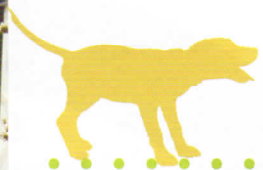


Gail Kurtz and BOLO.

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ila Kurtz has loved many different dogs, but it was her first Lab who changed the way she sees the world — right when she needed it most.



In Their Debt

by Jen Reeder

Dog Is Good

Yellow Lab inspires with everyday wisdom

In 2013, the California resident was “knee deep” in work, juggling parenting, dog training, and running a rapidly growing start-up business, the canine-centric apparel company Dog Is Good. Unaware that she was already burning the candle at both ends by rising at 4:15 a.m. each day and working late, she volunteered to take on another project: raising a guide dog puppy for the nonprofit Leader Dogs for the Blind.

It proved to be a life-changing decision. “I always say when the student is ready to learn, the teacher will appear, and mine appeared in the form of yellow fur,” she said.

The yellow fur belonged to a female Lab named BOLO (an acronym for “Be On the Lookout”). In the first year of raising BOLO, Kurtz became increasingly overwhelmed as her life began “spinning out of control” as

she poured all of herself into helping the business she'd co-founded with her husband in 2007. She ended up clinically depressed to the point of the issue being "life-threatening." But one morning when BOLO woke her up with typical Lab exuberance to greet the day, she had an epiphany.

"I remember sitting on my bed and looking at this pup and thinking, *If I could only be like that for one day, I would do whatever I could to try to string more of those together,*" she recalled. "So the first lesson, right out of the gate, was to set the intention to just choose to be happy. Period. That was a choice I could make, and to seek other lessons from BOLO that I could then follow."

A visit to a park, where BOLO gleefully chased birds as they swooped down and teased her, led to the next Lab-inspired lesson: Chase your dreams.

"She's just a playful, loving dog, and she was having a ball," Kurtz said. "She would look at me with her tongue hanging out like, 'This is so much fun!' That was a moment where I realized, 'Gosh, there really can be such joy in the journey of chasing your dreams.' She will never get those birds, right? But she doesn't know that, and so she continues to chase them with joy and exuberance, as though she expects wholeheartedly that she'll get them – or maybe it wasn't about getting them. Maybe it was just the peace of enjoying the journey of the chase."

Another critical lesson BOLO taught Kurtz is to make time for play. She realized dogs don't need to schedule time for play – it's just part of who they are – but that human responsibilities lead adults to forget how to really engage in play.

"We forget what that actually feels like to not be thinking about the office, or work, or saying to yourself, 'I should be doing XYZ.' That was another lesson that was incredibly powerful for me."

Soon after BOLO left the Kurtz family for advanced training with

Leader Dogs for the Blind, it became clear that she didn't enjoy the work. So when the chance arose to permanently adopt the "career-changed" Lab, they welcomed her home.

"BOLO's destiny was to be the eyes for someone visually impaired. Although I still have my vision, my vision of myself – of where I stood in my life, of how I was living my life – was incredibly impaired. And she provided me that reflective opportunity to change that if I wanted to, and led me on the way."



BOLO sure likes to have fun!



programs that benefit other organizations throughout the year.”

Though BOLO has inspired her owner and countless strangers, Kurtz acknowledged she’s by no means a saint.

“Be On The Lookout really stands for – as it related to the launch of Dog Is Good – to ‘Be on the lookout for all things good.’ This was going to be a company that would create a legacy of doing good in the world through our brand. BOLO, though, her namesake suits her in terms of, ‘Be on the lookout to cover your trash, make sure you don’t have food on your desk,’” she said with a laugh. “I could write a coffee table book on her food-stealing antics. They are endless, but I’m sure most Lab owners can relate.”

Still, she’s eager to bring more Labs into her family in the future. “I absolutely love this breed. I feel they are so soulful and playful and full of love that it’s crazy,” she said. “What’s not to love about a Lab puppy? They’re brilliant. They’re compassionate. They’re playful. They’re the perfect mirror for one’s life.”

Kurtz spoke about BOLO’s profound influence on her life during a keynote speech at the 2018 awards banquet for Women in the Pet Industry Network (WIPIN). After WIPIN named Gila Kurtz the 2017 Pet Industry Woman of the Year, she won a year of leadership coaching from WIPIN Founder Shawna Schuh.

“Coaching Gila for a year allowed me to hear firsthand how BOLO influences and continues to affect Gila on a daily basis. They are a true team and take time daily to play and go outside. This, in turn, allows Gila to work at a high level when she returns from BOLO

time,” Schuh said. “When a dog is a constant companion, they allow you the much-needed pockets of pause time. This then fuels additional creativity and joy.” 

Just Labs readers can get 15% off when shopping at Dog Is Good with the code: **LABLOVE18**. For more information, visit: DogsGood.com or FurCoveredWisdom.com. For more information about Women in the Pet Industry Network, visit: WomenInThePetIndustry.com. For more information about Leader Dogs for the Blind, please visit: LeaderDog.org. For more information about Cammies and Canines, please visit:

CammiesAndCanines.com.

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Award-winning journalist Jen Reeder is former president of the Dog Writers Association of America. She became a self-proclaimed “crazy dog lady” after she and her husband adopted a lovable Lab mix named Rio. Visit her online at www.JenReeder.com.



Now Kurtz shares what she learned from her Lab to help inspire others to make positive changes in their lives. Based on her experiences with BOLO, Kurtz wrote the book *Fur Covered Wisdom: A Dog Can Change the Way You See the World* and started a weekly e-newsletter called the “Fur Covered Wisdom” project that shares life lessons from dogs.

Additionally, Dog Is Good started a “Dogs can change the way you see the world” line of t-shirts and accessories, and a portion of the proceeds have raised thousands of dollars for animal welfare charities. The latest project, “Dog Is Good For Patriots,” supports the nonprofit Cammies and Canines, which provides homeless military veterans with a place to live while they train rescued dogs to become service animals.

“My husband’s a twenty-seven year Navy veteran, and that community is very near and dear to our hearts,” she said. “We’re deeply committed to them and will create additional