

Wolf Forever

When we first hooked up, Sean had a steady job driving a delivery truck. He owned a house, doted on a six-year-old dog named Wolf who owned the back yard, and we even had health insurance. Life was good.

Then little Sean happened. When I first told big Sean, he lost his mind. Got this glazed look in his eyes. "Sean II," he prophesied. "We'll call him Deuce." Started singing how he was "gonna build a mountain and a daydream" for his "fine young son."

I told him, "This is not a Broadway musical here. And your 'fine young son' could be a daughter."

Didn't faze him. As soon as his fine young son Deuce was born, the love of my life quit his wonderful steady job to start building a "legacy." Life became lean.

First he started The DJ Gig. That's actually what he called it. I said, "Can't you come up with anything original, Sean? How about Sean-sations? Or maybe Music by the Sean-ster?"

My suggestions seemed to cause him pain, so I let it go. And the business grew. He played music for house parties, for pool parties, for Jack-and-Jill dances. Sean had a great collection of oldies, lots of special light and video effects, and people loved him. Life was getting back to good.

Then Wolf had a heart attack at the vet's. Can you believe it? I never heard of dogs having heart attacks, but it happened. Sean and Deuce were devastated, and I wasn't too happy myself. We decided to deal with our grief by giving Wolf a beautiful send-off. I made all the arrangements -- contacting the pet crematorium, ordering the custom-designed urn, making reservations at the small pet chapel, and framing an 11' x 14" picture of Wolf to display during the service. Then The DJ Gig spun into action.

Sean designed a special light-and video show for Wolf and synchronized it with his favorite oldies. (That's Wolf's favorites, not Sean's; this dog was different.) He arranged for flowers in Wolf's favorite colors. He made a shadow box for a dog-lifetime of Wolf mementoes: his beloved chew-toy (bronzed), his immunization records, his first collar. He posted fliers inviting the neighborhood to come to the churchyard garden and join us to "celebrate Wolf's life and mourn his untimely death." (Did I mention the dog was 12 years old?)

There was only one thing missing from the plan for Wolf's memorial tableau. The love of his life. Lady was her name. (I know, I know, that's not an original name either, but I played no part in the canine christening here.) Lady loped into our life after Deuce was born, when the new baby displaced the old pet as the family's center of attention. One day Wolf lured her from her owner's yard and brought her home.

Unfortunately, in addition to the doggy charms that caught Wolf's eye (or opened his nose), Lady had a temperamental owner named Malachi. Malachi was not Wolf-friendly, so his objections were loud and

profane whenever he found his dog on our premises. He and my men never exchanged blows, but words flew around like crazed bats. Malachi threatened to call the law, accused us of trying to steal his property, and referred to Wolf as "that %\$@% &*!%- \$#% @^ mutt." Sean called him a Wolf-hating hermit. Deuce just snarled (boy spent way too much time with Wolf) and muttered "mean ol' meanie" during their regular confrontations.

Despite all that, Sean **had** to have a picture of Lady for the service. "After all, honey," he explained, "Wolf **loved** her." Hey, it wasn't my delusion. So, to make my double-Sean set happy, I tried to scrounge up a picture of the mean ol' meanie's Lady. First, I tried the direct approach. Called Mr. Wolf-hater and asked him. His response was unprintable--and rude as well. Then I rummaged through our whole drawer of disorganized prints, searched through 3 gigs of picture files, and asked neighbors if they had, by chance, ever snapped a photo of Wolf with Lady. No joy.

The evening before the service, I finally gave up the search. I mean, we had loved Wolf and he had been part of the family and all, but still--he was just a dog. And Lady--well, we were simply out of luck with Lady.

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The Saturday morning of Wolf's memorial service was sun-bright, hot, and sticky. Deuce was somber and brave as we ate breakfast and carted light-show equipment, power cables, and food to the memorial tent set up in the churchyard garden.

"Hey, baby." I looked into his serious six-year-old face. "You okay?"

"Course I am, Mom. But everything has to be right today. For Wolf."

"And it will be. Not to worry, though. Wolf wouldn't like that."

He nodded and headed off to help Sean finish loading the van.

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Sean was playing some dreary, funereal dirge as the neighborhood pets, neighborhood kids (and an occasional parent or two) filed into the memorial tent, when I realized that Deuce wasn't with the rest of his gang. From my post at the flap of the tent, I caught Sean's eye. "Where's Deuce?" I mouthed. He looked puzzled and shrugged. So I went looking.

Deuce wasn't in his bedroom. He wasn't in the kitchen. He wasn't on the sidewalk in front. Nobody had seen him. I questioned all the neighbors inside the tent, but none of them had seen him either.

Sean ignored my frantic hand signals from the back of the tent, so I went up to the DJ stand and whispered fiercely, "I can't find Deuce! You have to do something! Stop the service and make an announcement or call

the police or ...”

A strange entourage was filing into the back of the tent. Deuce — thank God!— was smiling broadly and cradling...a baby? No. A PUPPY. With three other little furry bodies hard on his heels. And Lady was bringing up the rear.

Oh, no. I thought. Deuce has hijacked the Wolf-Hater’s dog. There will be hell to pay when Malachi finds out. And where did Deuce find four puppies?

I glanced at Sean. He had caught Deuce’s smile and his intention. Ignoring me, he segued into a loud, rollicking version of “When the Saints Go Marching In” and the mixed-species procession made its way through the tent to line up just in front of the keyboard. Deuce whispered to his Dad, and they both motioned with their hands for the assembled mourners to stand and join the song.

And there was the mean ol’ meanie Malachi, standing at the back of the tent, singing as loudly as anybody. Not a bad baritone either.

The music ended with a typical DJ Gig flourish. Deuce looked at his Dad, and Sean offered him a cordless mike, but the boy shook his head, hugged the puppy a little closer, and looked out across the tent.

“Wolf is dead.”

His six-year-old voice was surprisingly strong, and even the kids standing just outside the tent stopped milling around to pay attention. “But Wolf is here, too. I will never forget him. My Mom and Dad will never forget him. And we’ll always love him. I know some of you will remember him, too, ‘cause Wolf was your friend just like he was mine.

“Wolf was my best friend. My very best friend, and I was his best friend, too. Maybe except for Lady. I love Lady, and thanks to her and to Mr Malachi, I got Wolfie.” He angled his body to show the crowd the puppy’s face—dead on Wolf. Fur color was a little off, but still...

“So we’re having a party to say goodbye to Wolf and hello to Wolfie and his brothers and sisters. Everybody can eat and meet Lady, and I think Mr. Malachi wants to give away some more new best friends. Don’t you, Mr. Malachi?”

The mean ol’ meanie looked uncomfortable and nodded slightly from his post by the tent flap. Everybody applauded. Then Sean went into DJ mode and cranked up the mixer with a loud version of “All Dogs Go to Heaven.”

And, once again, Wolf owned the premises.