

# Baxter

*Dan Hardison*

Baxter is a dog, a Brittany Spaniel mix, who belonged to my wife's best friend. Patty's friend had been battling cancer for years when Baxter came into her home. She wanted a dog as a companion and Baxter was just that. Already trained, he was a gentle, quiet, loving dog who was playful, but content just to be by your side and petted.

Whenever Patty's friend was away from home, we would dog sit. In early 2006, her friend's cancer became worse. As she became weaker, Patty would visit most days during her lunch break and walk Baxter. When they could, they would sit on the porch with Baxter lying between them.

The doctor finally said there was nothing more he could do and sent her friend to Duke Hospital in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, for another opinion - a last hope. She went over Memorial Day Weekend and while she was away, Baxter stayed with us. The doctors at Duke determined there was nothing more that could be done and sent her home. The day after she returned, Patty visited her friend and asked if she was ready for Baxter to come home. Her friend asked if we would keep Baxter and give him a home because she simply could no longer care for him. We agreed.

Three weeks later Patty's father unexpectedly entered the hospital in East Tennessee in serious condition. After receiving the phone call, we immediately packed our bags, loaded the van, and began the ten-hour drive - Baxter in tow. We were gone for about two weeks. During that time, we stayed in motels and the homes of family members with me making shuttle trips to Alabama, Middle Tennessee, and back to East Tennessee. Everywhere I went, Baxter went - never a problem, always on good behavior, taking it all in stride. But, Patty's father passed away - cancer.

After returning home, we found out that her friend's condition was worsening. It was to the point that she could not get out of bed and much of the time she was not coherent. Patty had

one last good visit with her friend where they were able to have friendly conversation as they once had. A few days later she was gone. Her suffering was over.

Baxter is still with us and it is here he will stay.

*Baxter*  
Wilmington, North Carolina  
Photo by Dan Hardison

