

Abandoned Mountain Guide Dogs From Taiwan Find Forever Home in NYC

Siblings Kathy and Ali spent their lives aiding hikers, but after budget cuts they were cruelly left to fend for themselves.

Lisa Plummer Savas
| Nov 19th 2014

Imagine you have a job that you really love, one you've trained most of your life for and are totally committed to, heart and soul. Now imagine that your boss suddenly stopped paying you — would you keep doing that job? For many humans, the answer would be a resounding no, but for two highly trained guide dogs, the answer was an undeniable yes.

As canine members of a mountain patrol unit charged with guiding hikers up and down the treacherous and heavily forested mountains of Taiwan, three-year-old Shepherd-mix siblings Kathy and Ali had spent almost their entire lives dedicated to the job they had been trained to do.



Boasting the largest number and density of high mountains on the planet, Taiwan attracts thousands of eco-tourists and hikers each year, so highly trained guide dogs able to assist with treks are

extremely valuable.

But when government budget cuts caused the closure of their patrol station, the young dogs found themselves abandoned in the mountains, simply left behind to fend for themselves.

With no food, water, and very little shelter to protect them from the harsh elements, Kathy and Ali's future looked bleak. But despite the fact that they were starving and dehydrated, the committed canine duo continued trekking up and down the mountain, guiding hikers without any human supervision.



Kathy led the way, whether asked to or not. (Photos courtesy NSALA, with the exception of top photo by Ellen Dunn)2 of 5

Kathy led the way, whether asked to or not. (Photos courtesy NSALA, with the exception of top photo by Ellen Dunn)

Fortunately a pair of concerned hikers noticed the poor condition of the dogs and reached out to Animal Rescue Team Taiwan (<http://www.savedogs.org/english/>), a nonprofit animal welfare organization focused on rescuing wounded, abused, and trapped animals, as well as controlling stray populations. ARRT promptly swooped in and rescued Kathy and Ali, who received all the nourishment and veterinary treatments necessary to restore their health, including spaying, neutering, and vaccines. Once the dogs were strong enough to travel, in October, they found themselves on a plane destined for New York City and North Shore Animal League America (<http://www.animalleague.org/>), the world's largest no-kill rescue and adoption organization.

When Kathy and Ali arrived at the shelter's Port Washington headquarters in Long Island, it became immediately obvious that the siblings were completely dependent on each other and would need to be adopted out as a pair, said Ronald Martorelli, NSALA quality care manager.

“They’re inseparable,” Martorelli explained. “They worked together guiding people up and down the mountain; that’s the reason they rely on each other so much. I know the conditions in which they were living were pretty harsh, so we believe they need each other and are protective of each other because of those conditions.”



Ali watched out for hikers and his little sister, Kathy.

Ali watched out for hikers and his little sister, Kathy.

While both dogs are sweet tempered and obedient, Kathy tends to be the more submissive pup while Ali is the alpha and her big, protective brother, said Martorelli. And while they had warmed up considerably after arriving at the shelter, the siblings needed some help overcoming their shyness and becoming more socialized with other dogs.

They got that help in early November, when a loving family from Manhattan adopted the pair. Renamed Bootsy and Flash, the once ill-fated siblings are enjoying the lush life with humans who also understand the importance of letting these extraordinary dogs do what they were raised and trained to do best: hike! And that means plenty of trips to Fort Tryon Park, where the pups enjoy guiding their new parents along rambling miles of scenic walking trails.

But this time, when they return from their long treks together, tired and seeking rest, they are not alone and afraid. Instead, they have a warm home to come home to and a doting family to adore them for many years to come.