

Last week while my nephew Cameron Lockhart was visiting, he asked me a question "Do you have a favorite dog," while waiting one millionth of a second before answering the question himself. "It's Vale," he said with nary a hint of question in his voice. "I can understand why you would THINK that to be the truth," I admitted, but it goes so much further than just one, single, black and white answer. So I set out to make him understand what the "gray area" of his question meant, and how the answer I would eventually give him would contain "several shades of gray."

All four of our dogs are loved and cared for without denial. They were all rescued from dire straits. In the order they joined our family are Posie the queen, Jane the sweetheart, Belle the beautiful and Vale the valiant. They have similar lives but very different personalities, which makes them unique in the way they love us, and they way they want us to love them.

Posie has spent nearly all of her 14+ years with Allen. So to say that she is partial to her daddy is an understatement. She is the quintessential daddy's girl. You have to admire a girl who knows exactly what she wants and isn't afraid to show it.

Jane began her life here with us with a bang, but has now settled into a very laid back, mellow existence. She enjoys playing hard with her sisters, but also enjoys plenty of quiet time and serenity. When she is ready for attention she doesn't mind who gives it.

Belle loves affection and knows just how to sing her way into our hearts. She can be cute and coy with whomever is nearest at the time and is totally open to a scratch behind the ears or a nice belly rub. As long as there is attention to be given she is open to receive it.

Which brings us to the girl in question, Vale. When Vale came into our lives it was during a time when neither of us was looking for another dog. But when faced with a do or die situation, Allen said, "We cannot keep this dog but we can take her in until we find her a good home," and I agreed completely. That all sounds so simple...so cut and dry...so black and white. But, the circumstances that followed were anything but.

From an ad in The Express we received dozens of calls from potential adoptive parents - none who lived up to my high standards however. This baby girl began tugging at my heart and I couldn't clearly see how I could just hand her over to a stranger. So I began testing the waters. Wouldn't it be great to have four dogs? She's really smart and brave. Wouldn't she make a great watchdog? What's one more dog? Allen was steadfast and unbending, "No."

Within a couple of days Vale was a very sick pup. Her tiny, trembling body was almost lifeless. I took her to Brown Creek Animal Hospital where she stayed for four days, and was given a 50% chance of recovery from Parvo. But recover she did. Dr. Danny Wright and his staff took wonderful care of Vale and so did I upon her return. When you have a sick baby and three older, healthier stronger siblings it doesn't take a brain surgeon to figure out how one's maternal instinct could take over, and so continues my "shades of gray" saga.

How could I bring Allen along on my quest to keep our latest rescue? He was a tough nut to crack for sure and seemed to be unyielding to my unending attempts for the new addition to the family. "We are not keeping her," he repeated often. I was attached to this puppy, but more importantly, she was attached to me.

On Sunday afternoon I began to think of ways to sway Allen's decision. He was watching a Grand Prix motorcycle race on television when it hit me. Secretly I began running through the names of his favorite motorcycles and his favorite motorcycle racers. Ducati, Hayden, Yamaha, Lorenzo, Stoner, Honda, Valentino ... Valentino Rossi, a.k.a. Vale ... THAT'S IT! We can name the puppy Vale," I shouted! Allen liked it immediately and I knew it was the perfect name for our perfect new addition. A few days later he realized that I may have manipulated the situation a bit, but by then he was just as smitten with our little Vale as I was.

Four years have passed since that day. I'm not completely sure why Vale follows my every footstep, sleeps next to my side of the bed, sits at my feet, paws at my knees, is the most excited to see me when I return, and the saddest to see me leave, will bite anyone who comes near, and intuitively knows when I am not feeling well. It is then she stands watch until I am up and at it again ... as if she knows I did the same for her when she was such a sick little pup.

As for the answer to my nephew's question, I see it like this. Vale is the one with a favorite, and just like her big sister Posie, she is not afraid to show it. My answer is rightly filled with those "shades of gray" I mentioned earlier. I do love each dog, and I do love the dogs differently, but that's because the dogs ARE different. For Vale, her answer is as black and white as it gets without one hint of gray. Her answer is simple ... her answer is me. *By Melanie Lyon*



Vale the day we found her.

### Parks and Recreation Spring/Summer Registration

Anson County Parks and Recreation will be offering Tee Ball for ages: 4-6, Coach Pitch for ages 7-8, Minor Baseball for ages 9-10, Major Baseball for ages 11-12, Micro Soccer for ages 3-4, Youth Soccer for grades: K-12, Summer Youth Basketball for ages 10-12, 13-15, and Summer Swim Lessons.

You may come to Little Park to register Monday through Friday, from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. or to the schools on these dates below:

- Wednesday, March 18, 3 to 5 p.m. at Lilesville Elementary School
- Thursday, March 19, 3 to 5 p.m. at Ansonville Elementary School
- Tuesday, March 24, 3 to 5 p.m. at Morven Elementary

The deadline to register is Monday, March 30. The cost for athletic programs is \$25 and the cost for swim lessons is \$18.

For more information call 704-694-5751 or 704-694-5868, or you can email: [wsmall@co.anson.nc.us](mailto:wsmall@co.anson.nc.us) or [mgatewood@co.anson.nc.us](mailto:mgatewood@co.anson.nc.us).

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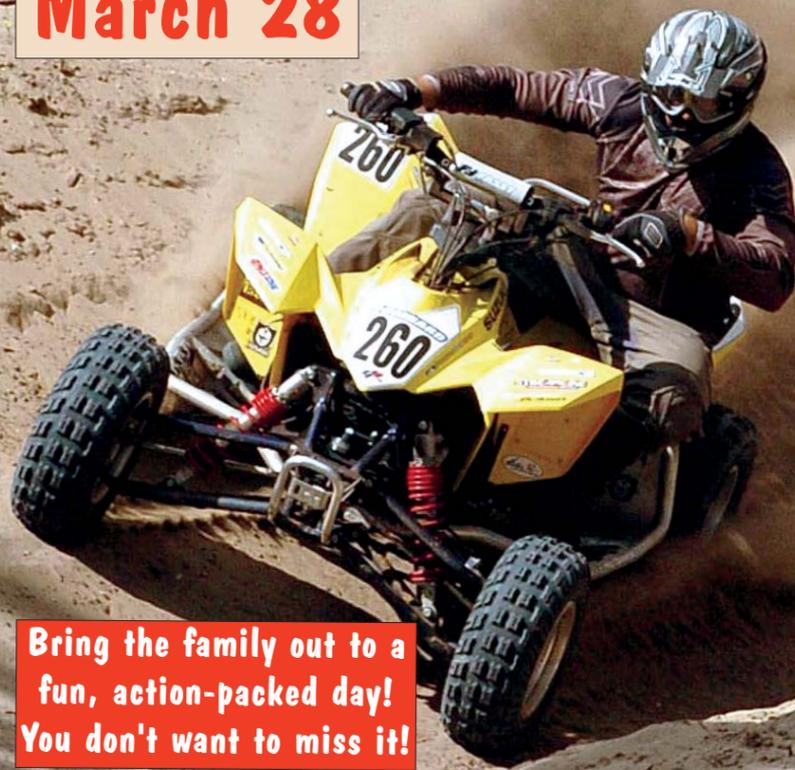
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Directions from Wadesboro: Take Highway 109 South, go approximately 1/2 mile past Wadesboro IGA through the flashing caution light at Capel Dairy Road. Joe Jones Road is the second road after that on the left. PPM is at the end of the road on the right.

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