



# New Leaf

The Official Newsletter of STOLA – Saluki Tree of Life Alliance  
Fall, 2006

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## Elektra Anniversary Issue

This is a very special issue for us at STOLA because it represents the culmination of a difficult year - and a resounding success. A year ago at this time, we were faced with a very difficult and delicate situation - the rescue and care of 39 Elektra Salukis and the precarious balancing of asking for a community's help while maintaining confidentiality as required by the district attorney in the criminal case pending against the Salukis' breeder and owner, Alexandra Shalmers.

Suddenly, we needed to come up with over \$30,000 to be earmarked specifically for the Elektra's care at the Animal Control shelter and for the ongoing food, and considerable medical care when they were released from the facility. Quite literally overnight, volunteers sprang into action assigning foster homes for the fourteen Elektra Salukis who were initially rescued, arranging for groomers and food supplies to be sent to the woefully underfunded Animal Control shelter where the dogs might have to stay for up to a year while criminal proceedings were underway. We knew that just coming up with enough food to feed 39 dogs for up to a year could drain our treasury and leave nothing for the medical care they needed so desperately, so we contacted several major dog food companies asking for help. Pedigree came through for us, donating 20,000 pounds of food. All we had to do was pick it up! Easier said than done when you need an 18-wheeler and a forklift, but it was a godsend anyway and we are so grateful for their help.

We then turned to the national and international Saluki communities, sending out hundreds of e-mail pleas for help across the ether in the desperate hope that money would follow. It did. Nearly \$30,000 in just a few

days—a miracle.

The rest, as they say, is history. The dogs were released from custody within two months, and the food we did not use was donated to Katrina survivors. Ms. Shalmers was convicted of multiple counts of animal cruelty, and the dogs went to live with amazing caregivers whose dedication, love and expertise is of prime importance in the successful rehabilitation of the Elektra Salukis. Most of the dogs are now in their permanent homes enjoying life. Hopefully, the memories of their former life filled with such horror are now being replaced with those of love and nurturing. It still brings a tear to our eyes to remember the first time an Elektra rescue in foster care furtively picked up a toy and did a hesitant playbow - an early step on the road to recovery.

When the Saluki community first learned of the Elektra rescue last fall, many people contacted STOLA telling us we should euthanize all of the dogs because they were too feral to ever be pets. Based on our experience with previously placing more than twenty other Elektra Salukis in the previous five years, we knew that in most cases the Elektras could be socialized to be able to live relatively normal lives. Some may continue to be shy, some may have some fears to deal with, and most were in poor physical health. But, with the help of excellent, wonderful, and giving volunteer foster caregivers, and with the money provided by generous donors from home and around the world we have been privileged to see a remarkable transformation. Wounds have been healed - both physical and psychological. The Elektra Salukis are now living in homes with their new families – and they are thriving!

Amid all the broken bones and broken spirits, there are real lessons to be learned - lessons of hope, and perseverance, lessons of love and survival. We at STOLA are so thankful for the amazing caregivers who were able to see beyond the physical and psychological infirmities and to restore each Elektra Saluki so that each is now enjoying life - perhaps for the first time.

Even at this time of celebration for the Elektra Salukis, there still exists the very real possibility that their breeder and former owner, Alexandra Shalmers, may try to acquire more dogs and begin breeding again in spite of the fact that a court order specifically stipulates that this cannot happen. It is the responsibility of each and everyone of us to remain vigilant in the months and years ahead to make sure this tragedy is never repeated. If you know or suspect that any Salukis are in a dangerous situation, speak out - at least notify us at STOLA - so that we can initiate proceedings to protect them. Now, please enjoy the following pages of Elektra Salukis enjoying their lives.

**On this and following pages are updates and photos of Elektra Salukis taken recently. Each photo speaks more eloquently than words as to how well the dogs are doing in their new homes. We also include updates from their homes, but for security reasons all names of dogs and caregivers have been either omitted or changed, and photos have been randomly placed.**



## Elektra Happy Tails!

R is doing wonderfully. He has settled in extremely well. He listens to my voice (and tone) well. In other words, he has learned he can rely on me to help with his sight problem. He loves to be scratched and we can sit close to him. Cuddling is still a little uncomfortable for him, but he is quite accepting of it. He is now as healthy as you could possibly want for his age and then some!

P goes back next month for another heartworm test to make sure he's clear. He has come a long way but still has his problems. His coat is still coarse and dead. His weight comes and goes. He still stresses himself. Yet, there is improvement!! He no longer hangs back to go outside; he's right in the midst of the pack. If I touch him the slightest bit, he goes flat to the ground but doesn't go flying off in a different direction. When it's time to come in, he comes right in. R hangs back at the door until I say "Okay R" and then he saunters right in. P still doesn't move off the couch much (neither does R but it's different with R) but we can walk up to him (and yes, from his perspective we are towering over him) and pet him without him trying to fade into the couch. He lays there and lets us pet him. He'll even stick his head out to be scratched sometimes!!! He no longer lays there and stares at us 24/7! He's much more relaxed these days but he still has a way to go. Many a time, when he's asleep and it's time to go out, I walk over and kneel in front of the couch and play with his feet until he wakes up. He'll lazily wake up and look at me and stretch his legs and act pretty normal. When he is outside asleep, I can do the same thing as long as I'm kneeling as low as I can get, so there is improvement! With time we can expect even more.

As for B, my husband doesn't ever want him to leave—and B never wants to be separated from him either. The beginning of the week, my husband was away for a few days. When he got home, B plastered himself against him. B is my husband's boy too the MAX!!!! B is now actually normal! People come and go and it's no problem! He's right in the middle of the pack doing the "Me, me, I want attention, too" routine to whomever walks in the door! It would astound you!!! He is head strong beyond any shadow of a doubt, yet easy going. B is loving life around here!!!!

## A Tale of Two Sisters

As told by their caregiver

It's hard to believe a year has passed already and the girls are now 13 years old. Other than a minor ear infection now and again and some arthritis they are in very good health. They have enjoyed moving from their foster to their forever home with us. They are now very well adjusted and have only a few ghosts from the past to deal with. They run and play with other Salukis, enjoying the neighbor's Labradors and the squirrels in the yard. F is the most outgoing and loves to be picked up and carried around. I never thought that would happen! H just wants to be on her bed inside, but when she is outside ventures out on her own path. They have new doggy companions and are very willing to leave the security of each other to go play. They sleep very soundly especially F. In fact, she sleeps so soundly she has had me panicked a couple of times. The girls are very well traveled, visiting friends this summer and even staying at a friend's kennel overnight. Happily, they enjoyed every minute of that adventure. No residual of their former trauma is evident now. They are accepting of most strangers and curious about the toys that make noises. They are connoisseurs of various fruits and veggies and they love yogurt. No more worries about where the next meal comes from. Grooming is no longer an issue except ear cleaning sometimes. It is joyful to see them light up chasing bugs and just enjoying a safe life now. Hugs from H and F to all the Elektra rescues on their anniversary. This year they have something to celebrate.



**Hey! Wake up! Don't sleep through the STOLA Fundraiser Auction on eBay beginning Sunday, September 17.**

We have donations of great items including custom hound coats and collars, Saluki art work, first edition books, jewelry - even a diamond bracelet! - and lots more. **Log on September 17 -**

**<http://members.ebay.com/aboutme/stolarescue>**



## **No More Looking Back: The Rehabilitation of Two Elektra Salukis as told by their Caregiver**

In August of last year, I received an e-mail about the Elektra “bust” and became aware that there were Salukis in need. We knew deep inside that we needed to offer some kind of help. We had no extra money to give, and it was too far to drive to help in the shelter, so we e-mailed an offer to foster one of the dogs in need.

A pretty, petite silver grizzle girl entered our home several weeks later. Miss R did not understand what petting was about. She didn’t know how to walk on lead – and she was terrified. Her eyes were wide with confusion and fear, and she trembled when we touched her. It took a few days for her to realize that she actually enjoyed sitting beside me having her ear feathering stroked.

We were asked if we would be willing to foster another, and of course, we said yes. Weeks later the court case came to an end, finally ending the suffering of the many Elektra dogs housed at animal control in Virginia. A very pretty, but very skinny, sabled fawn entered our home. Miss A was so terrified and so skinny that I cried when I looked at her. I just wanted to hug her close and take the past away. But first, I had to teach her to trust.

Their progress was amazing and it seemed that each day the girls were more relaxed and more comfortable. Just when we were pleased with their progress, something would happen that knocked them back. At first this discouraged us, but then we remembered how they were when we brought them home and we were encouraged all over again! Two steps forward and one step back is still forward progress!

Miss R. has made the most progress. She’s younger, came to us healthier and was spared the weeks at animal control. Away from home, she’s still quite stressed, but at home she’s as happy, bouncy and normal as our other two Salukis. She often approaches me for pets and hugs and her newest milestone is that if she’s lying on the floor, I can step over her without her even moving! She loves to play with latex squeak toys and for the most part, is a happy, bouncy little girl.

Miss A’s progress has been slower, but she had so much farther to come! She’s still stressed by anything new in the house but recovers much quicker than she did at first. She still prefers to spend the majority of her day lying on the sofa but comes alive at mealtime! She can be quite the demanding little girl! As I’m dishing and serving the meals, she’ll run between the living room and the den barking and bouncing on toys, clearly saying, “Hurry up!”

She’s quite comfortable in the fenced yard and often is seen lying stretched fully out on her side soaking up the sunshine. Her favorite time of the day is morning. She waits until she hears us waking up, then up on the bed she comes, right up to us and lays down offering her head and ears for scratches. This is the time of the day when I see her fully relaxed and affectionate and know that she has so much love to give and that we’ve come a long way in teaching her to trust.

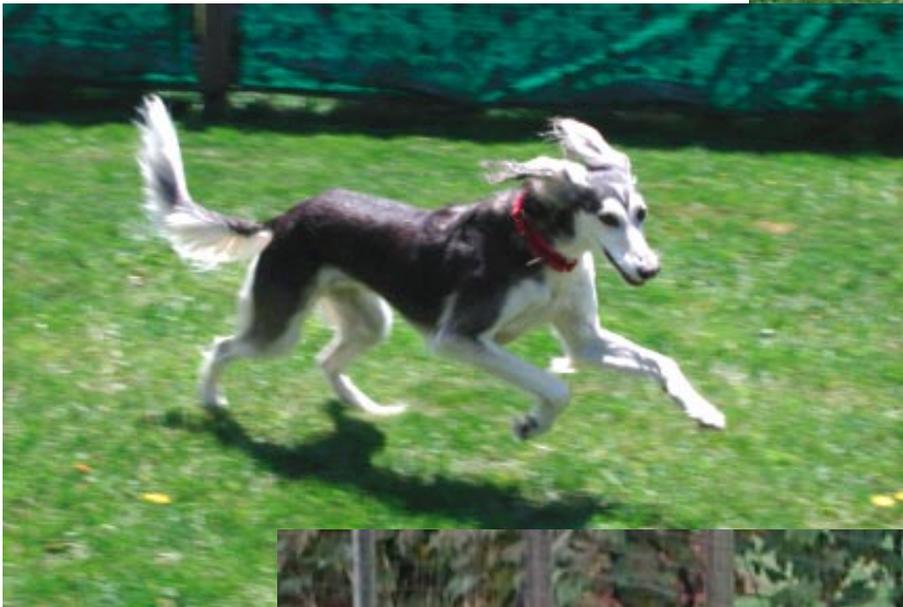
Miss R is increasingly worried about thunderstorms. We’ve had our share of severe ones the past week or so, and today was no exception. About 2:30 it started to get dark outside. It was the time of day that I usually shower and get ready for work. As I stepped out of the shower I noticed something different.

There sat both Miss A and Miss R wanting to be in the same room with me to avoid the storm. I wrapped in a towel and sat down on the edge of the tub. Miss R moved close - her shoulder touching my leg. As I write this, it’s 4 a.m. and Miss A wants to go to bed, so she’s standing behind me whining. At one time I had to carry Miss A up the steps to get her to the bedroom but now she willingly follows or tells me that we need to go.

When I return home from work each night, joyous howls and barks greet me. Miss A has learned that if she gets up on the sofa, she can see out the window. She barks along with our gang and Miss R’s voice joins the chorus with some (very) off key singing. These are the little things that I don’t notice on a day by day basis. And the things that make the past year so incredibly worth it.

As I look around me at the two wonderful Salukis who have become such an important part of our family,

tears well in my eyes and anger starts to build as I think about the things that they must have endured in the past. But then I am reminded that they have both somehow found the strength to move forward – to love and to trust - regardless of whatever horrors may haunt them. I try to learn from them. It is my hope that one day the memories will be completely forgotten and we can all move forward ... no more looking back.



## A New Name and A New Life for Bobby

As told by his caregiver

Bobby is his new name. Bobby is from the Elektra rescue. Bobby is now very happy in his new life. His favorite nickname is Ba-ba-loo. He lives with a group of four rescued female dogs: a Borzoi, Komondor, Clumber Spaniel, and Irish Setter. Bobby is the reigning king, giving his time to each of this harem, but he and the Borzoi are especially close, taking turns using each other as a pillow for those much needed naps.

Bobby is doing well after having been diagnosed with and treated for heartworm disease by his foster mom. He loves chasing around the yard with the other dogs, and has adjusted well given a fair amount of sight loss because of retinal atrophy and detachment.

Bobby really enjoys life, love and, of course, food having developed a craving for the weird soups that his mom makes. His favorite is pulled pork and cheddar cheese soup generously ladled over his kibble. He is still shy around men, but gets better each day. His mom has started taking him to the hardware store to help with this, but he prefers going to pet stores to check out the bones, dog treats, and stuffies.



## Madame A's New Life

As told by her caregiver

Madame A has been with us for several months now – first as a foster and now as a forever part of our family. When she arrived, we knew only that she was a “sweet” and “affectionate” member of the infamous Elektra Rescue tribe and that was true, mostly creditable to the loving fosters who had cared for her prior to arrival with us. Things were just a little iffy for the first few weeks as she became adjusted. Though she took to me almost immediately, offering kisses and assuming the role of my shadow, she was less accepting of my husband (barking whenever he appeared) and our other two Salukis, greeting each with a bite. My husband took to bribery and our Salukis, being unfamiliar with the concept of “bite” gave her a wide berth. As time went on, she also began to have nighttime accidents, although this was not as bad as it could have been since we had long-ago tiled the floors assuming we would always have Salukis.

Madame A's adjustment however has been swift and satisfying. She is indeed a sweetheart and with a little help from the STOLA coordinators and other Elektra homes even our few issues are resolving and the Madame is growing by leaps and bounds. The nighttime accidents resolved when a STOLA adoption coordinator informed me that at least one of the Elektra's wouldn't go potty outside unless accompanied by his “person”. It turned out that Madame A's nightly kissy-face moments were her way of asking that I accompany her out into the fearful dark so she could potty. There were no more bites but distance-keeping and bloodless scuffles became a part of our lives for a while. I let the dogs work it out, and each day Madame A became more accepting of our other dogs and my husband – the barks turned into howls, then howls with tail wagging. Now she howls with tail wagging on his return from work, accepts treats from his hand, and even allows him to pet her. Every day we are further charmed by her intelligence, affection, and (yes!) mischievousness. She lounges with us in the evening, sleeps in the bed, rouses us in the night with sloppy kisses. She plays now, occasionally running in the yard and throwing her tennis ball in the air then chasing it, also playing with our dog toys. Recently, we realized she enjoys

watching TV. During an airing of a segment called *Growing up Wolf* on the Animal Planet channel, she plopped herself down on her pillow directly in front of the speakers and listened intently for an hour to the conversation of a wolf family with a new set of pups, rising occasionally and trying to get behind the television to find them. It made me sad and I wondered if she herself had puppies in her previous life. Since the next day she seemed to thoroughly enjoy a show about baby pigs, we now leave the TV on and tuned to the Animal Channel and Madame A watches and listens. Just a few days ago she let us know she was done with pens (our other Salukis have always had the freedom of the house). I returned home from my morning job to find her ex-pen open and the Madame lying peacefully on the sofa. Assuming that my husband had inadvertently left her out, I penned her the next morning. Again she was out. I called my husband to find that he had assumed that I had left her out. Hmm. Now we leave the pen open and Madame A uses it or not as she desires.

We just had our best day ever! Having injured my back, I returned from just a couple of hours of work almost unable to stand. Leaving the door to the back yard open I laid down and fell asleep. I awoke an hour later in panic, not seeing the dogs. Hurrying outside as best as I was able, I was transfixed. Having tried as hard as I could to get Madame A to play with the other dogs and failing, I was delighted to find her and my little bitch chasing each other around my husband's fenced-off succulent garden. They had pulled down a section of the farm fence that isolates the "off-limits" garden from the rest of the yard and were having themselves a heck of a good time. This did not stop when I barked at them but only moved the chasing activity back out into "legal-territory". I was so thrilled and happy that I just watched them play

wondering all the while if sometimes we don't try too hard, and if it wouldn't sometimes be better off if we let these wondrous creatures use their own very considerable wiles to solve things for themselves.

We cherish Madame A and look forward to many happy years with her. We also thank STOLA and all of you who helped to bring her to us for your gift of caring.



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## Mr. Bark says.....

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