

Griffin Fielding AKC TC, CKC TCH, ASCA TDX, Mixed Breed Dog Club TDX (now dismantled)

September 11, 2007- November 2, 2020



(Photo by Beth Arnold)

How does one write about a dog like Griffin? How does one break down such a life into bullet point highlights? How does a dog's journey take him from a mixed breed litter of puppies to superman lifetime achievement awards? Let me try to tell you.

Griffin was born through a fortunate accidental union of "Zumi" Xuma von Grunheide, German Shepherd and "Piper" Seadrifts Pipers Amazing Grace, German Shorthaired Pointer. He looked like a large, fit deep chested lab but was far from it. Zumi's siblings were renowned police service dogs.



Zumi and Piper – Mom and Dad

I brought my step kids to Joan's house to help socialize the puppies and after several visits went home with Griffin. Griffin started out as a family dog. Jackson took him to puppy classes and 2 levels of obedience with Joan and walked him in Lynn Creek trails. Tessa brought him to tracking until a spider web ended that career! He loved to get Orrin mad and make him chase him, only to take off like the Roadrunner leaving Wiley Coyote behind. He would ninja away Orrin's toys, and Orrin would let him.



Joan and Griffin as a puppy



Griffin and Orrin

They were good pack brothers.

One day I brought Griffin to the forest with me for a tracking private with a student. He had a GSP of the same age and fitness. After tracking we let them off line to run. The speed was phenomenal as they raced around, and then hockey checked each other at top GSP speed right into my knee, shattering it. I was out for several months and took a year to be good as new! I respect the size and strength and speed of dogs, and it is surprising how many accidents like this happen. I am also now bionic! :)



Photo by Rob P

Griffin was so fast and agile, Rob who took the 2 dogs on forest runs twice a week, described 9 foot airborne strides as he flew through the air like a gazelle. He could spin 180 degrees at 5 feet airborne catching a Frisbee and land running. He could swim like a seal, his back legs pedaled so fast his whole spine writhed side to side like a snake. I wish we could start again, as there are so many sports for dogs like this now! He could have done it all! His natural walking pace was so fast that in order for a walk to be enjoyable for him, I would maintain a full run beside him, with his puller in his mouth, of course!

As things go, the kids both went off to university in Edmonton and Griffin shifted over to Andrew for trips to the cabin and swimming in the lake. Allan took Griffin through one of my urban component classes so I could get him a sound foundation in urban tracking. It was difficult trying to train two dogs, and I was focusing on Orrin's championships at the time. With Allan's attention to detail, you can imagine that this dog was nose on footprints the entire time.

As Orrin got older, I started to bring Griffin along regularly to tracking and was astounded at how good he was. It was at this point that I adopted Griffin as my own, and our real journey together began.

With the confidence in guarding from his mother, and his general aloofness of strangers from his father, Griffin was a formidable force to be reckoned with. Although he never broke skin, he could stop an approach of a stranger dead in their tracks with an arm grab, a face bop, or a very believable bark and hold. Guests at my house would be held hostage with a cold hard stare, ready for any movement. It

was apparent all along that he needed clear consistent leadership and being passed around family members had its benefits and its drawbacks. Settling in with one main handler gave him certainties he could count on, and I started to make headway with his ongoing distrust of strangers.

I have a hair studio at home where I still do clients one day a week and these people were instrumental in helping with his counter conditioning from the safety of his crate, and eventually coming out for short successful visits. The tracking group became of source of safety for him as he was heavily rewarded with swift 'Go Say Hi's'. No one dared near the truck as his booming GSD bark would make them think twice. Walking Orrin and Griffin was amusing as folks would gravitate to the 'lab' while I would be directing them frantically to the GSD with the giant head, Orrin, as the 'friendly' one!

Something shifted when a Search and Rescue mission went sideways. This is a story in itself, but the short version is the extensive search for Ellie Mae, the frightened bloodhound, resulted in Ellie Mae being recovered and Griffin being separated by his speed, and running back to the empty vehicle. A well meaning stranger caused him to bolt at top speed whereby he was lost for 6 nights. After a week of a community pulling together to search for this hero, it was discovered that he had found one of the tracking group, and made a den out back of her property which backed onto the mountainside, just east of the main search area. The final chapter of this epic tale finds Orrin and Charlotte tracking through the mountain trails in the falling snow until his unmistakable paw prints disappear under a cover of snow. The fairy tale ending brings him back to the den site, discovering my footprints leading into Kirsy's yard. He decided that this person letting him into a warm house with food where he scented me, keeping him safe until I arrived, was not such a bad thing!

Here is an article of the happy ending, where school kids cheered as it was announced over the school PA that Griffin was found and home for Christmas! His first media coverage

(Yes, Griff looked a little skinny there, but otherwise all okay. :) He sighed a lot in the days to come curled up warmly in his bed....)

Doggone it: Tracking dog returns home after becoming lost during pet rescue

By Brent Richter, North Shore News December 21, 2012

Lost and found: Ellie Mae and Griffin got some studio time for seasonal photos after both dogs spending days lost in the North Shore's backcountry.



Photograph by: NEWS , Kate Morris

The last of the North Shore's wayward dogs is back home for Christmas, bringing an end to the almost daily searches of local mountains this month.

To the great relief of owner and professional dog trainer Maureen Fielding, Griffin, a mixed-breed, trained tracking dog, timidly presented himself in the backyard of a home on Prospect Road late Tuesday night after being lost near Mosquito Creek for five days.

The home he stumbled upon belongs to someone to whom Fielding taught dog tracking.

A testament to the species' place in the Western family, Fielding roused hundreds of local volunteers to help look for Griffin and canvas nearby neighbourhoods; she conscripted the help of many of the tracking dogs she has helped train and even consulted pet psychics and dowsers who used a divination technique with a pendulum to point them in the direction of Griffin.

"People might think that we are a little strange but the fact is, I got there and he (had been) there," Fielding said.

Unfortunately, Griffin was on the move often, only leaving occasional clues — a temporary den, a bloody paw print and rare sightings by hikers and residents.

"For a couple of days I was about an hour behind him but he kept moving, which makes it difficult," she said. "It took me several days to figure out his pattern. . . . It took several days to bring it all together to such an incredible happy ending."

Fielding is "extremely grateful" to the multitude of people who helped bring Griffin home for Christmas.

Ironically, Griffin was instrumental in tracking and finding Ellie Mae, a four-year-old bloodhound, who turned up Thursday after being lost in the backcountry for 10 days. While Griffin was able to flush Ellie Mae back to volunteer searchers, he became lost himself, triggering another all-out search.

As for lessons learned from the ordeal, Fielding said Griffin won't be going off-leash on any tracking missions for a while, and she'll now be recommending dog collar GPS units as Christmas gifts for people who hit the trails with their dogs.

But there are some even more poignant takeaways from this, she added, especially for people who have lost pets.

"Be persistent, determined and active in getting your pet back. You can't give up hope," she said.

And there's also uncanny matter of Griffin coming out of the woods and into the backyard of a home he had never been to before, but likely recognized the scent of thanks to spending time with the owners' dogs.

"I just cannot see that as a coincidence. It's just phenomenal," she said,

Ellie Mae and Griffin are just the most recent lost dogs to spur large-scale search efforts. On Dec. 8, Ohly, a Bernese mountain dog, was captured by North Shore Rescue volunteers after he went missing in one of the more treacherous areas of the North Shore's backcountry.

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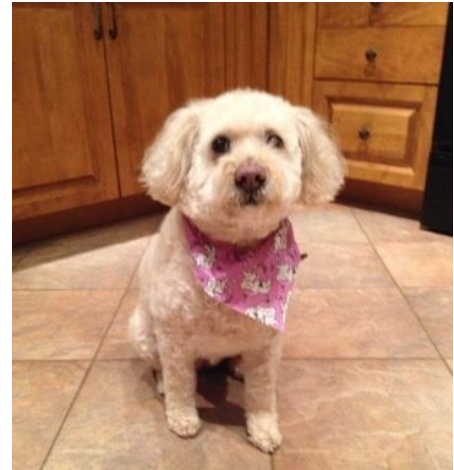


We had started Nosework where he was dubbed the laser beam, as he would radar in on the odours with intensity and precision and attention to detail. This is where Lale and I met and began our journey together as tracking buddies. Over the years we continued to dabble in Nosework making our way up to Level 3. Challenges in getting into tests, conflicts with tracking, and eventually covid, prevented him from getting any further.

K9 Nose Work Trial

As time trickled on, and Orrin started to age, I put more energy into tracking with Griffin. I was astounded at his focus, drive, work ethic, and precision.

One New Year's Day, Andrew and I set off for Nicaragua. We had hardly arrived when I got news from Allan that Griffin had just successfully tracked a lost dog from Riverview Hospital in Coquitlam, where Allan had sighted the poor dog that had bolted from home due to fireworks the night before. The track took them across the highway, along railway tracks, where a train passed for 8 minutes, pinning the team between the noisy cargo train and the creek, until they could resume the track. Griffin continued as if nothing had happened, and turned into an open meadow, where the dog sat exhausted. The owner who had been following behind was able to walk in and retrieve his dog with great relief and amazement.



The little dog back home safely

Griffin searched for many other lost dogs and never had any trouble discerning the difference. He would just track whatever you put in front of him. He was on the news tracking in Vancouver for a little lost dog that was never recovered, believed to have been picked up and eventually sold. There was great footage of Griffin intensely tracking along the way he did.

He was instrumental in the last ditch efforts to find Joan Warren, a senior lady with dementia who went missing on the north shore, found by a hiker just after we called the search at dusk.

In 2014, the AKC opened up tracking to mixed breeds. This was a dream come true! Griffin had his first TD in Bow, under our mentor Sil Sanders, and what a great day it was! Here is the link to that track: <http://youtu.be/cJ2jyIKDN-w>

Notice that I wave the glove, and we leave the field without greeting the judges? Yeah, we were still working on the distrust thing at this time.



In the spring of 2015 I failed him in Wenatchee for his TDX, pushing him past a turn where he couldn't recover. Once back on track, he flew to the end motoring through the sagebrush without breaking stride, while the judges looked on in disappointment at my failure. Judge's comment was 'This is a very honest dog'. Note to self....: (This was a tough lesson and a grave disappointment for me. Griffin was flying through the sagebrush in the days prior with Margaret J, one of our fondest memories:

Griffin in Wenatchee

We had another opportunity a couple of months later in Idaho. A bit further to go, but proved to be another adventure as a stray cat hitched a ride with us along the way. Fond memories of this day as my tracking buddy Deb and Zoe were there with me. Griffin worked his way through a field of gopher holes, surprised by the fact he could stick his whole head in one! Zoe was digging her way to China in another on her TDX. Both passed beautifully, and 2 Canadians drove the long journey home a lot swifter than we came. This link is the Canine Partners Spotlight article about him as the first 'All American' mixed breed to earn the AKC TDX title.

<https://www.akc.org/canine-partners/incredible-nose-earns-top-titles-finds-lost-pets-2/>



Griffin's TDX in Idaho



Photo by Beth Arnold

After Orrin passed away, Griffin seemed determined to fill his paws, taking his new position very seriously like he had earned his place. It was an emotional time for me, and I felt that Orrin was sitting on our shoulders as we headed to Utah for a VST test. That was a really long way, and I can remember almost giving up in exhaustion trying to get there. I am so glad I didn't, as he performed at his best, right on track with one beautifully organized search, with the AKC Senior Executive Field Rep Diane Schultz there to witness the first Canine Companion 'All American' Mixed Breed Tracking Champion in the AKC. He had accomplished this in less than one year. Again, the media, here is the article:

<https://www.akc.org/canine-partners/first-champion-tracker-mixed-breed-crowned/>



VST Pass at the University of Utah



In 2017, the CKC followed suit and we could finally enter a test. Sue Sorensen gave up her spot for us in Courtenay BC. But she did so much more than that as it opened up a chain of opportunities in perfect succession. Our TD was laughable, as it came in mid March after a long snowy winter. The grass was dead and fields were flooded after the melting snow. We tracked from pond to pond, weaving around in that field looking like we never tracked before. At one point I said to Griffin, 'We are NOT failing a TD, Griffin, let's get it together here!' And we did! Thankfully!

The next BIG ADVENTURE was heading to Thunder Bay, Ontario later that spring. If I could drive to Utah, could I drive across the country? Karen Boyes of the Thunder Bay Tracking Club was instrumental in ensuring that I got there. A huge supporter of a team she had never met, with confidence to fill every possible spot, she waggled a TDX spot and a UTD spot for us, just to make the trip worth our while. I will never forget her energy, hospitality, generosity and faith in us. Donna Brinkworth was there as well, earning Ben's TCH, and cheering us on. Griffin strode like a tracking machine through his TDX through the most beautiful field I have ever seen. My bestie friend Deb W flew in to see Griffin and help me drive home, and she was amazed watching him. She still talks about it with enthusiasm! His UTD went equally as well, a clean pass right on track. Karen called him a powerhouse tracker.

We flew home in the truck 5 feet off the ground all the way back to Vancouver.

Again, the media coverage, one more article in the local newspaper!

<https://www.nsnews.com/lifestyle/pets/mixed-breed-dog-tracks-pure-victory-1.20514899>



Thunder Bay TDX

We loved Saturdays with the 'usual suspects' in our Tracking Group. One warm sunny spring day we made a field trip to Western Washington University where unbeknownst to us, there was to be a festival that day. We laid all our tracks, and realized something was up when Little Bo Peep walked past Kaid on his track. Not unusual at all! When we arrived at the other end of the university 3 hours later, a full on outdoor rock concert was just starting up with the adjoining festival in Red Square. Hundreds of people were milling around, and all kinds of activity. We started at the edge of it all, and Griffin paused circling a lot at his first corner, which headed right into all the action. The band was in full swing behind a large group of trees, and it was LOUD. I think he was acclimatizing to all the noise, until finally he leaned his shoulders forward as if to say, 'OK, we're going in.'

Over the grass through the Frisbee game, over the sunbathing woman, right turn on the walkway to an article in front of the bench with the resting couple. I coiled up the line as he headed into the intersection of the rock concert, milling with people and dogs on leash. Deb jumped in as flanker as we did active circling in 2 choice points before committing to the third, a left turn. Along the way I heard "Oh look! They've got the search dogs here today!" I didn't have the heart to tell them he was searching for a leather square, but I was quietly amused that we could assist in the feeling of security for our fellow Americans. LOL.

Negative at the parking lot and a right turn down another courtyard passage into Red Square. Right turn through the kids on the grass catching sight of Little Bo Peep again. Over another courtyard passage through the bike and skateboard, down the steps through the main entranceway to an article sitting there. Continuing straight through the main entrance across the road to a patch of grass, right turn past the barking lunging dog on leash with the people eating off paper plates to his leather square. Another fun tracking day for Griffin. :) He had a few like this, but this one was a favorite that stands out in my mind.

We had a chance to get a UTDX track in Red Deer, Alberta in August of 2017 under Judge Donna Brinkworth. I was excited as I liked Donna and thought she was a great teacher. I had known she was a good judge, but I had never seen her judge or any of her tracks. That day sparked a further connection between us that continues to this day. Again, Deb and Zoe were our good luck tracking buddies as they

got into the test as well. Both Zoe and Griffin earned their championships that day, on beautiful tracks plotted by Donna. Again, Griffin did two of his beautifully organized searches and the rest right on track.



Red Deer UTDX

What an incredible journey. This time Griffin earned four tracking titles in less than 6 months!

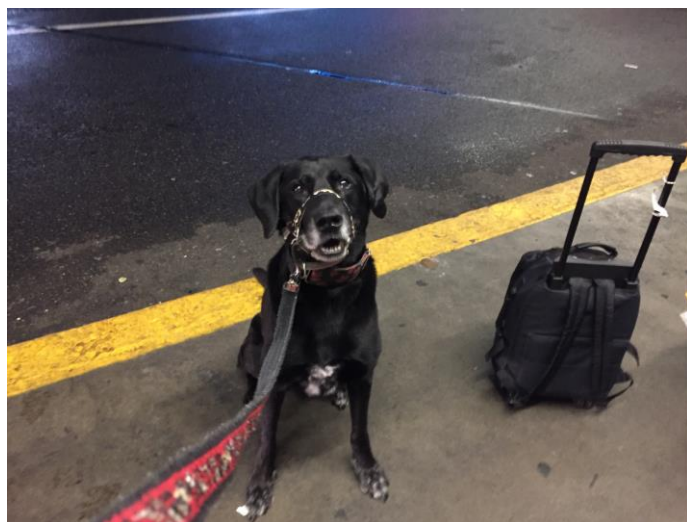
We loved to track with ASCA, and his ASCA TDX is most memorable for me, as a rainstorm came through Bow the night before the trial after plotting. All the fields were flooded and Griffin's was an organic field with lakes as large as 3-4 feet deep. We were so in tune that day, working through and around 3 lakes and reacquiring track somewhere on the other side to a successful finish. That day I felt that we had really grown as a team and in our communication with each other. It was beautiful.



Griffin and his more recent pack brother Pilot

When Pilot came to live with us, Griffin was not impressed. Although he had known him since puppyhood, Pilot had grown into a pushy young male. Three times I saw the temper of his mother that I had never seen before. He was so righteously angry in each case, but I couldn't let it continue, for fear that Pilot may not back down. From then on, Griffin would just stop and look at me with eyes that said, "You going to take care of that then?" It was a contract that I kept from then on.

As Griffin was getting older, the CKC Masters Tracking Championship felt out of reach as Thunder Bay seemed like a daunting trip to take him on. But I was shocked to find that we had one more adventure yet to go. When I got the call that Griffin got a spot in the 2018 AKC Tracking Nationals, I was in disbelief. Who could imagine a Canadian having the opportunity to take part in this event, never mind a mixed breed dog! Just as I was trying to digest the news, Theresa called to tell me that Charlotte also got a spot! What? *Two* Canadians? We started our plans, and I dubiously flew Griffin to Kentucky with fingers crossed. Those flights were truly the scariest thing I ever did with him, as the thought of him in cargo away from me was torturous. I couldn't relax until I saw him again.



Griffin at Seatac

This is another long story, but the short version is that a terrible high humidity heat wave came through Kentucky that week, and the focus quickly became Theresa and I managing our dogs in the heat, trying not to kill them, rather than succeeding with an unassisted track in the midday heat. It was an incredible journey, and an incredible honour. Again, Griffin was recognized for his tracking abilities even in those extreme conditions of essentially trying to track in a sauna. Here is the production that the AKC aired on their channel in honour of these tracking champions.

<https://akc.tv/watch/13/1767/video/national-tracking-invitational/?ctx=/watch/7/1740/events/2018-national-tracking-invitational>



2018 Tracking Nationals

In the following year, we focused on his Nosework 3 where Griffin excelled as a senior dog. He also loved to be the tracking demo dog for the students in my classes. He loved to show those young dogs how it's done!

Here is a video of Kayla filming one of his demos:

<https://youtu.be/RkB2Q5WOMTM> Mo and Griffin Demo on cornering and handling June 17.2020.

In September of 2019, there was one more achievement for Griffin. We attended the Vincent Ramirez seminar in Bow, Washington with a working spot. Griffin worked all the exercises with his usual precision and work ethic. At the end of the seminar Vincent gave Griffin a gift, a Superman bandana. I don't know what it was about that moment, but to me it felt like his Lifetime Achievement award. I know Vincent was touched by him, still tracking and learning at just shy of 12 years old.



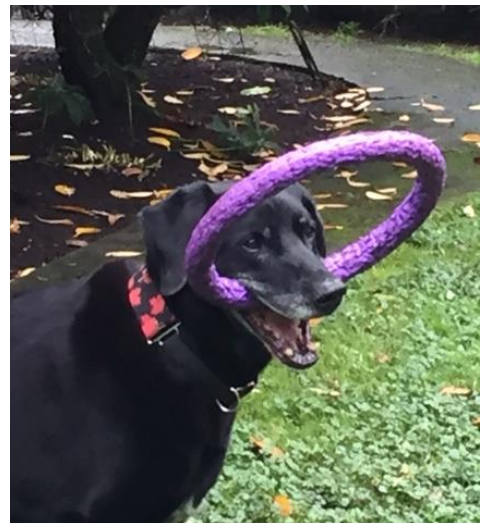
Everyone who saw Griffin was taken by him in much the same manner. Something about him made people stand up and take notice. He was a beacon to the sport, something to aspire towards, an inspiration. People would love to watch him work. At a seminar hosted by Jan Wesen, in Bow, Deborah Palman commented, "It's hard to think of an exercise to do for Griffin, as he does everything so well".

People noticed, and they remember him.

As for searching for more lost dogs? In July of this year, he tracked several kilometers determinately across Richmond after Taj, still missing. Please take a look, and watch for him in South Vancouver and Richmond.

https://www.cbc.ca/amp/1.5758777?_twitter_impression=true

We enjoyed the summer with days on our river, pullers in the yard, and watching nature in the shade under the trees in the breeze. He was slowing down for sure in this last year.



Summer 2020

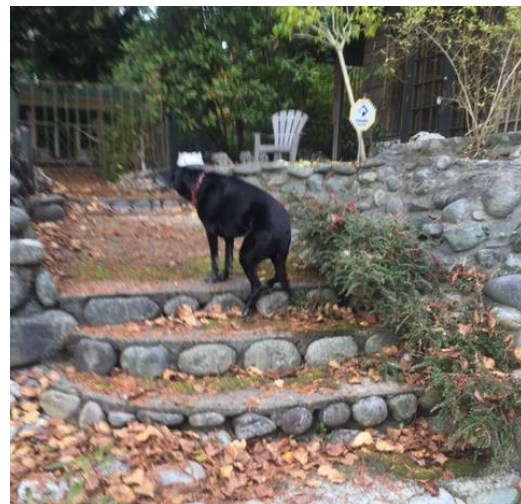
However, Griffin was still a robust 13 year old on his birthday on September 11th. In early October he jumped down off the bed and appeared to tweak his left shoulder. I treated it as a soft tissue injury and it seemed to heal, but reoccurred days later. I treated it again, but this time it did not get better. An X ray revealed early stages of bone cancer, which progressed aggressively over the next 10 days.

<https://youtu.be/btCG7O89YEc> Griffin Oct 30th, 2020 “off he goes..”

Three days later Griffin collapsed in pain, unable to get up.

We wonder how our dogs will grow old. Some say the good ones live fast and leave fast. I think this was clearly his stop sign.

He loved the yard, chasing the pullers, his blue ball, and the river. I thought it would be an ok retirement for him. On his last day, he rallied in the afternoon and he did everything at least once. He even insisted on going down the steps to the river for his last drink there, just unbelievable how he did that, but he dragged himself out there.



November 2, 2020 The last steps to the river

I am so grateful to have had this journey with him. Orrin was my teacher, but Griffin took me places I never expected. He defines this last segment of my life, and became my partner like no other cross species connection. We experienced Pure Joy together.



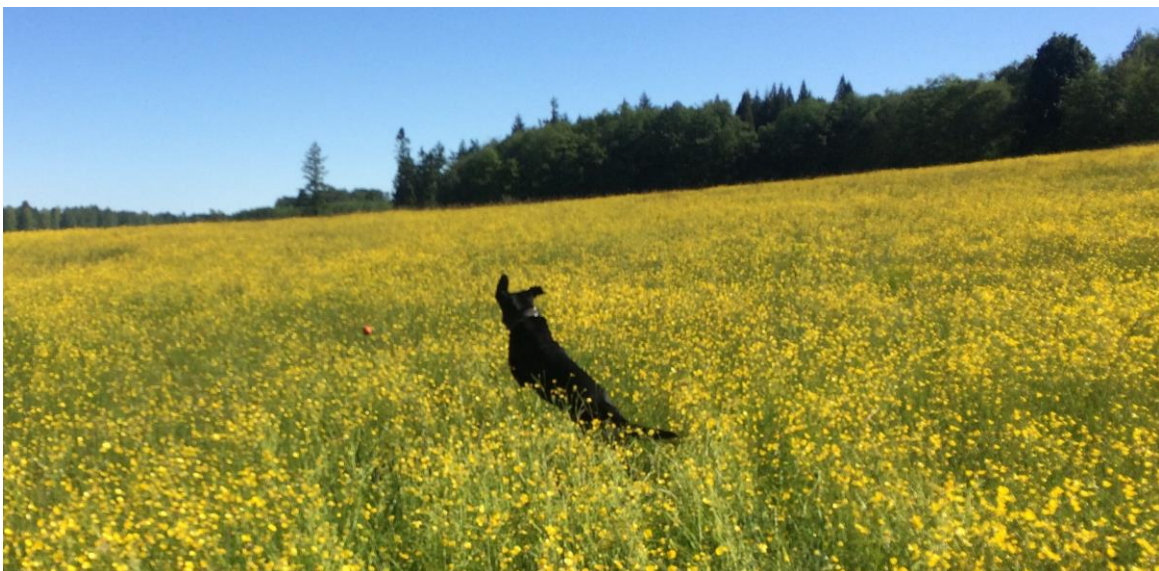
He outgrew his own demons, becoming the most affectionate, people loving dog anyone could imagine. He was a favorite, visiting everyone one by one, seeing what good treats they had. He particularly liked tailgate parties at the back of SUV's, sharing treats with the resident dogs.

Griffin getting affection from the tracking group

John Rogerson once said,

“We can be assured that behavior modification has taken place successfully when the dog is dead and the behavior has not reoccurred.” Well done Griffin, I wonder how many people can attest to this?

With all my love and gratitude, Griffin, here is my wish for you. Fly through the fields with your nine foot airborne strides, with your ears flying in the wind. Run like you've never run before, get Orrin to chase you like old days, track to your heart's content anything that you come across, and we will find each other once again.





Saturday October 31, 2020

There are so many people I wish to thank who were special in his life, too many to mention. I would however like to thank Dr. Janice who so lovingly cared for Griffin in his senior years, keeping him in the best shape possible. I am grateful for her guidance during this last difficult time. I thank most of all our tracking group, who loved him as their own in our inner circle, my students, and clients who also loved him, along with all the special people who paved the way for Griffin's amazing journey to success.