

Greetings from Ghana #30

There are More Pleasant Ways to Meet a Caucasian

The Caucasian Shepherd is one that, prior to arriving in Ghana, I had never heard of before. I first heard about it from a woman I met on a five mile hike. She was remarking about how smart and beautiful they were. Having had Australian Shepherds in the past I was intrigued and sought out a breeder.

We ended up getting a beautiful female, Nya. She is fun, kind, very protective (shepherd) and fairly big. She weighs about 60 pounds. Caucasian shepherds are also longhairs. That is not a good idea in 90+ degree weather, but the breed manages to survive. I have Nya shaved twice a year to make her more comfortable (and to stop from sweeping up bales of dropped hair).

The natural distinguishing trait of the Caucasian is their long and tightly curled tail. The breeder induced trait is that the top 1/3 of each ear is removed giving them flat ears on top. I do not find the breed as smart as an Australian. They are, as far as I can tell, on a similar level as German Shepherds – smart but no Einstein. At the same time, they are a breed that, like the Aussie, needs daily physical and mental exercise to keep from getting bored and anxious. The exercise also helps keep their nails trimmed.

Anyone who has ever traveled to areas where there are extreme rainstorms has seen the open culverts on each side of the road designed to capture massive amounts of water. They are typically about two feet across and three feet deep. The house I live in is on a block in between two larger streets, each of which has culverts, even though our immediate street does not.

A couple of days ago, a friend of mine, Kwesi, came over and said he had seen a dog lying in the culvert still alive and needing help. He took me to the street on the north and there, a short distance from the corner was a dog at the bottom of the gutter, laying in a stream of waste water. It almost looked like a giant pile of matted soaked hair. Kwesi said, "I saw him and asked the merchants. They said he has been there for a while."

His hind legs were stretched out behind him and flies were concentrating on where the hair had been scraped away. He looked to weigh about 30 pounds. His eyes were receding into their sockets. His gums were grey. And his temperature was colder than it should be. He had apparently had nothing to eat or drink during a week of 92+ daytime temperatures. He tried drinking water from a small bowl I offered and after lapping for about a minute had not changed the water level. I opened his mouth on the side and gently poured the water in. He started drinking and then relaxed a bit.

He was emaciated and covered in spots with a dark slime. He was soaking wet. But if you looked, you could see he was a handsome, brown and tan Caucasian. We made a stretcher out of two broomsticks and a sheet and brought him to the house.

I kept pouring water into his mouth every so often and he kept drinking, each time having more. In a matter of a couple hours he was able to move a bit and I was able to see that he had no broken bones or open wounds. The worst thing was the scraped away hair on his back leg and foot.

His eyes and the area directly under them was coated with thick, dried mucus. I began soaking the coat with a gentle swabbing of cool water to dissolve the chunks and clear away the crust. The eyes are 98% water. His had dried up and sunken into his head a good half inch from the outer edge of the socket.

I washed him as best I could to remove the waste from his coat and tried dissolving the mats by getting the mud and muck out of the hair. It wasn't perfect but enough to greatly reduce the flies and the stink. During the bath I raised him up to wash his underside and he remained standing as I did it. Afterward I gave him more water and I laid him on his side. He was breathing deeper and it was slightly labored but he seemed to be resting so I left him.

I was walking in the house and heard him moaning. I stepped outside and as I approached the side porch where he was confined he lifted his head and then laid back down and quieted down as I sat next to him. I stayed with him for a while and kept trying to hydrate him. He was still not eating but the vet said his recovery signs were getting better.

I said good night to him and he raised his tail briefly in a small wag.

At some point in the evening he had enough fluid in him again to evacuate whatever was inside his intestines. It came out solid, semi-solid, and liquid. And all black. I cleaned his area and him and put down fresh bedding. He was drinking water more easily and I was hoping he would try food.

When I isolated him on the side porch I used a wooden pallet as a gate by tying it to the porch railing on one side. I saw no reason to create a latch. To close him in I lifted the pallet and set it in place. A dog unable to walk was not going to need more. I made sure he was comfortable and went inside. An hour later it was discovered that he had gotten up, forced the pallet aside, walked about 30 feet, laid down and died.

If you would have seen him then you would have noticed that his toenails indicated he had been chained for months and not exercised. As best as I can determine, he was a young male around a year old who had been abused and then abandoned. Whether he was dumped into the culvert or got there by falling in and being unable to get out, I will never know.

I found out from the neighbors and merchants who stopped by as I was extricating him from the gutter that, "Oh yeah, he has been crawling up and down the gutter now for around a week."

Fifty-nine years ago a young bartender named Kitty Genovese was attacked outside her apartment in Queens, New York City. Neighbors watched as she was mugged and stabbed and left on the sidewalk. And they watched as her attacker returned and attacked her again as she was trying to crawl to safety. No one called for help. No one raised an alarm. The incident became known as “bystander’s syndrome.” Some say it is because everyone thinks someone else will do it. Others say it goes deeper. You can read about it in many freshman psychology books.

Psychologists have since spent a plethora of studies on why people do not get involved. One theory is that there is a five-step decision making process people go through before acting to help. I am not certain why the neighborhood people did not intervene. I believe someone else, much earlier, would have been rewarded with saving a life and having a devoted friend.

As I said I am not sure what prevented someone from acting. I would like to think it was because they did not want to be involved in someone else’s affairs. I grieve about it but I would rather believe that than what one friend of mine said, “You are being an American. Ghanaians don’t care.”

Side note: In the U.S. you can get cremation services for your pet. Animal Control will pick up road kill and dispose of the carcass. Here there are no such services. Local superstitions prevent you from burying an animal on someone’s lot and the only way to dispose of a carcass is to travel to the countryside in the dark of night and bury the animal in a field of brush and tall grasses. The dog is now resting anonymously in the countryside.

I am consoled that although he may not have been able to be saved, at least his last hours were ones where he understood that someone cared and was trying to help bring comfort.

As I told my friend who callously said, “Ghanaians don’t care.” I replied, “Yeah, well I am an American and don’t plan to change that part.”