

The adventures of Elsa

This is the story about Elsa, our beloved border collie (mix).

Nine years ago, in the summer of 2010, I moved to Houston to join my partner, and start a new life. I had always wanted to have a dog, and now, finally, settled in a house with a small garden, it seemed like the perfect time for it. Together with a friend, I went to visit the Houston Humane Society and looked at the many dogs that were up for adoption. We decided to adopt a border collie (mix) called "Lexy". Lexy was born on 25 September 2009, and had been briefly adopted by another family, but brought back again to the Houston Humane Society. We re-named Lexy "Elsa", not after the Disney movie (it had not yet come out at the time), but after Joy Adamson's Born Free Elsa the Lioness.



On a trip in the hill country in Texas, in late 2010.

Elsa and I bonded immediately, and we became inseparable.

On 1 May 2011, my partner died in a road accident. As I am not from the United States, I decided to move back to my home country, the Netherlands. Of course, I took Elsa with me. In the weeks after my partner's death, while I was still packing up my things in our house in Houston, Elsa slept next to me every night. She really pulled me through those terrible times, and I often think it is thanks to her that I found the strength to carry on.

Back in Holland, I felt restless. To take my mind off things, I decided to go on a road trip to Italy, together with Elsa. We drove from Holland all the way to Abruzzo, a mountainous region in the East of Italy, and spent three weeks there. While I was heartbroken in the months after my partner's death, those weeks on the road with Elsa were beautiful, and I cherish the memories of that trip until today.

Not long after that, I re-joined the organization I had left the year before, and took up my work again. My job took me to Thailand, and of course, Elsa went with me. Within a very short period of time, Elsa had now travelled from Houston to Holland, to Italy and back to Holland, and from there to Bangkok, and on to Mae Sot, a small town on the border with Myanmar. Only a few months later, my duty station was changed once again, this time to Eastern Libya. Unfortunately, this time, Elsa could not join me. At that time, there were only very small aircrafts headed to the duty station where I was posted, and bringing a dog along was out of the question.



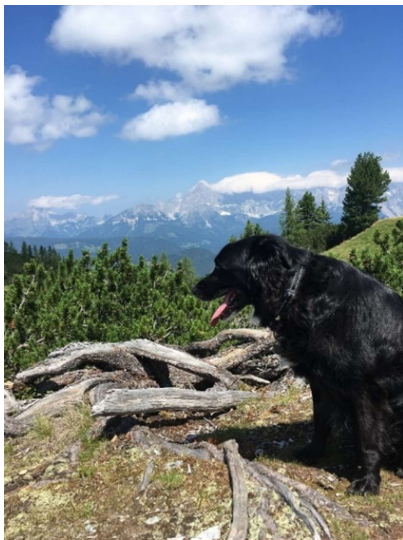
Elsa in Holland

My parents graciously jumped in, and offered to care for Elsa during my stay in Libya. Their house and large garden in Holland was a paradise for Elsa, and – having retired recently – my parents had plenty of time to take her on long walks in the fields and forests surrounding their village. While I missed Elsa terribly, I was happy knowing that she was safe, well cared for, and enjoying daily long walks. My parents, who are fervent sailors, also started taking Elsa with them on their boat. Elsa soon became acquainted with the lakes around my parents' house and, looking at the pictures of Elsa on their boat, I like to think she was having a great time!



Elsa on my parents' sail boat in Holland

A few years after the tragedy I had experienced in Houston, I was fortunate to meet someone new and eventually start a family. With our two children, we moved to Budapest, Hungary, where I got posted for a number of years. Our new life, which came along with some stability, a house with a nice garden, and proximity to fields and forests, proved to be the perfect opportunity to reunite with Elsa. Last year, we brought Elsa from Holland to Budapest and she has been living with us ever since. The children have become very attached to her, and she is extremely protective of them.



This summer: Elsa looking out over the Dachstein in Austria

This year in September, Elsa is turning 10, and this month, August, Elsa has been with me for 9 years. We cannot imagine our lives without Elsa, who is truly a part of our family. She goes

wherever we go, whether it's on a daytrip, a walk in the park, a quick run to the shops or a camping holiday in the mountains in Austria. To our family, little Elsa is and always will be the sweetest, smartest and cutest dog in the whole world, and our most loyal and faithful friend.



Elsa hiking with our family in the hills outside of Budapest