


Amazing

DOGS

Survival in the Fire Zone

By Meyla Bianco Johnston





For anyone that keeps livestock guardian dogs to watch alpacas, their incredible behavior in the face of danger will come as no surprise. Ask owners about the characteristics of the dogs and the same words keep coming up: loyal, brave, intelligent and resilient. These dogs have been known to escort strangers to the property perimeter instinctively and to stand up against anything threatening their herd, including wolves and cougars.

These canine good citizens prove over and over again that they are a huge asset to any working alpaca farm and take their guarding job quite seriously, whether they are watching over a specific parcel of land or animals. In fact, they are unhappy if they can't keep watch over what they understand as their property and animals.

Derived from ancient dogs that existed almost 6,000 years ago, their DNA makes sure they stay on the clock, tirelessly protecting, whatever the stakes.

In this case, their mettle was tested in the most fundamental way, and a pair of Anatolian/Pyrenees mixes

came through with flying colors.

The Camp Fire that raged through Northern California is now known to be the most devastating wildfire in California history. The fire killed 96 people and injured 12 more plus five firefighters while burning more than 153,336 acres and destroying more than 18,000 structures. It also caused the death and displacement of many of the surrounding community's livestock and pets.

It has defined the new normal for the Western United States and with that has brought a sobering reality.

At the time the fire broke out, Paradise, California residents Andrea, "Ann," and Bill Gaylord had just minutes to escape their property with their lives. Gaylord's family was forced to leave in a hurry – without their two Anatolian/Pyrenees mixes, brothers Madison and Miguel.

The fire swept though their property and entirely destroyed the structures.

As soon as the fire passed, Andrea Gaylord made a request for rescuers to try to find her dogs.

Shayla Sullivan is an independent animal rescuer from Browns Valley,

California who was leaving food and water out regularly for any animals that might have survived – and they were eating it. While in the fire zone via police escort to help a group of horses, she began the search for the Gaylord's dogs.

It was very difficult to find addresses because of the sheer scale of the fire and the new, moonscaped terrain.

During one food and water drop, Sullivan thought she saw a flash of white fur near Gaylord's property, but she was unsure. She says, "The canyon was steep," so it was hard to see and also that livestock guardian dogs don't always show themselves if they don't want to. Sullivan knew it would take persistence to lure them out.

Later, Sullivan called Andrea to let her know she had checked on the 80-acre property, owned by Andrea's family for 100 years this year. Sullivan and Andrea continued to communicate frequently.

Then on Thanksgiving Day, Sullivan checked for the dogs one last time but did not find them. She called Andrea, who was very grateful

The ruins of Andrea and Bill Gaylord's home in Paradise, California, north of Sacramento, after the record-setting Camp Fire devastated a large swatch of Northern California.



but also very sad because there was still no sure sign of the dogs.

At this point, Sullivan had to “turn in her ticket” and leave the rescue to someone else because the authorities would not let her back in to the evacuation zone. During the aftermath of the fire, access was tightly controlled.

She assured Andrea that a new, fresh team was going in to search for her dogs and that she had left them detailed directions as to how to find the place.

Meanwhile, things started to turn around. Another rescuer saw and captured Miguel at the property and brought him to safety, though neither Sullivan nor Andrea was aware of this at the time. One down, one to go.

The very first day emergency management services allowed her

to come back, Andrea went to her property to find total devastation and ashes. Her home and property were a complete loss, a shocking and difficult reality. She was also looking for Madison and Miguel and trying to cope with the idea that she might not find them.

Then, she was amazed and delighted to see one of her two Anatolians, Madison, come running toward her out of the smoldering, ashy landscape, a big fluffy white blur against a bleak gray background.

He wagged continually and seemed to appreciate that Andrea had brought along Madison's favorite treat: Wheat Thins crackers.

“Imagine the loyalty of hanging in in the worst of circumstances and being here waiting,” Andrea told WKYC. “It was so emotional!”

But sadly, Miguel was still unaccounted for as far as Andrea knew.

Persistence

Sullivan had not given up – her dedication to animals runs deep. She had continued trying to help Andrea's family and many others find and reunite with their pets.

Shayla Sullivan is an animal lover who took on the formidable task of trying to find and help as many displaced animals as she could. Right before Christmas she was still at it. She fostered animals at her place, suffered from smoke inhalation and more.

Her Facebook page is a testament to the sheer number of people and animals she has helped, including cats, dogs, horses and birds. Here, she chronicles the pets she rescues

and shows the reunions with grateful owners. Her determination to help is almost boundless.

She later explained in a live interview on Anderson Cooper's *Full Circle* that she did this because if owners saw that someone was trying to take care of their animals while they were evacuated it might give them some "comfort."

Sullivan said volunteers and pet owners were continually "scouring" not just the landscape. They were using the Internet to find and cross-reference lost and found pets on websites and Facebook pages set up for the purpose.

A Clue Online

Things really improved dramatically for the Gaylords when a female member of Andrea's family saw a photo of what she thought could be Miguel on one of these sites and sent it to Andrea to look at. She notified Sullivan immediately.

Sullivan posted the photo of what was possibly Miguel on the Paradise Lost and Found Pets site. She says "within 10 minutes" Arian Kaloke of All About Pets in Citrus Heights contacted her and let Sullivan know Miguel was safe with her.

The shocking part was that Miguel had ended up 85 miles away! The chaos of the fire contributed to a jumbled sequence of events, decisions and placements.

Once Andrea and Sullivan were sure the photo of Miguel matched the dog Kaloke was caring for, the Gaylords were keen to pick him up right away. But they were in a challenging situation, having just lost everything and sheltering away from the property at a mobile home park. It was a time of profound anxiety.

Great Pyrenees



Great Pyrenees dogs originated to guard sheep in the Pyrenees Mountains and have remarkable resilience to difficult climates. Stunning in appearance, Pyrenees are white, large, imposing

dogs with a regal air. Their exuberant thick coat, developed for use in a punishing mountain environment, is superb at keeping the elements at bay.

Pyrenees enjoy guarding the livestock, the children, the barnyard animals – anyone and anything they have been instructed to keep track of. They are described as kind, especially with children, but can take care of business immediately when a predator is present.

Strong-willed, independent and reserved with strangers, Pyrenees are fearless, loyal and attentive and will protect their herd with their lives.

Anatolian Shepherds



Anatolians are very large, strong, hardy and imposing. These rugged dogs have remarkable resilience and power with sturdy bodies, thick necks and broad heads. The most common coat color is white. Anatolians have large rib cages and an overall thin build with small stomachs and long legs. Fur around

their ruff is especially thick to protect against attack. Anatolians often have a black mask or ears. Anatolians mature at about 18 to 30 months of age and are known to have excellent sight and hearing.

Anatolians are self-sufficient, intelligent and can be forceful when necessary. They are instinctively protective and logical, which allows them to defend flocks of alpacas and other animals with little outside help from humans. Extremely perceptive, they may not always obey because of their independent natures.

As one of the most commonly used dogs to guard alpacas, Anatolian Shepherds' reputation as capable guardians is unsurpassed.



The white fur of livestock guardian dogs was bred so they could mix with their white flocks easily while guarding. In a landscape with little left but charred trees and debris, Madison's normally white fur takes on a dingy tone.

Sullivan says, "Ann was nervous to go too far. She and her husband were sheltering in Oroville and driving far was a hardship. I told her I would go and get [Miguel]."

Sullivan drove four hours round trip to pick up Miguel for the Gaylords. "Arian assured me she would stay open, and she was true to her word." When Sullivan arrived, "She had groomed and loved on Miguel the whole time he was there. Her happy tears showed me that her heart is just like mine," Sullivan says.

"Miguel landed in a GREAT place when he landed at All About Pets," Sullivan says. "They are a beautiful group of people."

It took Sullivan more than six hours to get clearance to claim Miguel. However, Sullivan is grateful for the careful checking process

by Butte County Animal Control because she is so dedicated to helping ensure pets end up with their rightful owners.

For pets, being lost and displaced is extremely distressing. Miguel had been upset and visibly depressed at his temporary home.

Sullivan recalls, "They brought Miguel out, and he was sad and timid. Of course, he showed little emotion. After all, I was *not* his people. We took our verifying pictures so that I could claim him. I led him out to the truck, and for once, he wagged his tail."

Sullivan got him loaded up in her vehicle to take him to the Gaylord's temporary home.

"The ride home was quiet, and he looked so sad . . . I'm sure he was wondering, 'What now? Can I please

go home?' I kept the windows down, and I just about froze to death... Miguel likes it cold, so of course, I obliged him."

Sullivan met Andrea at the parking lot of the donation center in Oroville. They hugged, realizing they were meeting for the first time in person after so many phone calls.

"I no sooner got back to the truck and Miguel was up and sniffing," Sullivan says. "He was wagging his tail and happy. He couldn't wait to unload. He was going to be reunited with his people!"

He was so excited to smell his truck nearby and could surely smell Andrea on Sullivan from their hug.

Sullivan says it "looked like it took eight years off" him when he saw Andrea.

When they arrived, Sullivan and Andrea led him into the house, but as he lay down, they noticed he was clearly sad again. "He thought he had made it home – I think he missed his land," Sullivan says.

Finally

On December 7, Sullivan picked up Andrea and Miguel and drove them to their Paradise property.

"Today I had the pleasure of picking up Andrea and Miguel," Sullivan wrote on her Facebook page. "Miguel was very suspicious of me, but he eventually loaded into the truck – I think he remembered me. It was a long ride back to his home, and he was restless."

Of course, Miguel had no way of knowing things were about to get much better, and he was about to be reunited with his brother for the first time after a very traumatic ordeal.

"It was the BEST feeling having Madison meet our truck," Sullivan says. "After feeding him for almost a

month but not knowing he was for sure still there, seeing him was surreal! He followed the truck, so he must have sensed Miguel was aboard. He was wagging his tail as if to tell me, 'I know you from around here, I think you're pretty ok.'"

Sullivan says Miguel and Madison's reunion was amazing.

The siblings resumed their regular behavior, and all visible signs of distress from both disappeared. "They said their hellos and then went right back to work," Sullivan says.

They quickly regrouped and clearly made a practical plan, with Miguel guarding the lower part of the property and Madison looking after the top.

It had been a full month since the fire changed all of their lives.

Andrea and Sullivan are still amazed that both dogs survived and can only surmise that they outran the fire and circled back. Some animals Sullivan rescued returned too soon and burnt their paws badly on smoldering embers. But not Madison and Miguel, who came through without a scratch.

"It's a true testament to the instincts these dogs have," Sullivan says.

In late December, they were staying at their property watching over what is still left with regular visits from Gaylord and her family, who were still staying at the mobile home park.

However, Sullivan says, "Andrea's

spirit is uplifting, and she hopes to rebuild a new home for the boys to watch over."

"Madison is proof that there are many animals waiting for their people. Keep feeding, just in case, and keep the hope alive!"

She modestly says, "It's just what I do." ●



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© Courtesy Shayla Sullivan

Shayla Sullivan and Arian Kaloke soothe Miguel at All About Pets in Citrus Heights, California. At this time, Miguel had been without his people for a long time and was depressed and distressed. Sullivan knew he missed the Gaylords, his job and his land.