

Escaping Paradise

By Becky Lee

In a life-altering year filled with uncertainty – a year which has tested the most resolute and optimistic of any of us - November 2020 also marked the second anniversary of the most destructive and deadliest wildfire in California history – the Camp Fire that leveled the once-idyllic mountain town of Paradise.

In the two years since the devastation, hopeful rebuilding has been the focus for those who chose to stay, but for former Paradise resident Jane K., who lost everything, this time of year especially brings back many bittersweet memories that are never far from her mind. Reminiscing about that terrifying time, Jane can only think of how lucky she and her family - including loyal GSDs Bella (adopted from GSRNC) and Koa - were to narrowly escape the disaster.



Paradise after the Camp Fire (AP photo / Noah Berger)

While Jane has since recently lost her precious Bella, we are honored to share their story with you during this anniversary.



Bella (fka Mary Kate) and Ashley

The story begins circa 2006, when Jane and her now-husband Ed originally adopted Bella (formerly known as Mary Kate, who along with her sister Ashley, were two extremely shy sisters that entered our program via the Monterey Animal Society). The sisters had a rocky start, but had a wonderfully dedicated foster mom, Ann H., who fostered, adored, and successfully guided them both through their respective adoption journeys (spoiler alert: Ann ended up adopting Ashley!).

At one momentous GSRNC adoption event in the South Bay, Jane remembers how she and Bella locked eyes and how Bella instantly came running up to her and sat with her quietly throughout the event. Jane felt that Bella had chosen *her* before Jane had a chance to even see which dog she might have a connection with that day! Needless to say, Jane fell head over heels in love and adopted Bella that fateful day. The two formed an instant bond that only grew stronger and deeper with time and experience. Jane soon learned how much of a sweetheart mellow Bella was – Bella was her fur-baby if ever there was one! Jane remembers fondly how much Bella enjoyed cuddling, playing, and lounging poolside, and even how fiercely protective and fearless Bella was when a would-be intruder unexpectedly tried to enter Jane's home!

It turns out that Bella's mission was to save Jane several times in life.

Bella's next mission was to provide everlasting devotion and love to Jane as she and Ed steadfastly overcame the emotional trauma of narrowly escaping the Camp Fire and losing her



Bella & Koa fleeing Paradise during the fire

home. Early on the morning of the fire, Jane remembered her neighbor pounding on her door, warning her of the coming danger. Later that morning, Jane and Ed immediately packed up their dogs and as much of their belongings as they could fit into their car. On the panic-filled way out of town, various parts of Paradise were already on fire. After several hours of driving, the family and their dogs thankfully made their way to a safe location and spent the next several years patiently rebuilding their lives.

Without a shadow of a doubt, Jane tells us that she could not have gotten through the past two years without her dogs, especially faithful Bella, whose calm presence was one of the enduring constants in her life. Dedicated Bella continued to fill her family's life with delightful laughter, joy, companionship, and perhaps most importantly, hope. There is not much more

we can ask from our dogs. Those of us who have lost a faithful companion can relate to the heartache and sorrow that Jane is now experiencing after losing her Bella.

Special thanks to Ann and Jane for being such amazing, loving individuals and for taking the time to share their experiences with us for this story.

[Click here for more on the horrors of the Camp Fire.](#)