

No one knows exactly when he was born. I wish I could say he glided into this world on a lustrous cloud of love, but I didn't even want him when he first came into my world.

By his teeth and paws, the vet confirmed my guess that he was about eight years old. And a rough eight years it was. His tail was broken and never fixed so cockeyed. He didn't bark, not a yip nor a peep, for over six months. Shoes could not be put on in his presence. Brooms, mops, my daughter's softball bats, anything of or on a stick made him hide and tremble in fear. His big, beady, black eyes seemed in a perpetual state of trying not to cry. So my daughters named this sad excuse of a dog, a chihuahua-dachshund mix, Donner because it means God of Thunder. They wanted him to feel big and strong because he appeared neither.

Route Twenty

I was harassed into "rescuing" Donner. At the time, this meant paying a large amount of money which I couldn't afford, to take him off of the dog shelter's hands. I'm not sure why my daughters thought he was meant to be ours, but I am sure the shelter thought that because I was the only one that dared suggest I *might*.

We lived in Upstate New York on Route 20. Literally. Our address was "Route 20". The shelter was eight miles down the road. When they carried him out to me, they cooed, "he just loves his little belly rubbed." On the way home, the dog fell asleep. I presumed they doped him up to make him appear calm. Nope. He was living in a perpetual state of fear, which must be exhausting. We learned very quickly he didn't like his little belly rubbed ... he was cowering in fear when approached. Boy did I get stuck with a dud. He was not a Donner, he was a d-u-d Dudder.

Twenty Days

It took almost three weeks to realize not only was Donner ours, but I think I was starting to like the little guy. It took almost three weeks for him to realize the new people taking care of him wouldn't abuse him. Not only did we feed, water, and not beat him, but we actually wanted him around.

He started sitting near me, then next to me, then on me. He started to sleep next to me. I didn't mind his snoring nor the surprising amount of heat his tiny body gave off. He started greeting me when I got home. I didn't have to search for where he was hiding. He started looking me in the eyes. I could stop being sad this little creature couldn't look up out of fear.

Donner grew on me. So much so, he became my bestbud. I called him my little old man or the man of the house. He became such a happy pup with so much personality, I forgot how much I did *not* want this specific animal. Neither of us ever forgot how terrible, painful, and unnecessary the first half of his life was, but we moved on, together.

His coat was pumpkin orange which aged into ghost-white.

His ears were so abnormally gigantic for his body, he was famous for them. They were an endless cause of laughter, jokes, and nicknames.

His body was a barrel with tiny stick legs. His little, tiny feet made us wonder how he balanced.

He was always willing and joyful to go on a ride, or perfectly content staying home.

He was fine on a leash, not pulling or dragging me, and before he lost his hearing, came when I called.

He loved to bury bones and treats, and loved going back for them even more.

We had settled into a nice life together.

Twenty Hours

Then the big move. We packed up the car and drove twenty hours south. Twenty-Hundred miles south.

Donner was always along for the ride. He was so adaptable. Peeing in the deep snow with those tiny legs - no problem. Running in the tall grass between rows of Upstate New York grapes - sure. But I wondered how he would take the Southern heat.

Why did I wonder? Mr. Along for the Ride, Mr. Adaptable, loved the Florida sun. He soaked up the heat like he was born here. My guess is it soothed his arthritis. His early years took a toll on him and now retirement in Florida was just what he needed. Soaking up the sun, lazing in the shade, watching lizards dart around, far too old to chase anything, tiny toes in the sand life was good. Canine good. The first half of his life wasn't worth it but this sure was nice.

20 East Main St.

Until it wasn't. Well it was for four years. Then Donner's little orange/now white little barrel body couldn't take it any longer. The good life wasn't enough to overcome age. My bestbud was fading fast.

And then he faded away.

The new vet helped, but Donner's last address, 20 Main St., was our last stop.

Twenty Years Almost

Two and a half months after Donner left me behind, he would have been twenty years old. That's pretty darn good for my tough little guy.

*Don, you truly were God of Thunder, tiny tower of strength. I'll try to harness it from you,
because my heart will take longer than twenty years to start healing.*

Catch you in the next storm.