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Smokey: The Golf Ball Retriever

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by Robert L. Ticehurst, V34

This is the story of Smokey, who was not a Labrador, golden, or Chesapeake Bay retriever, but a golf ball retriever. He appeared on my family's New Jersey doorstep in 1973. No one in our neighborhood had ever seen him before and every time our wonderful cat went outside, Smokey would chase him. I chased him away several times, but he kept coming back. When we went away on a three-week vacation, he was waiting for us upon our return.

We had a lovely little miniature wirehaired dachshund, Beetle, who had been sent to us by a dear friend and fellow veterinarian, Robert E. Ticehurst, from Cornwall, England. We didn't need or want another dog, but Smokey decided that we did, so we took him in and were never sorry afterward. Housebroken and loving, he proved to be a great asset to our family. One morning, after letting him out to run (we either had no leash laws or nobody bothered with them), we were sitting at breakfast when the front doorbell rang. I went to the door and found Smokey, who was ready to come in. Shortly after he adopted us, my wife, Alice, was walking Beetle, on leash, alongside the woods on the 12th fairway of our country club, which was right behind our home. Smokey, unleashed, was walking with them. Suddenly, he went into the woods, came out and dropped

a golf ball at Alice's feet. She commended him, gave him a dog biscuit and he went back into the woods and got another ball. This became a daily routine, and some days he would find 25 to 30 golf balls.

A few years later, we purchased a home in a golf course community in Central Florida and, upon my retirement, became snowbirds, divid-



Dean Kelly (r) and Dr. and Mrs. Ticehurst.

ing our time between the two homes. Old Smoke had a great time retrieving golf balls on both courses. But never did he take a ball from a fairway or rough, always from the woods, and if I could see the ball he wasn't interested in it and would go deeper in the woods to find one. During the 13 years that he spent with us, he found approximately 8,000 golf balls. We often

had friends over for small parties and we would send our golf-playing guests home with two- or three-dozen new or almost new golf balls. I also returned hundreds of balls back to the pros at each course. And when Smokey passed away, we were left with enough golf balls to last us several years.

The public relations agency for the American Animal Hospital Association, of which I was an officer at the time, heard of Smokey and passed on his story to United Press International who sent a reporter to interview us and meet Smoke. The story was published, and we received several clippings from friends across the country as well as Europe (in *Stars and Stripes*). Later, one of Tampa's TV stations came to film Smokey. We still have this tape. Although Smokey has been long gone now, we have a photo montage of him which hangs where I see it every day. We never tried to replace him, we couldn't have. We still miss him.

Dr. Ticehurst, 89, received the School of Veterinary Medicine's Bellwether Medal in 2000 for his "thoughtful compassion and contributions to society in general and the School of Veterinary Medicine in particular." The Ticehursts have moved recently from Central Florida to Maryland to be closer to their family.

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