



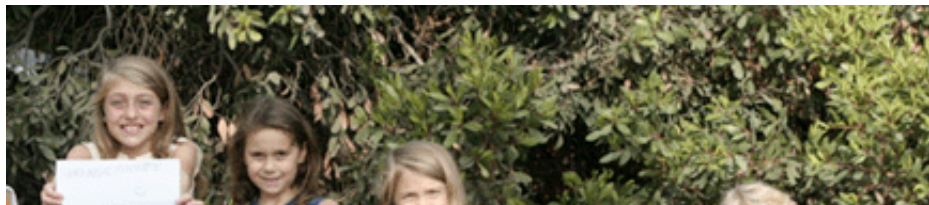
## Ginger's Gift

*by Karen Lee Stevens*

**November 5, 2008**

There's something magical about the relationship between kids and dogs. Perhaps no one knows this better than Lauren Caplan, 8, and her sister, Jackie, 5. Ever since they were born, the girls have shared their hearts and their home with Ginger, a beautiful and sweet Golden Retriever. Ginger was there for all the important milestones: the girls' first smiles, their first baby teeth, their first tentative steps on wobbly legs, their first day of school (they both attend Peabody Elementary School in Santa Barbara ). Through all the normal ups and downs of childhood, Ginger was a calm, loving presence in Lauren and Jackie's lives.

The Caplans lost Ginger to cancer in late August, but instead of wallowing in grief, Lauren, Jackie, and three of their friends, Ben Spievak, 9, Sophie Spievak, 7, and Chloe Spievak, 5, decided to do something for other dogs afflicted with the devastating disease. "We really wanted to help other dogs who were sick," Lauren told me in a phone conversation on Monday just prior to an after-school piano lesson. She explained that during a family camping trip at El Capitan Campground exactly two weeks after Ginger's death, she and the Spievak children, who loved Ginger as much as she and her sister did, came up with the idea to make jewelry out of multi-colored pipe cleaners and sell their creations to fellow campers. "We made a sign on a box and people started coming up and giving us money," Lauren remembers. "It felt really good."





From left to right:  
Lauren Caplan, 8, Sophie Spievak, 7, Jackie Caplan, 5, Ben Spievak, 9, and  
Chloe Spievak, 5

Andrea Caplan, Lauren and Jackie's mom, vividly remembers that weekend: "The kids took on the entire task themselves, from creating the bracelets and writing the signs to soliciting donations throughout the campsites and retelling the sad story of Ginger's last days. There were so many people within the campground who connected with the story and felt the pain the kids were feeling. I was so happy to see Ginger's legacy carried on in a way that was for a wonderful cause."

The five kids raised \$65.00 and donated the money to Buddy's Fund at CARE Hospital in Santa Barbara. The medical fund is part of [Shiva's Center for the Human-Animal Bond](#) and financially assists injured or ill animals whose families cannot afford medical care. When Dr. Trish Lane, co-owner of CARE and facilitator of the Center's pet loss support groups heard about the children's fundraiser, she wanted to tell others about it. "I'd much rather read about these kids' efforts to honor their beloved dog than all of the war, destruction and economic devastation that we are inundated with these days," Dr. Lane wrote in an email message. "These children's efforts and compassion in honor of their beloved companion as well as their earnest act of kindness is compelling and heartwarming."

Ginger, who was aptly named because of her golden-colored fur, was 11 when she passed away. Like all Golden Retrievers, Ginger loved fetching sticks at the beach and taking long walks with her family at local parks. Lauren says she'll miss snuggling in bed with her beloved four-legged pal and her mom says she will miss her "first daughter's" constant companionship. "My husband and I always jokingly said that we had three daughters (Ginger, Lauren, and Jackie)," Andrea says with a laugh. "I had Ginger long before I married or had children. She was with me through every life situation: when my husband and I got

engaged, when we bought our first house, and when we had kids together. It was devastating to lose her. I don't know how people do it; I couldn't handle the pain."

Shortly after Ginger died, Andrea learned about Shiva's Center and its free pet loss support groups. "I participated in one of the grief counseling sessions offered by Shiva's Center," Andrea wrote in an email message. "It was an amazing hour where I ended up feeling energized about my passion to help animals. I now have become certified as a volunteer with the Santa Barbara Humane Society and our family recently adopted Cleo, a two-year-old Labrador/Hound mix from an animal shelter in Southern California. I now believe in adopting a dog from an animal shelter, rather than buying one from a pet store. I would rather help a dog who has no home."

Sometimes amazing gifts come in the most unexpected packages. Some are wrapped in pretty paper and tied with a shiny piece of ribbon, while others are enveloped in golden fur. Ginger was a gift that left an indelible pawprint on the Caplan family. Because of her gentle and generous spirit and the endeavors of a group of passionate and compassionate children, many animals will have a chance at a better life with a loving family. Now that's magical.

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*Karen welcomes stories about your kind kids (both two- and four-legged!). Send an email message to her at [karenleestevens@cox.net](mailto:karenleestevens@cox.net).*

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