

From Sheep to Shining Sea

These days, 11 year-old tri-colour Border Collie Charissa is what you might call a “Border Collie beach bum” - something that, in her former life, would not have been even a twinkle in this well-worked doggie’s eye.

For the first nine years of her life, Charissa was a professional sheep herder at a ranch near Langley, British Columbia. Most days, she likely woke up before dawn and worked into the evening, without a care or worry in the world except for her herding duties at hand. Then the unthinkable happened: her much-loved owner fell ill and had to sell the farm. Unfortunately, Charissa and her daughter Vera were also casualties of this terrible turn of events. Somehow, they found their way into the caring and able hands of That’ll Do Border Collie Rescue, a volunteer group whose mission is to place rescued Border Collies into safe and sound forever homes. They boomeranged the girls’ fate, which once looked so bleak.

Charissa was about to change one family’s life, too. “We were so lucky that we found Charissa, and have been having much fun with this old lovable girl!” Says Karen, Charissa’s new mom. Adopted by



Karen and Rob in November 2004, and now living in Tsawwassen, British Columbia. Karen admits it wasn’t all smooth sailing after the adoption. Karen says, “It has taken some time for her to transition from working sheep dog to retired house dog living near the beach.” But, as is evident in her photos, she is having the time of her life easing into her new role. “Charissa has happily adjusted to beach life, and can be found most weekends strolling the paths around Centennial Beach, and digging holes in the sand”, says mom Karen.

In October 2005, Charissa successfully passed all testing required to become a St. John's Ambulance Therapy Dog. These days, once a week, you can find Karen and Charissa visiting with the elderly. “She takes this job as seriously as she did her sheep herding, and every Saturday morning can be found sitting happily next to seniors in wheelchairs, smiling and gently nudging hands for more pats” says Karen.

Charissa is an amazing dog who has definitely had her share of rough times. Having a fresh start and living a retired sheepherder’s dream as a beach bum/therapy dog - now that’s something to “Baaah” about! ■



For her portrait, Karen wanted to “pay homage to Charissa’s working past and playful spirit” by integrating some of her former charges into the portrait. Charissa and her family also enjoy the local fish and chips restaurant on Centennial Beach, Pajo’s, which provided the very humorous yet sweet theme. Also in the portrait are a favorite rope toy, animal crackers (her favorite ‘secret’ snack) and a maple leaf suggestive of the Toronto Maple Leaf hockey team’s logo - an homage to Charissa’s dad, Rob. Black-Eyed Susans, Blue Herons and sitting logs complete the authentic Centennial Beach picture.