

## A Loving Barricade

**Two Collies help their owner cope.**

*By Sharon Pflaumer*

In May 2000, Dad suffered cardiac arrest after brain surgery for two subdural hematomas. His right lung collapsed when he was resuscitated, and he developed virulent pneumonia. He was on a ventilator for five days and in intensive care for a month. Six weeks of hospitalized physical rehabilitation followed. At its conclusion, the enormity of the care Dad still needed was overwhelming.

I was so emotionally and physically drained by summer's end that I started crying at work one day. My father's suffering and debilitation were more than I could bear. When I got home that night, I sat on the edge of the bathtub and wept some more. I began to question if life was worth living.

At the time, I owned two Collies, Kaspir and Brook. Typically, they didn't come running with tissues whenever I felt a little blue. But the intensity of my sobs that night told them something was terribly wrong. They bounded into the bathroom.

I still remember the looks on their beautiful faces: soft, brown eyes wide with alarm, furry brows drawn together, and heads tilted to one side. It was as if they were asking, "What's wrong?"

Gently, they jumped up, put their paws in my lap and licked away my tears. In loud and clear dog language, they seemed to say, "Don't give up! We love you!"

They didn't pull me away from the wheels of a speeding car, nor did they drag me from the water of a raging river. Nonetheless, my wonderful Collies saved me that night. Their outpouring of attention tied a knot at the end of my proverbial rope. They gave me something to hang onto and a reason to go on.

And they continued to do that. Dad lived another seven years, but never fully recovered. There were many more ambulance trips and hospitalizations. I know that I never would have made it through without Kaspir and Brook. For the duration, my Collies were a living, loving barricade between me and the edge.

A stroke overcame 12-year-old Kaspir three months after Dad passed. With great sorrow, I had my beautiful boy put to sleep. Brook, who is 11, continues on without him. I know not to take her life for granted.

I once asked a minister if my dogs would be in heaven. He said he didn't know, but if they weren't, I wouldn't care because heaven is a place of perfect happiness. I just can't imagine being happy, even in heaven, without Kaspir and Brook.

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