offer, it's a good idea to do the same with a used vehicle. So when you find a vehicle you would like to purchase, take it to an independent mechanic for a thorough used vehicle inspection. This will typically cost around \$100, but the value it offers with peace of mind is priceless.

There are mechanics that perform digital inspections with pictures that can be sent to

you so you can see what they see and you have a record of its health before you choose to buy it. This inspection may reveal some areas of concern. At that point you will have to determine if you are still willing to buy the vehicle and, if so, are you willing to pay what is on the price tag? If the problems are ones that you were not informed of by your sales associate upon your first visit, it may be a good idea to consider negotiating a lower price and taking it for repair at your trusted mechanic rather than having the dealership or used sales business repair it.

Once you have chosen and purchased a vehicle—whether used or new, it's your turn to do all you can to get it to a ripe old age. You will find my advice for this one of my next articles. But now it's time to reveal my theory for the October snow.

On October 13th we noticed Sadie was having to go outside often to urinate but nothing was coming out. At first, we assumed it was a UTI—a problem that could wait until her vet opened on Monday. But as the day progressed and she started becoming anxious, I noticed her belly was distended and painful. At that point, we knew she needed professional help so we whisked her off to the doggy ER.

Over the next two days with all that happened during her stay at the hospital and terrible changes in her quickly declining health, it became clear that her time with our family was coming to an abrupt end. I was not ready. In my mind, it was supposed to be a UTI, not a tumor! But I have always said that if my dog is in pain and treatments would be difficult for her, I will choose to do what is loving towards her rather than being selfish and choosing what is best for me and my family.

So on Monday morning we brought Sadie home and loved on her in all the ways we knew how. She had bacon, peanut butter and her last bully stick (her favorite treat). And then we took her for her last walk around the block. The whole way around the circle in our neighborhood our Sadie smiled and pranced and did one of her most favorite things—she ate snow. In October. So there it is. God brought snow on October 14th so that Sexy Sadie could do her favorite thing before He took her home. We did our part—we loved her well into old age and she did her part in loving us back and creating one last incredible memory before she died. She will be forever loved and missed.

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