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## ANIMAL HOUSE

Story by Kimberley Gadette

*How four dogs and two people found happiness during a beach vacation.*

**F**ourteen-year-old Becky was in dire need of a vacation. Between her brothers pulling on her ears, pushing her off her bed and stealing her dinner, she was at the end of her triple-knot tugger rope.

But where's a family of four ill-mannered dogs, accompanied by two questionably mannered adults, to go? Even if we paid extra pet fees to stay in a motel, since our dogs can't be deterred from their assumed duty of guarding us 24/7, any place with shared common walls was out of the question.

Yet the vision of 16 paws running down a gorgeous Oregon beach spurred me on. That, and Becky, who was relentlessly chewing on her own paws. Madly clicking on rental site after rental site, I searched for the right combination of seclusion, a fence, a view, easy beach access and—above all—an owner who would be amenable to hosting four dogs. I ultimately stumbled upon a Web site that gave listings first by state and then by individual communities. Each listing had icons that designated whether the advertised rental had pictures, comments from previous renters, availability, and—via a paw-print icon—pet-friendly status.

Yet even with the paw print, most rentals would allow two dogs maximum.

And then I saw a listing with promising words: Contact owner. Soon I was having a lovely conversation with Janet Beckerman, owner of three vacation homes in Oceanside and Cape Meares. Though I believe I heard a sharp intake of breath when I mentioned the number of dogs, I assured her I was the most responsible pet owner since Cruella DeVillie. Beckerman laughed, and when I promised that I'd bring my own pre-chewed sheets/towels to cover her furniture, that I'd hose off all sand before allowing the animals (including my husband) inside, and that I'd happily pay the additional pet-fee charges, she agreed.

This is a happy tail, er, tale. We've been back to Beckerman's Blue Sea Cottage twice. Second to running on the beach, the dogs love barking insults at the gulls from the cottage deck.

I'm not sure who has a better time: Becky, wandering blissfully alone, free from her annoying brothers; Flo-ey, the pudgy 13-year-old, a birder to beat the band; or our duo of 2-year-old "woofians," Murray and Ollie, taking turns dunking each other just when a wave crashes to the shore.

Oh, and then there's the two of us, getting a chance to reconnect with each other. Treasuring our time alone . . . well, as much as we can with four dogs right alongside.



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