

## Asland and Patrick, by Katie

Their names are Asland and Patrick, they're part of my family and the best walking companions anyone could have. They have been there for me through the thick and the thin. Best friends are like that. Asland and Patrick are my dogs.

Asland is a 4-year-old Golden Retriever, a real tongue licker, and Patrick is a 3-year-old mix of Golden Retriever and Labrador Retriever; he's a little more skittish of people than Asland.

My husband, Chris, and I planned on getting a dog after we bought our own home someday. When that "someday" came after we were settled in for a year, we felt the time was right. I needed a dog more than he did, and growing up with them on a farm, I missed that connection between man and dog. Not working due to major depression and general anxiety disorder left me alone too much. We found Asland through a classified ad when he was 9 weeks old; he looked like a little lion cub, hence his name Asland from the *Chronicles of Narnia*.

When Asland was about 2 years old, I felt healthy enough to work part-time, but felt guilty leaving him home alone so much. Although I begged, pleaded, and used every possible reason to get a companion dog for Asland, Chris wouldn't back down. I gave up on the idea and tried to accept his decision, but it still continued to bother me, leaving Asland alone so much. He was getting into ripping up magazines, chewing up baseboard corners—well, you know what I'm talking about. He was totally bored by himself.

Then it happened! On St. Patrick's Day of 2006 I took Asland to PetSmart with me to walk around the store looking for nothing in particular. I should mention that St. Patrick's Day was very hard for me that year because my stubborn Irish descendent father was in a coma, lying in a hospital bed in a Pittsburgh dying. Every year I send him a St. Patrick's Day card except then, it just hurt too much to look at them.

Up and down the aisles we just walked until I came upon the Humane Society's Pet Adoption booth. They had just put a large black dog into its kennel before closing up for the day. It was him! I just felt it! "Please" I asked, "Could you bring him back out for me and Asland to see him." This energetic overgrown pup was excited to meet us, as we were to meet him. When I asked his name, I was taken aback, "Patrick" she said. "Why Patrick," I asked, "Was it because it was St. Patrick's Day?" "No," she replied, it was because he was born on St. Patrick's Day the year before. I became teary-eyed, and tried to hide them as I thought of my father. I filled out the paper work, paid her, signed my life away, and was told I could pick him up the next day after he was neutered in the morning.

I couldn't tell Chris what I impulsively did that would change our lives forever. I was scared he would be upset and tell me "no way!" The next morning he went to a friend's house to work on the car. After he left, I went to the Humane Society to retrieve our new dog. They placed him lying on the truck seat next to me, as he shook from fear and anxiety, I stroked him

until he calmed down and relaxed, and I couldn't imagine what he was thinking. I only felt love and tried to comfort him.

I pulled the truck into our driveway, happy to see I made it home before Chris and could get Patrick settled in. Suddenly, Chris pulled his car into the garage next to me and hopped out with a big smile to greet me. Just then, Patrick stood up on the truck seat and Chris's mouth dropped. I tried to remain calm for his explosion of anger over getting a dog without talking to him first. But many times before I had tried to reason with him; he just wouldn't listen!

Of course he wasn't happy at first, but by the end of the evening, he too fell in love with Patrick. Patrick and Asland became best of friends in a short time and now are inseparable. They are both great dogs and have made my life with major depression and anxiety so much more manageable. Even science has proven that having a pet helps those with mental illness maintain their health easier.