

Wyoming Tribune Eagle, Jan 21, 2016. Editor's headline: "A girl's best friend? Try . . ." Casper Star Tribune, Jan 23: "Abby, a girl's best friend"

"Diamonds are a Girl's Best Friend," sang Marilyn Monroe in true gangster-moll fashion. The idea may hold for the fakery of silver screen, but in real life? I am here to tell you, a girl's best friend is the same as man's best friend: a canine companion.

Abby was 18 months old when she came to me, a teenager in terms of human lifespan. She is Australian shepherd mix, short-haired, with the shepherd's dark grays and browns and the beautiful white "apron" of another breed. I yet lived in Cheyenne but, knowing I'd move to my farmland soon, thought it a good idea to have a sizable dog by my side. Abby captured my heart with her intelligent face.

I am her fourth owner. What traumas Abby has lived through I'll never know. I do know that the owners before last kept her in a carrier all day while they were at work. Her last owner gave me the carrier to take home, a sturdy plastic box with a hole chewed in back, Abby's doing.

This dog is a devoted runner. It may be snowing outside, icy winds howling; it may be raining in buckets: Abby runs. In the city I feared daily she'd get run over. Whenever a door opened she was out like a flash, tearing through the streets like a wild thing. No way to catch her.

Luckily, in addition to her need to run—and she clearly loves running—Abby also needs to touch base with me often, to make sure I'm still around. Problem is, no sooner does she catch sight of me, she's off again. Calling her name is useless. I finally figured out that hiding behind an open door or backyard gate was my best option. When she dashed in to check up on me, I'd slam it shut.

In Cheyenne I used to take Abby with me on outings with Wednesday Walkers, a group of women who weekly hike Curt Gaudy or Pole Mountain. Always several members brought dogs and, once we were away from the campgrounds and up in the mountains, the canines were allowed off the leash. Abby took every advantage to run with her kind.

It is early 2016 and Abby has been with me six months. Out in the sticks where we now live she has found dog heaven. Here she roams to her heart's content, though she regularly returns home limping from her outings. She literally runs herself lame, chasing after pronghorn antelope or mule deer, dashing around and barking at cows who just look at her. Sometimes I give her an ibuprofen in the evening so she won't hurt all night. Problem is, the next morning she is rearing to go all over again. An absence of pain may be making things worse.

"There isn't much you can do about it," says my veterinarian son, who once owned a runner with a similar problem. "She'll have to figure out on her own how to pace herself."

I have seen a pair of gray foxes streak across the field and wondered whether Abby has tried to chase them; if so, she would have come up short. Foxes are too quick, and way too savvy to tangle with dogs. My son once pointed out a foxes' den in a hollow between field and road, kits playing at its entrance. I myself would not have noticed them, but Walter as wildlife veterinarian had developed an eye. The den is still there, for I see Abby sniff around the spot that's marked in my memory. But foxes are smarter than rabbits; they will have disappeared long before she gets anywhere near them.

Rabbits are Abby's favorite targets. The first time she killed one, unbeknownst to me, she ate half of it. Not surprisingly she got ill during the night. Next morning there was a mess of vomit and diarrhea to clean up. She is a quick study, though, and has not dined on fresh-killed rabbit since; instead, she'll carry the dead thing around until she's had enough and drops it somewhere. Probably the coyote I've seen loping across the draw scavenges what's left.

Keeping Abby is not without cost. Her need to touch base means, she's in and out all day, tracking snow and mud, scratching at the door. A pile of logs meant for a fencing project she scattered ever which way, trying to reach critters hiding beneath. Twice she has mauled a rain gutter in which a rabbit sought refuge.

Then why do I think of Abby as friend? She is all over me when I return from an absence. She bursts with excitement when she sees me prepare for outside, to shovel snow or hike or bike to the mailbox. She's beside herself with happiness when she knows she'll accompany me into town. Since this typically means several hours' confinement, we've worked out a system: she runs beside the car to the mailbox, a stretch of about a mile, then jumps in back where I clip her onto a doggie belt that permits her to sit up or lie down. The previous owner allowed her up front unencumbered, which she quickly learned is a no-no with me.

Abby loves it when I stroke her neck or caress her down the length of her spine. Whether I've suffered a financial setback or am in despair over uncaring humans, whether I've slept poorly or am having a bad-hair day: as I turn to Abby for stroking, my worries fade away.