

<http://www.dailybreeze.com/news/articles/4303297.html>  
October 4<sup>th</sup>, 2006

### Play with Misty for Him

A Rancho Palos Verdes woman taking care of a stroke victim's dog goes the extra mile to create a father and son reunion.

By Doug Irving  
DAILY BREEZE

Michael Gargalis doesn't remember his father walking out on him. It was more like the old man faded away, little by little, until one day there was nobody there at all.

On Tuesday, Michael stood in a Torrance hospital room and introduced his wife to a man he hadn't seen in some 20 years. It had taken a remarkable series of events to reunite father and son, and it all began with a dog named Misty.

Misty is a border collie mix with a plume of a tail and shaggy tufts for ears who no doubt would have preferred to spend Tuesday lounging in her pillowy bed in Pete Gargalis' camper. Pete is a 77-year-old wanderer who makes his home wherever he can park his camper; he's also Michael's father, but that's getting ahead of the story.

Pete is known around Torrance as a man with a kind nature and a big heart for his dog. When he was taken away in an ambulance last week after suffering a stroke, Torrance animal control officers started calling rescue groups to find someone to take care of Misty.

Lynne Amano, a woman with a giggle in her voice and an acre of land in Rancho Palos Verdes, came forward. She keeps goats and chickens, ducks and peacocks on her property; she also founded the Whiskers & Tails Foundation, a rescue group.

She found Misty looking sad and alone in a kennel. That night, she visited Pete in the hospital to let him know she would look after his dog while he recovered. His eyes welled up at the first mention of Misty's name.

Pete had listed no relatives on his hospital paperwork, and he had left the emergency contact line blank. But on Monday evening, over a dinner of rice pilaf and applesauce, he began sharing his past with Lynne. He told her he did have children -- Micky, Franky and Cathy -- but he had left them years ago, when they were still very young. He had lost touch with them as they grew up and moved on with their lives, and he hadn't seen them in years. He'd never even visited their homes.

Lynne went home and logged onto the Internet. She tried searching "Gargalis," but the computer thought she meant Gargoyles. She tried "Peter Gargalis," but found nothing useful. She typed in "Micky Gargalis" and, again, came up empty. She erased Micky and tried Michael.

Michael Gargalis. Canyon Lake, Calif. There was a phone number.

It was getting late, but Lynne dialed the number. A woman answered. Lynne wasn't quite sure what to say, so she started at the beginning. "I'm fostering a dog named Misty," she said. "Misty belongs to Peter Gargalis. Is ... Peter related to you?"

There was a long silence on the other end. And then the woman said yes. Peter was her husband's father.

"You can always tell a man by the way he treats his dog," Lynne remembers telling her. "Your father-in-law is a very gentle man, and he's in the hospital."

And so on Tuesday, Michael Gargalis drove with his wife, Priscilla, from their home in Riverside County to a rehabilitation center in Torrance to meet his father. Michael, now 56, couldn't quite remember the last time he had seen his father, but he thought it was during a family reunion two decades ago.

"Dad's always been kind of a loner," he said. "He liked being by himself. ... He's always been a good person. I don't have bad memories of him.

"He's always had a dog, all his life. Of all the things important in his life, that's probably number one."

Pete Gargalis was working with a physical therapist to raise his arm when his son walked into the room. He smiled.

"He's handsome, just like you," Lynne told him.

Pete nodded in her direction and joked, "What a gal." And then Lynne led Misty out of the room, leaving Pete alone to catch up with his son and daughter-in-law.

Misty flopped down just outside the room and squeezed her eyes shut against the midday sun. Michael came outside, scruffed the fur on her head, and said he was making arrangements to take care of his father.

Lynne held Misty's red leash and beamed. "This is the dog," she said, "that brought us all together."