

UNCONDITIONAL

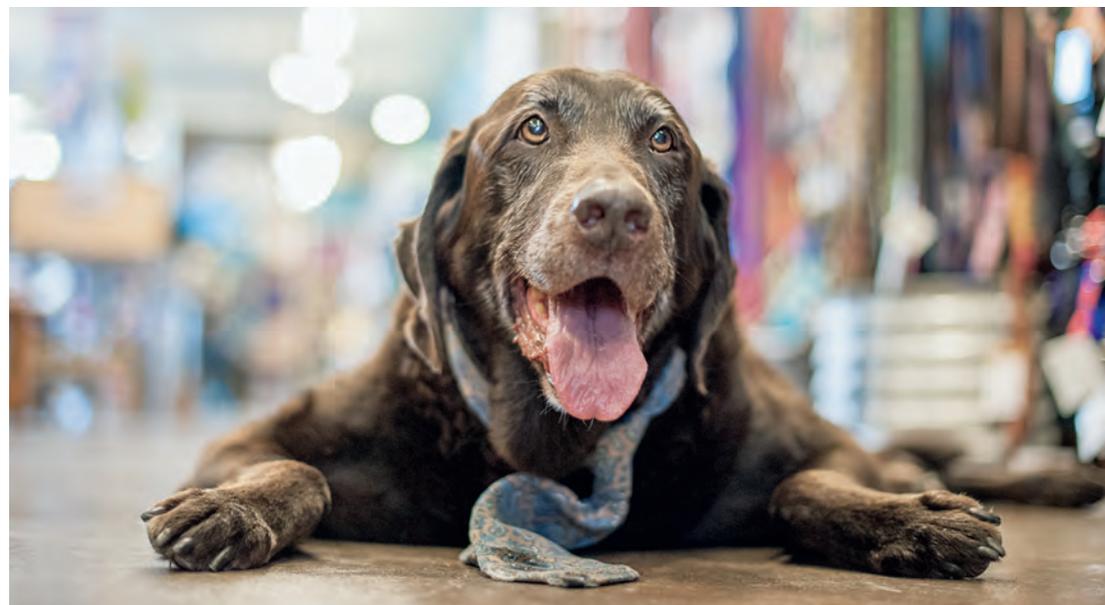
OLDER DOGS, DEEPER LOVE

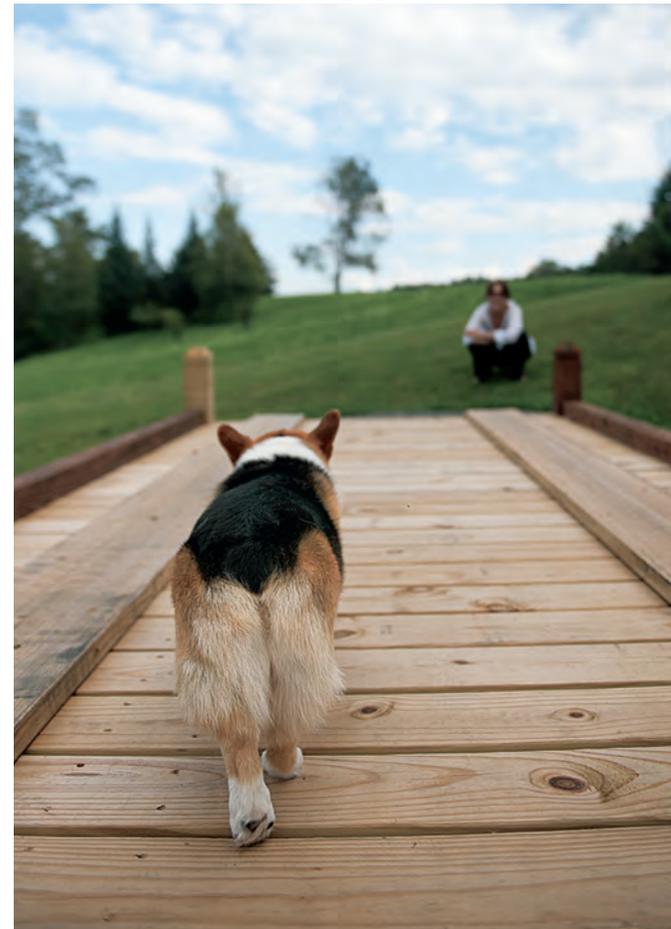
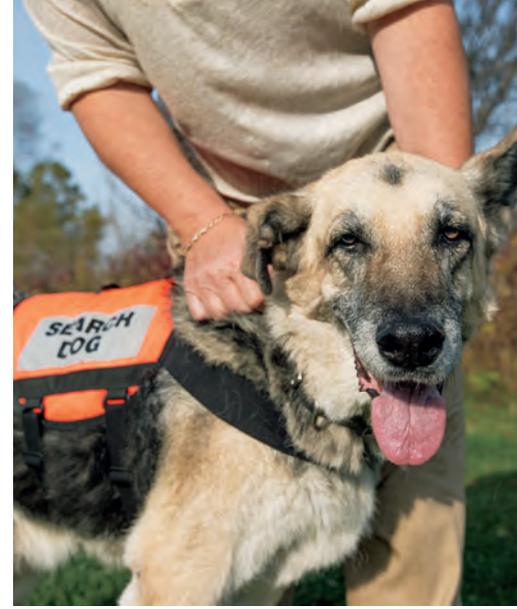
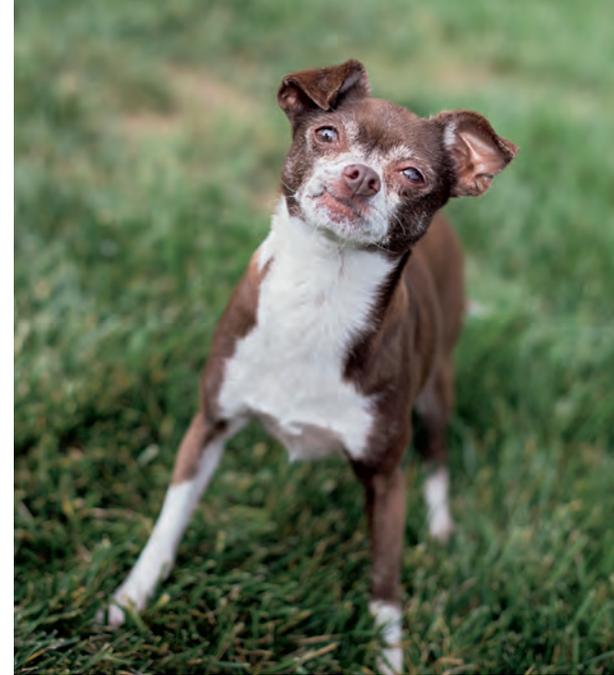
JANE SOBEL KLONSKY

 NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

Washington, D.C.









BAILEY 🐾

{ 16 YEARS || DACHSHUND || CALIFORNIA }

Dear Diary,

Today is my 16th birthday. I don't know what all the fuss is about. It happens every year. My humans always give me ice cream with dinner and act like it's a big surprise, like I haven't caught on after 16 years. I'm wise beyond my years, but I pretend—I go along with it because, why not? And because I love them. And I love ice cream. I've made a list of some other things I love:

- feasting on dirt
- lounging
- doing my business in the rain (just for the thrill of it!)
- the sound of my own bark
- *Pride and Prejudice* (anything by Jane Austen, really)
- sniffing butts and taking names

I've come a long way since my years as a wee pup, and I must say, 16 looks good on me. I've grown quite regal. But now I'm getting writer's paw, and this fashion model needs her beauty sleep. Until next time.

XOX
Bailey

—Aliya Weiss

AVERY 🐾

{ 17.5 YEARS || ENGLISH SPRINGER SPANIEL MIX || OREGON }

Where to start? Avery is half of my heart. She came into my life at college graduation as a gift from my mom, who rescued this runt of a litter of Springer Spaniel mixes from a Kentucky kill shelter. I thought I was so not ready for a dog, but Avery knew different. She has helped me grow up and become a better person. She has been by my side through health issues; lost jobs; moves; and the deaths of my grandparents, dad, aunt, and uncle. I started dating my husband a few weeks before she came into our lives, so she's his everything too.

Avery has been in the Atlantic and Pacific, and still takes walks with our other two fur kids. She doesn't make it as far as she used to anymore and prefers to ride home in the stroller. She's half blind and mostly deaf; she's torn both anterior cruciate ligaments and suffers from pancreatitis, thyroid issues, and chronic urinary tract infections.

The doctors have told us that she seems to be in good spirits, so we get to have her with us a little longer. Every day is a gift with her. When she woofs and wags her tail in her sleep, it still makes me smile, and I know all the effort is worth it.

—Jen DeVere Warner





“ When she woofs and wags her tail in her sleep, it still **makes me smile,** and I know all the effort **is worth it.** ”



CASPIN 🐾

{ 8 YEARS || LABRADOR RETRIEVER-GOLDEN RETRIEVER MIX || CALIFORNIA }

Caspin, a Canine Companions for Independence service dog, has been working alongside me for six years. I have dystonia, a muscle disorder that not only makes movement sometimes difficult, it makes speaking nearly impossible. Since we've been working together, Caspin has learned to understand more than 50 commands and communications in American Sign Language.

Caspin has done the impossible: pulling me home during dystonic attacks, instinctively navigating two years of hospitalizations, and anticipating my needs based on cues as simple as following my eyes when I'm stricken and can't move, even to sign. Through partnership with Georgia Tech's FIDO research team, Caspin can even seek help by tugging a rope sensor on a special vest that activates a speaker, which informs a bystander that his owner needs attention.

Together, we are a remarkable team. He has helped me conquer many big challenges: graduating from Gallaudet University for the deaf with honors, competing in an international alpine monoski competition, and moving 3,000 miles from my family home to pursue a dream career. Caspin is my independence, my dignity, my sense of safety, and my best friend.

Together we are not just succeeding, we are thriving.

—Wallis Brozman

SPUR

{ 13 YEARS || ALASKAN HUSKY || ALASKA }

Ever since I adopted my 13-year-old retired Iditarod sled dog, we have been inseparable. Spur is my shadow, following me from room to room at home and sticking to my hip at crowded parties. However, when I slip on her harness and we charge out on a snowy trail, it all changes. Spur lives to pull.

We were two miles into a six-mile ski on the night of winter solstice when I stalled on top of a hill. Spur sensed my apprehension, quickly turned and pulled the leash from my grip, and then bolted back toward the trail-head. Devastated, I watched the red light on her collar disappear into the darkness.

I rushed after her with my skiing partner, Joe. He kept reassuring me that she was safe, but I could only imagine the worst. When we got to the trail-head, there she was, curled up in a tight Husky ball by the back tire of the truck. Together we started our skiing adventure again—this time without hesitation. That night Spur reminded me to always stay positive on our outdoor adventures.

My loyal dog serves as a constant source of inspiration. I have yet to see her tired after our daylong adventures: her pulling me on my bike, skis, or dog-sled runners. I hope I'm as tough as Spur when I'm in my golden years.

—Mollie Foster





NEBLINA 🐾

{ 14+ YEARS || MIXED BREED || MASSACHUSETTS }

“Puppy.” Sometime later in her life with me, she got addressed as such, and it stuck. She gets called “Puppy” as much if not more than her given name, Neblina. The name is Spanish and translates to “mist, clouds, fog,” which is her coloring (or was, she has a lot more white now). A young fisherman who lived near where I found her offered the name.

Oh, yeah, I found her (or perhaps she found me) out in the desert on the Pacific coast of Baja California, Mexico, while on a camping trip 14 years ago. She was a pathetic little creature and indeed a puppy, though I did not know it at the time. She was nearly starving and covered with fleas and sores. I almost didn't pick her up. But at the urging of a friend, I did, and only minutes passed before I knew I would never set her down. She was terrified of everything, and considering the circumstances out there in the desert, where there is no control of the dog population and no food to speak of, she would not have had much of a future among the coyotes ... You get the picture!

Neblina is a Mexican mutt, native to the Baja desert. She is sleek and slender, and even at this age she can run like a Greyhound. She is remarkably graceful and goes bounding through tall grass like a gazelle. She's incredibly gentle, so much so that a friend even nicknamed her “Gandhi-Puppy.”

When I got her home to central Vermont, she stepped out of my truck into snow that almost buried her, but she didn't skip a beat. She stepped right

 *Neblina continued*

into my life and has been in my home and my heart for almost 14 years now. She won't let me out of her sight, and she is not pleased when I leave her behind (which is difficult for me as well).

There was a time when I'd go trail riding on my mountain bike every day with her at my side. We both seem to have retired from that, and Neblina spends a good amount of her time on her bed, as befits an elderly pup. Still, she and my partner will get to playing and the two of them will go running around the house like a couple of kids. One of many snapshots: Neblina may have a bit of separation anxiety, which she expresses by getting into the soiled laundry pile and getting out one sock, just one, that she'll then deposit on the floor. It is not chewed up. (Though available, she never chooses a clean sock.) She's done that for years, go figure. I am enchanted by the workings in her little head that I will never quite figure out.

People who hear her story comment that it was so kind of me to rescue her. I suppose so, but that kindness is repaid a hundred times a day.

The vet says her heart is getting weak. I feel obligated to let nature take its course and will not medicate her except for her comfort. I hope and pray that I will not have to choose to bring her life to a close.

I have my doubts about humans, but I know there is a heaven for puppies. Neblina. Neblinita. Puppy.

—Tim Rice



BARBARELLA 🐾

{ 13 YEARS || PIT BULL || VERMONT }

This captures a wonderful moment in our life together. If you had met Barbarella, you would have loved her too.

Our relationship was so tight, I often asked myself if I loved her too much, if I bestowed more than I should upon Barbarella.

I didn't think I could live without her. We were a team. We faced everything together. Side by side, we were strong, intelligent, and beautiful. Now my once-in-a-lifetime dog is gone.

The answer is no, I did not love Barbarella too much. Love is never-ending. Thank you for showing me the way, Boobie.

XOXO

—Jennifer Lalli





“

We were **a team.**
We faced everything together.
Side by side, we were
strong, intelligent,
and beautiful.

”

JOE 🐾

{ 11+ YEARS OLD || GERMAN SHEPHERD MIX || CALIFORNIA }

I think I was drawn to be in a relationship with an older animal because I, too, am an older animal, and we share a quieter energy. My relationship with sweet, sweet Joe offers joy and an opportunity to experience the complexity inherent in aging. A stray from the streets of Los Angeles, Joe was initially fearful, sad, and barely walking when I adopted him through the Thulani Program, a rescue organization for senior and hospice German Shepherds. Providing Joe with safety, comfort, nurturance, fun, and peace for these years has been a profound experience. I am awed and nourished by his capacity to trust, adjust to change, and thrive.

—Valerie Auerbach



MULLY 🐾

{ 7 YEARS || LABRADOR RETRIEVER || CALIFORNIA }

A boy and a dog: Wesley and Mully.

Their first meeting was not at a pound or a pet store but in our front yard. In half a minute they became friends, which, eight years prior, was how long it took the doctor to diagnose my son's autism. This meeting was not by chance. It was arranged by Tender Loving Canines Assistance Dogs, and it was not without risk. Some children wouldn't make it out of the house, while some dogs wouldn't go in. Not so for Wesley and Mully. It was sweetness from the start.

A rich relationship based on perfect trust and pleasure in one another's company developed. Sometimes it seemed that my son liked nothing more than to listen to the steady beat of Mully's tail on the hardwood floor. With his assistance dog credentials, Mully could go just about anywhere, and Wesley was eager to do just that. In the beginning, I tagged along (as moms do), with Wesley holding both Mully's leash and my elbow. We walked to the bookstore, to the library, to the sculpture garden at the museum. Until one afternoon, Wesley did not reach for my elbow. He held Mully's leash tight in one hand, as his other arm hung at his side. "Mully, with me!" he called out, catching the last few seconds of a green light to cross the street and leaving me behind to wait for the next one. It was all as it should be.

—Claudia Metcalfe





BELLA 🐾

{ 15 YEARS || SPANIEL-CHOW CHOW MIX || NEW JERSEY }

Bella and I have been together for 12 years, ever since I rescued her from a New Orleans shelter the day before she was to be euthanized. Or rather, she rescued me, of course.

Adventuring our way across the country, we've traveled together extensively and lived in seven states. She was with me in the Arctic while I was a teacher in an Inupiaq Eskimo village. She was a therapy dog in my classroom full of preschoolers who had suffered abuse at home. The children could talk to her about things they felt unsafe saying to adults. I understand—she's a good listener.

Bella has been my compass. We've hiked together on the tundra and sea ice, in the high desert of New Mexico, in the rain forests of Seattle, and across the midwestern farmland where I was born. Together we've traversed more mountain ranges than I can keep track of.

Now we live in Caldwell, New Jersey, where our days are quieter and our hiking days are over. Instead, we take very, very slow walks in our neighborhood. I can hardly bear knowing that our adventure together will soon draw to a close.

—Kelsea Habecker

“

She was a **therapy dog**
in my classroom . . .
The children could
talk to her about
things they felt **unsafe**
saying to adults.

”



JACK 🐾

{ 10+ YEARS || GOLDEN RETRIEVER || VERMONT }

Jack was our best exercise machine. Some days you just didn't feel like going for a walk, but he'd look at you with those deep, pleading eyes and ... well, how could you resist? Snowshoeing up the mountain was our favorite exercise. Dave and I would plod through the snow, while Jack bounded, covering at least ten times the distance.

No matter how far or how long we hiked, we'd be whipped when we returned home. Meanwhile, wanting to continue to play, Jack would search for a tennis ball to drop at our feet. The hike had only whetted his appetite for more exercise.

(Sidebar: I've wondered, prior to the invention of tennis balls, what did Golden Retrievers retrieve?)

Jack, you were a wonderful friend, and we all miss you very much.

—Jill Sands



SCOTTIE, WAWA, SANDRA DEE 🐾

{ 12 YEARS, 11 YEARS, 10 YEARS || BICHON FRISE, CHIHUAHUA,
MALTESE || ILLINOIS }

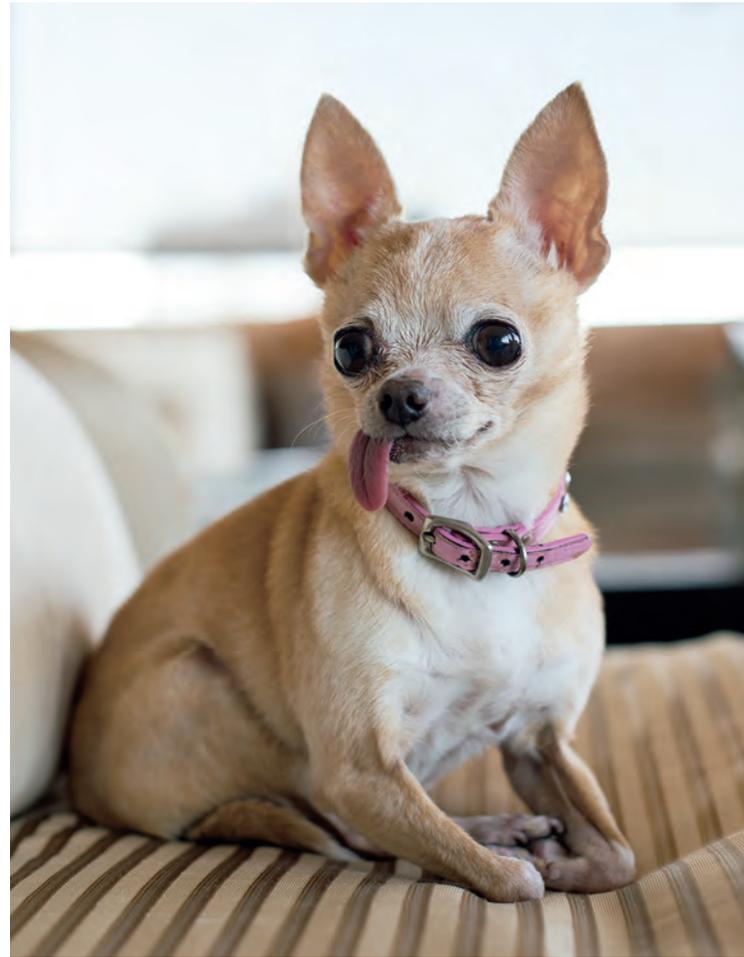
We found Pippen, a spunky terrier, on the Greek island of Crete. As with many strays, he would have been poisoned by local farmers after the tourist season ended. We could not leave this adorable pup to such a cruel fate.

My daughter and I were shocked to learn that homeless cats and dogs in Chicago did not fare much better. They were taken to shelters where the majority—more than 40,000 each year—were killed. In response, we founded PAWS Chicago in 1997 as a comprehensive humane organization. The number of pets dying needlessly in Chicago has been reduced by nearly 77 percent since then. Pippen died on October 25, 2005, but his legacy lives on.

Our family continues to honor Pippen's memory by adopting older dogs. We currently share our home with Scottie, Wawa, and our newest addition, Sandra Dee. In November 2014, PAWS stepped in to save nine Maltese dogs who had been brought, covered in filth, to the city pound by a breeder. One of these special dogs was Sandra Dee, whom I fostered and later adopted. She loves to follow me around and stands so close to my feet that sometimes I don't see her. When I look down, she is staring up at me, and all I feel is love.

—Paula Fasseas





“ **She loves to follow me around**
and stands so close to my feet
that sometimes I don't see her.
When I look down, she is staring up
at me, **and all I feel is love.** ”



CODY 🐾

{ 9 YEARS || AUSTRALIAN CATTLE DOG || TEXAS }

I didn't teach this dog anything. He just knows. As soon as I put him on the truck at eight weeks old, we connected. Cody has a mind of his own. My wife says that he's an alien. His mom was a Blue Heeler, and his daddy was a Red Heeler. His teeth are filed because he herds the cows. When a cow isn't moving, he'll nip the cow on the leg. That is his job.

He's with me 24 hours a day. He sleeps right beside my bed. If I go to the bathroom, Cody's there waiting when I open the door.

Cody knows the order of how I get ready in the morning. If I get dressed first, he knows we aren't going to work, and he stays and relaxes. If I put on my socks first, he knows it's time for work, and he gets up immediately and eats his food.

My wife hates when Cody smiles because she thinks he is laughing at her.

Men will come to the ranch from all over the world to look at our cattle for sale. They will always try to buy Cody because he's so good with the cows.

 *Cody continued*

I tell them, "If I sold you Cody, I'd be ripping you off because he won't do anything for you." I say, "Try to tell Cody to do something."

They try. Cody just walks away.

I wouldn't change anything about Cody.

—Barbarito "Blackie" Heredia





MOLLY 🐾

{ 10+ YEARS || MALTESE || CONNECTICUT }

Molly is my gift from heaven. She came into my life on the first anniversary of my beloved husband, Don's, death. We are now inseparable. She looks at me with such adoration, as if to tell me how grateful she is to be mine. She knows how thankful I am to have her help fill such a tremendous loss.

Molly was rescued from a breeder in Missouri, who had surrendered her when her "services" were no longer needed. She was nine when we found each other, and I wish she could tell me everything that happened to her before we met. She knows well all that happened to me.

Now I am weepy, so I will close.

—Shirley Calcaterra

COCO, EDITH, ROXY, STELLA 🐾

{ 10 YEARS, 12 YEARS, 11 YEARS, 11 YEARS || CHIHUAHUA MIX, POMERANIAN MIX, CHIHUAHUA MIX, FRENCH BULLDOG || CALIFORNIA }

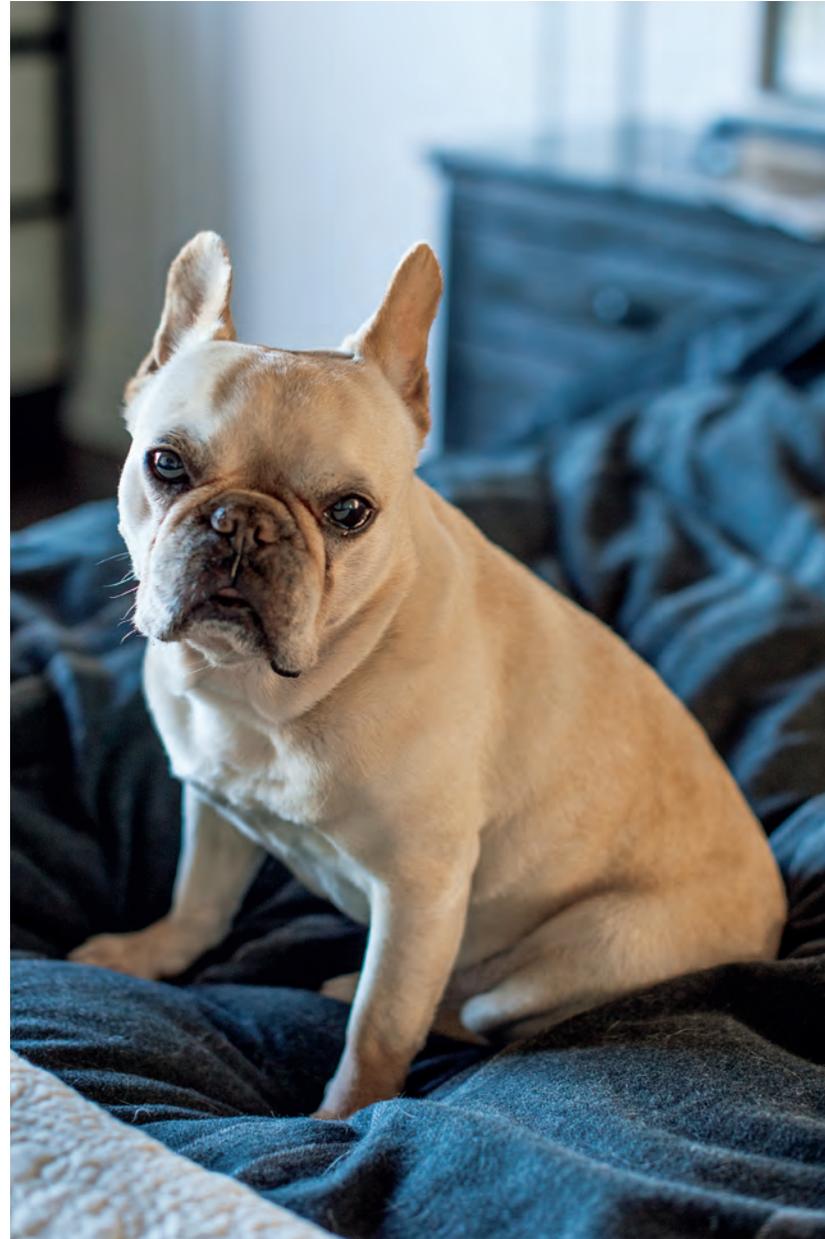
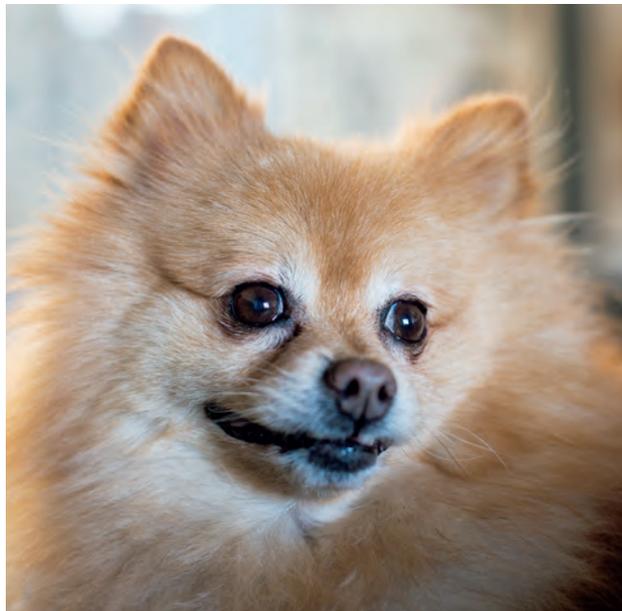
Senior dogs became a passion of ours after Rafael and I were introduced to Sherri Franklin, the founder of Muttville Senior Dog Rescue. We were immediately inspired and wanted to contribute, so we offered to foster a dog. I remember her placing in my arms a little dog named Misty Kay Mabelline. She was certainly odd looking, with big eyes, a tongue hanging out of her mouth, and back legs longer than the front, making her look like she was walking on high heels. She was a cranky old lady of a dog, but after having her for a couple of weeks, we fell in love. Misty Kay became a permanent member of our home until she passed away three years later.

We continue to foster other senior dogs in need and have taken in as many as 30 over the years. Many of these dogs enter our house traumatized from losing their homes. Others come with medical issues that need to be treated.

Saying goodbye to our foster dogs is always bittersweet. But although we miss every single one of them, the need is too great not to continue. So, with a heavy heart, we say goodbye, wipe away the tears, then say hello to the next frightened dog that just needs some love.

—Joe Marko

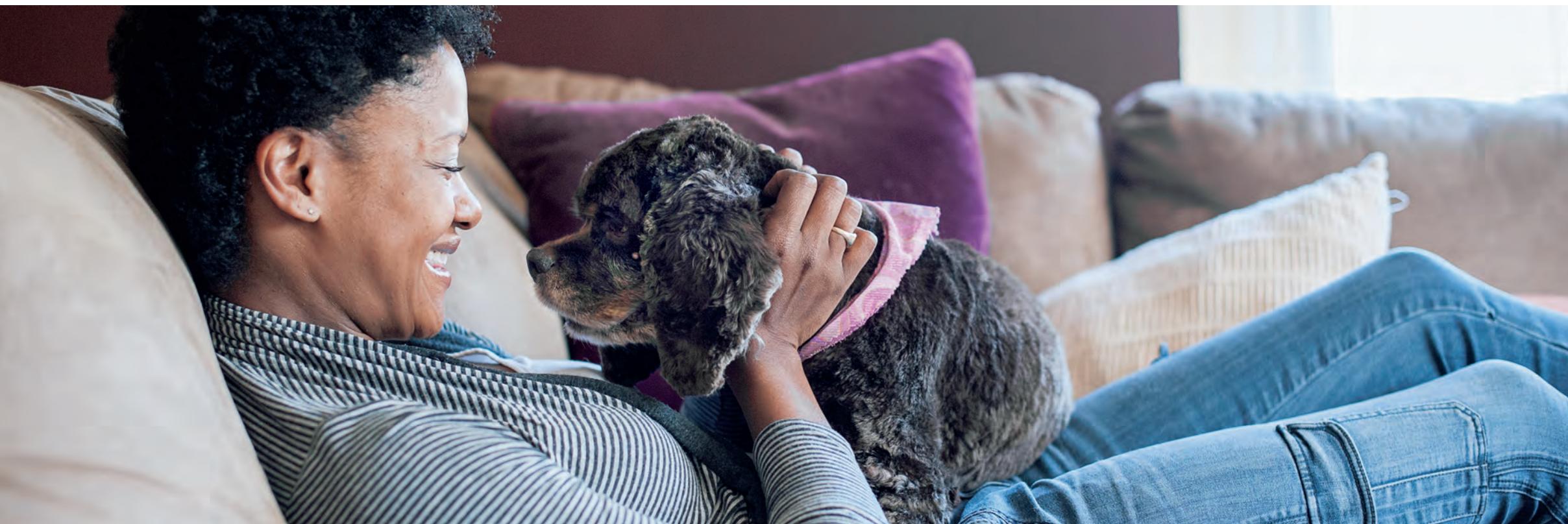




“

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”



PRECIOUS

{ 12 YEARS || COCKER SPANIEL || NEW JERSEY }

I'd always wanted a Cocker Spaniel, but as with most things, timing is everything. At 25, I was nearing the end of a four-year relationship and starting over in a new state. It was the perfect time for me to find a faithful companion that wasn't afraid of a long-term commitment.

I found Precious through a breeder online, and 12 weeks later, I locked eyes with my "precious" cargo at the airport. She quickly became my trusty sidekick. One night my best friend and I were planning to go to a party in Washington, D.C., when we received a call that it was canceled. We weren't about to waste the night, so we decided to drive to another party—in Brooklyn, New York!

We arrived with six-month-old Precious, whom I'd brought along in her small crate. I left my girlfriend to walk her, and when I came back a few minutes later, she was standing on the sidewalk with an empty crate. Frantic, I asked her where Precious was, and she said, "I don't know! Some guy asked me what was in the crate, and he opened it and took her out and ran down the street."

I caught a glimpse of a stranger with my puppy, and after a few minutes, a shadowy figure came running down the street, laughing, with Precious in tow. I shot him a dirty look, grabbed my pup, and pushed my way into the party. As the party drew to a close, my girlfriend and I were chatting

SHELBY 🐾

{ 10+ YEARS || PEMBROKE WELSH CORGI || VERMONT }

Oh, you Corgis. I first saw you little guys in a book on dog breeds, and it was love at first sight. Perhaps it was your structure or the big ears—or maybe your funny-looking butts. It didn't matter. I was enchanted.

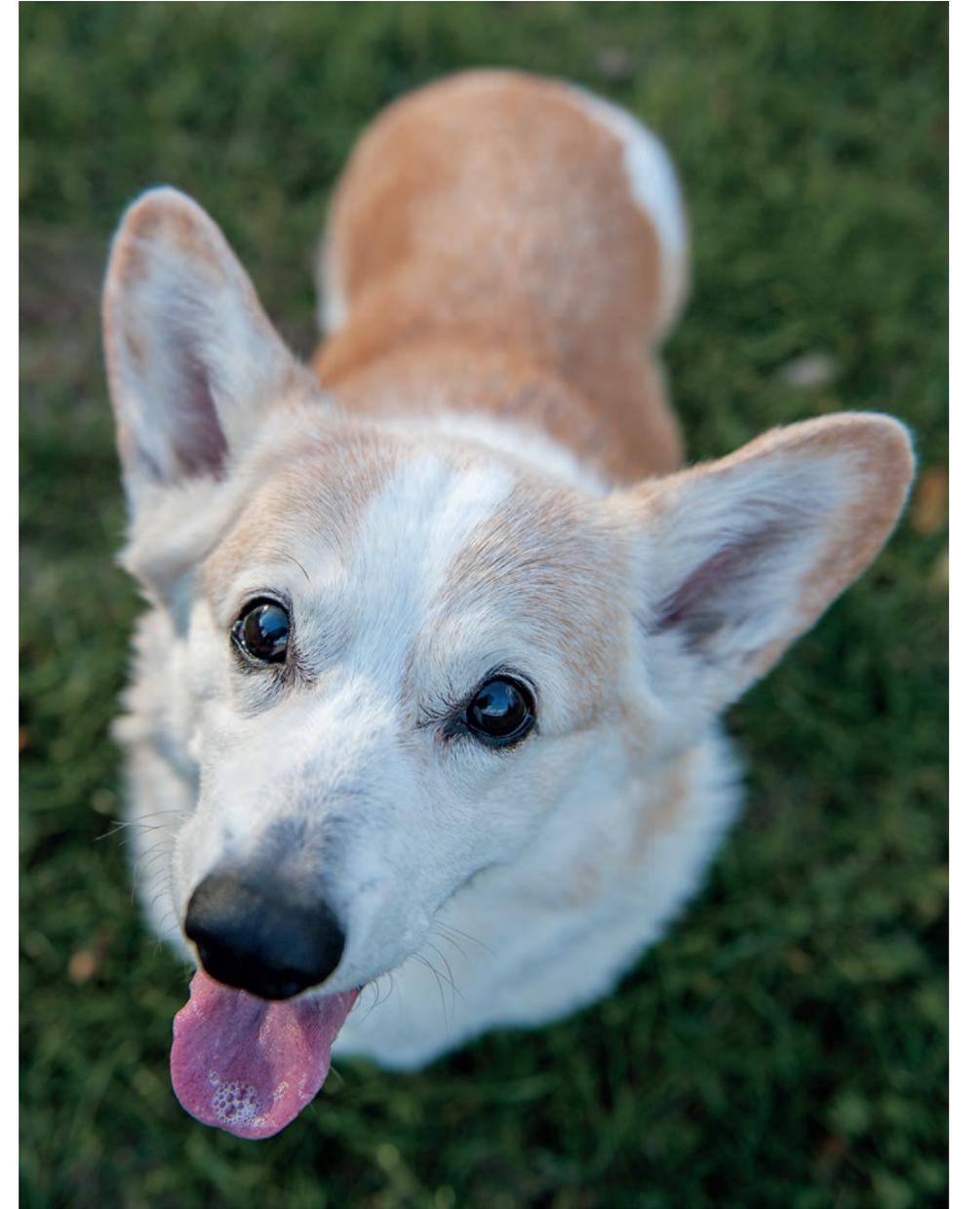
Thirty years have passed, and God has blessed Debbie and me with seven of these amazing companions. Calling them companions is like calling a Ferrari a mode of transportation; however, I am at a loss for a better word. They have helped us endure tough times and celebrated with us in good times. All the while filling our lives with the unfailing love and mirth they are so capable of.

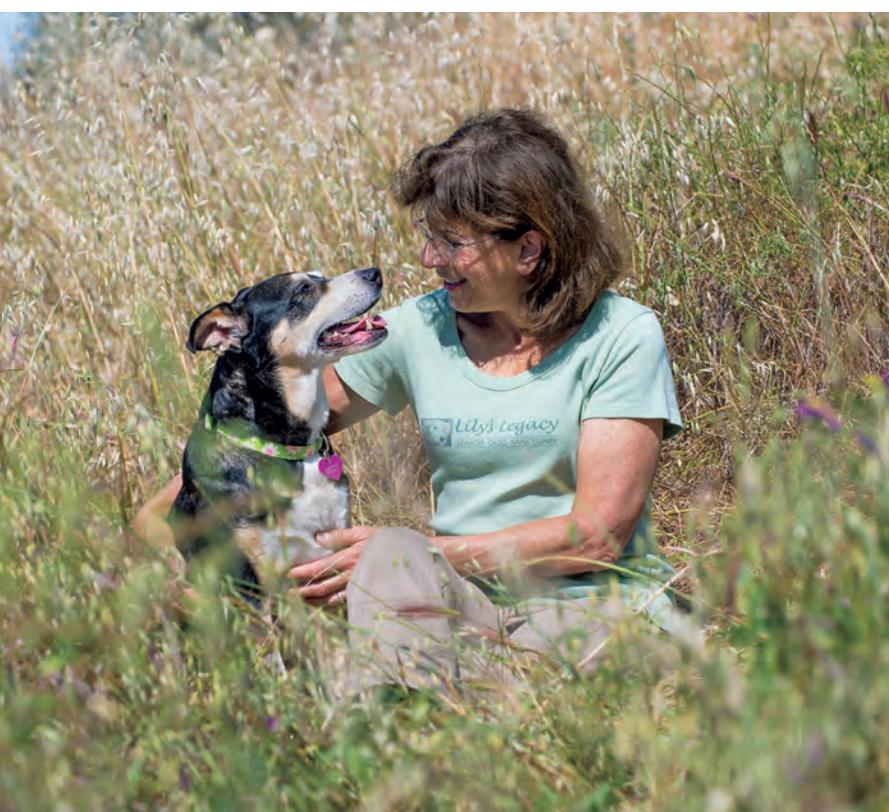
Shelby came into our lives like a tempest and took on the demeanor of a precocious kid—an ugly ducking, you might say. When my beloved Tegan, shop dog and constant companion for 15 years, went back to God, Shelby started to fill her paw prints bit by bit, emerging as a beautiful swan. She is still demanding, though. Food and rides in the truck are her top priorities, with Debbie and I being third on the list. Always watching her human charges from a polite distance, Shelby gives love and affection as needed—but always on her terms. Such is a Corgi.

Shelby, Tegan, Pebbles, Suzie, Brindle, Prince, and Curry, we love you so.

—Robert Gutbier







MISSY 🐾

{ 10 YEARS || AUSTRALIAN KELPIE-BORDER COLLIE MIX || CALIFORNIA }

Missy came to Lily's Legacy Senior Dog Sanctuary a few months after her owner passed away. At age nine, Missy had lost the only person she knew as Mom. A short stay with relatives had been disastrous, as she was attacked by the resident dogs. She arrived at Lily's Legacy hoping for a new, safe, and loving home. That's where I found her.

She had been through a lot and picked up some bad habits between her owner's passing and when she was surrendered to the sanctuary, where I am a longtime volunteer. In order to help her get adopted, I decided to foster Missy and give her a course in "doggie charm school." Well, she charmed her way directly into our hearts and never left. When she came to my home, my existing pack of two dogs and two cats gave her the once-over and decided she could stay. By the time all the dogs and cats were eating together harmoniously, my husband said, "She's not going back!"

Missy is the first one down the stairs to greet us when we return home. And she's the first one up the stairs when it's time for bed. She has made herself at home on the sofa, on the bed, and in our hearts. I am at peace knowing that when her time comes to cross the Rainbow Bridge, her other mom will be there to greet her and will know just how much Missy was loved.

—Linda Mannella

BIJOU 🐾

{ 13 YEARS || STANDARD POODLE || VERMONT }

Bijou made the transition from a fancy-cat city Poodle to a woodchuck-warrior country Poodle after my husband and I met walking our pups in a dog park in Minneapolis. We promptly forged a new life together and decided to move somewhere we could have a relationship with the land—and provide lots of room for Bijou and his best bud, Caleb, to romp.

The boys became presiding princes over our 30-acre parcel in Vermont named True Love Farm. They've protected vegetable, blueberry, and flower crops with limited success but with great joy and style. In his friskier days, Bij would alert us to a deer in the kale and has always particularly enjoyed a good snuggle in the late-afternoon sun.

—Karen Trubitt





OZZIE 🐾

{ 13+ YEARS || AUSTRALIAN KELPIE-SHEPHERD MIX || VERMONT }

My dear Ozzie was held at the shelter for six months, the staff nurturing him and exerting caution about adopting him to just anyone—they feared that his strong looks and size would find him used as a “junkyard dog.” One day a friend encouraged me to take a peek at the shelter dogs. How could I resist? Ozzie and I met in the playroom and instantly hit it off. I knew he was a large, strong-willed dog, so I spent the next month visiting the shelter a few times a week to make sure he would be a good fit.

When he came home with me, he quickly made me aware that herding dogs need to roam—for miles! Thus began the journey with one of the strongest and smartest dogs I’ve ever encountered. Ozzie’s spirit to roam but always come home resonates with my own. No fence can keep him in. We don’t want to bother anyone, but the urge to discover new territory is unstoppable.

At the time I was single, and Ozzie offered protection, but he was also welcoming and gentle with people of all ages. With his cat friend, Gracie Sage, by his side, the two of them made sure the world was right.

Ozzie and I may be free souls, but we always return home to where our hearts are. Never have I had a dog who understands me as well as he does. Never has he wavered in being there for my family and me.

—Seline Skoug

SAMPSON 🐾

{ 14 YEARS || CHIHUAHUA || COLORADO }

When life has literally brought me to my knees from pain or sadness, my best buddy, Sampson, is there to lick away the tears and give me nose nibbles and love. When I'm depressed, he always insists on a walk in the morning or tries to trick me into thinking, "Timmy's in the well again." A small something that will get me up and moving.

He loves his blinged-out collar and riding in my Cadillac. Everyone knows him and has special treats for him. Christmas cards are always addressed to Sampson—spelled with a *p* or he's offended—and Albert.

Oblivious to his size, he guards our house and me. He loves me and counts on me, and I hope I am equally there for him. He has turned out to be my perfect life partner. I think I will go kiss him and give him a chicken treat right now and say, "Thank you, best friend."

—Albert Feeger





“Oblivious to his size, he guards our house and me. **He loves me** and counts on me, and **I hope I am equally there for him.**”



MAX 🐾

{ 12+ YEARS || LABRADOR RETRIEVER || FLORIDA }

Some gifts come in large boxes clad in red wrapping paper, with bows and ribbons flowing. Others arrive not all at once but over time—and change how you look at the world and alter for the better what kind of person you become. Max was both of these gifts.

Max did not arrive on Christmas morning. He came four weeks later, amid the backdrop of a snowy New Jersey winter. The ground was covered with three feet of freshly fallen snow, and Max, a seven-week-old yellow Lab, bounded and virtually disappeared into the white powdery soft clouds. Worn out from his first adventure in the snow, we wrapped him, sleeping soundly, in a large, red box just before our youngest son, Michael, returned home from school. Over the years, whenever we looked at Max, we remembered the absolute joy and wonder on Michael's face the day he peered into that box to see him for the first time, as well as our oldest son Brian's astonishment when he met his four-legged brother.

Max always approached life with enthusiasm, love, and affection for everyone. Of course everyone says that about their dog, but Max possessed a unique, intuitive ability to sense what we would be doing almost before we did. He seemed to know when we were leaving the house before we indicated it and stationed himself strategically in anticipation. Max didn't simply wag his tail, he wagged his entire body, from the tip of his snout to the very

 *Max continued*

tip of his tail. He was the only dog we've ever seen who had a smile on his face for everyone he met.

A young pup has boundless energy and an eager enthusiasm for learning new things as he matures. But of all the attributes a dog can possess, it is the unrestrained love that remains most important. Each day with Max was a gift.

—Deborah and Bob Cargo



“Max didn't simply wag his tail, he **wagged his entire body,** from the tip of **his snout** to the very tip of **his tail.**”



CLEMENTINE 🐾

{ 9 YEARS || ENGLISH BULLDOG || VERMONT }

Clementine has a wonderful, quirky personality that has always made me certain that she communicates with me. The tilt of her head, the look in her eyes, her enthusiasm when I come home, and her joy when we play with her toys have been the greatest evidence that her love for us is real and unconditional. And we have unconditional love for her in return.

One year for my wife Angela's birthday, we (and of course, Clemmie) went to Le Château Frontenac in Quebec for the weekend. We told the front desk we were celebrating a birthday, thinking maybe they would bring us strawberries and chocolate! About an hour after we checked in, there was a knock on the door, and sure enough, there was the hotel manager with a big package. We thought it must be for Angela's birthday, until he said, "This is for Mademoiselle Clementine. We want to welcome her to our hotel and make sure she is a pampered pooch during her stay." The package contained a basket of treats and toys! We've laughed about that for years. Clementine was definitely a pampered pooch and deserved it all.

She has truly been "our little girl." As Angela and I go through life, we will surely have other dogs we will love, but Clemmie will always have a special place in our hearts and can never be replaced.

—Phil Arbolino



RUBY 🐾

{ 13 YEARS || GOLDEN RETRIEVER || ALASKA }

After my wife, Jayne, and I lost our beloved Sparky, we knew we wanted another Golden Retriever. When we felt ready, our friends Don and Barb Ljungblad helped us find a puppy in their home state of Wyoming. Born in July 2001, Ruby was ready to travel with Barb from Wyoming to Alaska the first week of September 2001. I was working as a long-haul pilot at the time, and Ruby came to us days before the September 11 attack. I will always remember what a comfort she was to me as I continued flying during such a tragic time.

Ruby has logged more flight time than some licensed pilots I know. She loves to ride in the airplane, particularly a floatplane, because she knows she gets to go swimming. Another favorite adventure is fishing. Ruby is sometimes in the boat before I have the motor ready! Besides being able to spend time with us, I think she's excited by the alluring smells of the Alaskan wilderness.

Ruby is now 13 years old, but she still has a strong bark, a sprightly gait, and a wagging tail. She can't quite keep up on the long walks she used to love taking with Jayne, but she still gets to tour the neighborhood in the sidecar of my motorcycle.

This beautiful creature has been a wonderful companion to us for many years, and we feel privileged to continue to care for her.

—Mike Koskovich

WALT 🐾

{ 10 YEARS || GREAT DANE || TEXAS }

Walton was the name chosen for my new baby, a Great Dane pup, brought to me by my son and his family as a Mother's Day and birthday present. His name was quickly shortened to Walt, and it seemed to fit him perfectly.

Life with Walt is so amazing because of his size and his gentleness. He is full of love, especially for the family and his best friend, Philly, a Chihuahua mix. The times they spend wrestling and playing have given me hours of entertainment. Our early morning walks on the ranch are of the utmost importance to Walt, and this routine has really helped strengthen his legs and keep both of us fit.

Walt is the first dog I have had of my very own. He is mine, totally mine. He loves the company of other people but scans the room to ensure my presence.

His love is so real—so uncomplicated. I am blessed to know this marvelous animal. Walt brings joy to my life, and to a lot of others who snicker when they see this little, gray-haired lady driving around town with his huge head hanging out the rear window.

My boy, Walt.

—Judy Coates





“

He is mine, **totally mine.**
He **loves** the company
of other people
but scans the room
to ensure my presence.

”



EINSTEIN

{ 10+ YEARS || SOFT COATED WHEATEN TERRIER MIX || CALIFORNIA }

Einstein arrived at Muttville Senior Dog Rescue on a day I volunteer. He was skinny, matted, and missing hair. His spirit seemed broken, but the boy had a lot of heart. In all honesty, I didn't feel a connection with him right away as I had with some other dogs. He was a little bit of a problem child, so I started hanging out with him. I would take him places such as Golden Gate Park, Bernal Heights, and Ocean Beach, where he saw the ocean for the first time. Then I started to bring him home to hang out, which turned into overnight visits, and my husband and I eventually became his foster parents. In the back of our minds, we knew he kind of picked us.

Einstein is an amazing boy. He loves camping and loves the water. Once he figured out how to swim, he was like a Lab, chasing sticks out in the middle of the lake. He loves sitting in the sun. He eats so many vegetables, we call him a "vege-terrier." Cream cheese is his favorite dessert. He is naturally happy all the time and wags so much that I think his tail got bigger! I can honestly say he's never done anything bad.

He has come such a long way, and we are so proud of him. The reality of it, though, is that my husband and I are really the lucky ones. I couldn't imagine my life without him. He has turned into one of the true loves of my life.

—Miwa Wang

OL' RED 🐾

{ 15+ YEARS || BOXER-PIT BULL MIX || CALIFORNIA }

Ol' Red was 15 when he came to Lionel's Legacy, a rescue group with a commitment to saving senior dogs that I founded in 2011. He had recently been diagnosed with lymphoma and was deemed a hospice rescue.

Ol' Red has shown us the true spirit of unconditional love and forgiveness. He has lived a long, rough life, likely from a home where dogs weren't treated as members of the family. When he came to us as a foster, he knew he was in a safe place, and naturally we grew as a family. Our children learned invaluable life lessons from Ol' Red such as patience, empathy, tolerance, and compassion.

Ol' Red helped us see the world through his eyes, to appreciate the sweet simple things in life, and to enjoy each other's company instead of moving at the speed the rest of the world demands. When it comes to rescue groups, everything is about making decisions and coordinating the rescue as soon as it's needed, which unfortunately is often yesterday. At the end of the day, whether we've been able to help or not, Ol' Red is there for us and serves as a reminder of the great work we can do together to advocate for senior dogs in need.

—Laura Oliver





DANNY BOY AND GRACIE 🐾

{ 12 YEARS AND 14+ YEARS || MIXED BREEDS || CALIFORNIA }

When I brought Gracie home from Muttville as my foster dog one rainy night, I had no idea the vital role this terrified little sausage dog would play in my life. In her 12 years, she had never known a kind hand. She deserved to feel safe and loved, and after six months, she grew to trust me. We were still trying to find her a forever home, but Gracie decided she was already home. And without a single adoption application to her name, it seemed the universe was conspiring to keep us together too. And it worked.

Now Gracie is my touchstone, the calming force that holds down one corner of the couch while the hectic world spins around her. The quality of the time we have together far outweighs any concerns about quantity—in fact, having a senior dog reminds me to do something special and joyful every day. Just in case.

Which leads me to Danny Boy. His mission is to help people realize that today is awesome. Like me, he loves to be outside exploring hiking trails at a senior dog's mellow pace.

Danny had been loved his whole life, but when his owner died, there was no plan for him. Muttville stepped in and rescued him from a shelter.

 *Danny Boy and Gracie continued*

After he came to foster with us, we discovered his cancer and enrolled him in Muttville's hospice program. Danny has lust for life, and after caring for many other dogs with cancer, we knew better than to bring him down with chemotherapy. With supportive care and, most important, a daily dose of happiness, Danny is now doing well. He wants people and their dogs to know that having a limited amount of time isn't tragic—unless you waste it being sad!

—Russell Ulrey





ELVIS 🐾

{ 8 YEARS || LABRADOR RETRIEVER || CONNECTICUT }

Imagine spending 24/7 with someone. Never going away on vacation without them, never staying at someone else's house without them. You are *never* apart. Now imagine that person is tied to your body for a good portion of each day, and they know your every movement by heart. They follow the direction of your fingers when you point. They follow your eyes when you stare. They hang on your every word, even when you're not addressing them, just waiting for the opportunity to assist you in some small way. Imagine there's someone whose entire life and happiness depends on your happiness and safety. I can't imagine anything more stressful and selfless all at once.

So I am sitting here looking at my white-faced best friend, confidant, caretaker, protector, and extension of my own body, wondering, "When, buddy? When will it be your time? In six months? Will we have years? Will you tell me when you're ready to retire? How will I be able to let go of that harness handle for the last time? Will you be happy hanging with my mom all day in your retirement? Will it be 'enough' for you?"

I shake my head and get choked up when I realize that, had I chosen to use a cane these past five years, and had I not received the greatest gift that is Elvis from Guiding Eyes for the Blind, how sad and lonely a blind person I think I would be. I know for sure that I wouldn't have had the strength to endure 15 painful eye surgeries in four years without him at every single procedure and office visit, lying quietly next to the exam chair. Each time I



BUDDY 🐾

{ 10 YEARS || BEAGLE || COLORADO }

I can thank my granddaughter's Beagle, Vinny, for showing me the light. Until I met Vinny, I never had much interest in dogs, nor did I understand why people became so attached to them. It wasn't long after meeting Vinny that I found my beloved Buddy at the Humane Society of Boulder Valley. We've been inseparable companions ever since.

Buddy has always been a sweet dog, but during his younger years, he occasionally ran off into the hills in search of foxes, chewed up a favorite shoe or shirt, and got a bit hysterical on summer nights when raccoons were prowling the deck or raiding the grape arbor. Now, after nearly ten years of sensing and adapting to the rhythms, habits, and lifestyle of his human and feline family, Buddy seems to have mellowed nearly to perfection.

—Evans Shaw





MAGGIE AND DAISY 🐾

{ 10+ YEARS AND 10+ YEARS || COCKER SPANIEL MIX AND POODLE
MIX || CALIFORNIA }

Maggie and Daisy were rescued through Lionel's Legacy Senior Dog Rescue. We both believe that senior dogs are the best kind of dog to adopt because they are ready to be present with the family. This dovetails with our goals for raising our children. On our daily family walks, we teach our children that it is important to be happy and to leave the world a better place by being kind and gentle to the people and creatures around us.

—Katie and Jeremy Hirst

DUKAVIK 🐾

{ 12 YEARS || CHINOOK || VERMONT }

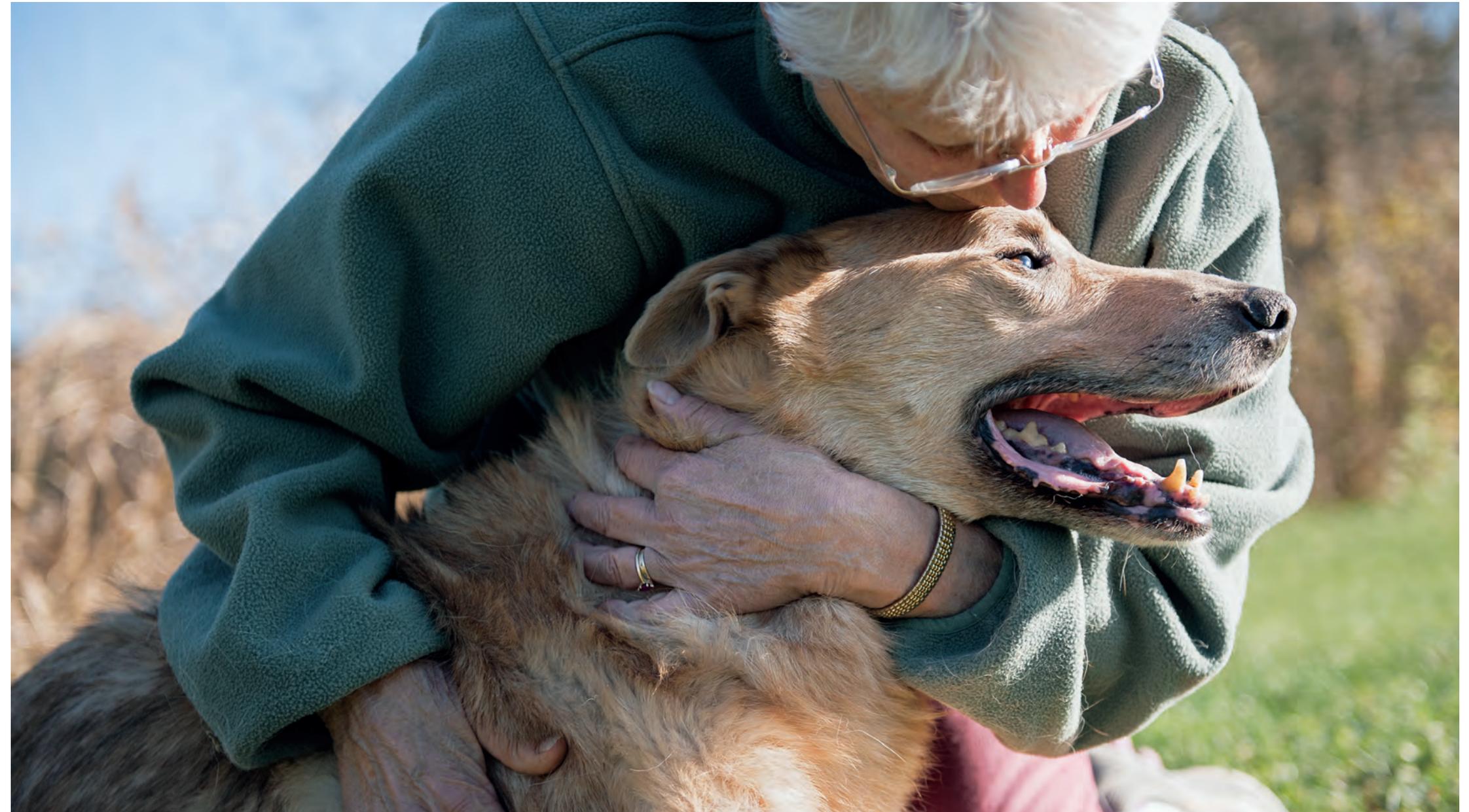
Hey Dukavik, let's take a walk down memory lane.

Do you remember when we first met? You were with all your brothers and sisters. I saw you and it was love at first sight. I came back the next week, and we went home to Maine together.

Do you remember when we would get in the car and drive across the river to play in the sandpits? There were great big cliffs of sand, and you learned to bodysurf down them. You looked so cute sliding on your belly with your legs outstretched.

Remember when we lived at a Residence Inn for seven months, while I worked at our corporate office? You spent days in the back of the truck with a bale of straw for warmth; I would walk you all over the complex at lunch. What a time—at least we were always together.

Now that we are both older, we do quieter things together. You are always at my feet, no matter where I am.



“

I saw **you**
and it was
love at
first sight.

”



 *Dukavik continued*

I know that you love your red sweater because, when I wash it, you always look for it in the laundry. I love seeing you in it—it's really your color.

We have been friends for a long time, and I will love you long after you leave. I will find you at the Rainbow Bridge, where we can go running over the fields together again.

I love you, Bud.

—Patti Richards



AUDREY 🐾

{ 11 YEARS || CHIHUAHUA-DACHSHUND MIX || CALIFORNIA }

I never had a dog growing up, although I pleaded with my parents, as most children do, that I simply couldn't live without one. When I got older, I finally took the plunge, and Audrey, a senior Chiweenie (Chihuahua-Dachshund mix), came into my life.

She was abandoned, found as a stray, and ended up at a shelter, where a rescue group saved her and two other senior dogs moments before their termination. She was with the rescue group for six months because no one thought there was anything special about her. I am so fortunate that they were wrong.

Audrey entered my life and that was it. I think we both knew we were meant for each other. In our first moments together, I laid down a blanket and just sat near her. She leaped over me, wagged her tail furiously, and continued to prance around me. It took a long time before Audrey's true personality emerged, but after several years, her confidence, intelligence, opinion, and vocabulary are in full force.

The day I adopted Audrey, I made a promise that we would be together for the rest of her life. She promised to love and protect me through her gentle nose-butt and "that look" that requires no words. I am grateful that she entered my life. Our best years together are yet to come.

—Evelyn Wang





LACI 🐾

{ 11 YEARS || LABRADOR RETRIEVER || CALIFORNIA }

Laci was selected to be my service dog by the group Tender Loving Canines Assistance Dogs. She has added years to my life. She got me outdoors on walks around the neighborhood. Because of Laci, she and I now know everybody in the neighborhood. I live in the cloistered Carmelite Monastery of San Diego, so we don't usually go out unless we have a reason. Walking the dog became the reason. She has helped us make friends all over the place and has turned into "the queen of Hawley Boulevard."

People just love her. They know her better than they know me. They say, "Where's Laci?" She's simply been a joy.

The whole community of nuns loves her. She's made a difference in everyone's lives here. There's something about the connection between a dog and a person. Recently I read a beautiful quote, "Dogs are the guardians of being." Isn't that lovely? I think there's a lot of truth in that. There's a very unique connection among all the living creatures in the world, but especially between humans and dogs.

—Sister Electa



MASSEY 🐾

{ 15+ YEARS || CHIHUAHUA || TEXAS }

Ol' Massey Dog was named after the biggest man I grew up with, Mug Massey, who owned the property next to our farm. He wore overalls every day; smoked, dipped, and chewed at the same time; and died at 83. I thought that this small puppy should have the largest name so he would grow into the rest of our pack, which included a Rottweiler, a black Labrador Retriever, and a Vizsla. Massey was a surprise for my bride that literally fit in the palms of our hands when we got him as a puppy.

Massey has unexpectedly ruled us all. He has the biggest attitude and is the best retriever and highest vertical jumper. He's loyally devoted, highly intelligent, and makes the greatest traveling companion on any form of transportation. He stands, sits, and lies down regally, struts like a Tennessee Walking Horse, is regimented like no other, and is an unbelievable communicator.

Bottom line: Massey is the coolest little dog with a big dog's personality.

—Josh Needleman

WINKY 🐾

{ 12 YEARS || BOSTON TERRIER || MASSACHUSETTS }

Winky is the sweetest thing in our life. She has been our constant companion for the past ten years, ever since a friend found her on the side of the road in Houston. She was torn up around the neck and face—apparently from bites—and lost an eye as a result. Even in that first encounter, when she was under so much stress, Winky was gentle and calm. My husband named her for the one eye she had left after the attack.

Winky recently lost her remaining eye after a battle with cataracts and glaucoma, but has continued to do well. She is a cancer survivor who is now mostly deaf as well as blind but still enjoys every day—sniffing around the yard, playing with toys, conniving us into feeding her just what she wants, and coming to work with me.

We are so grateful for the peace and joy that Winky brings into our lives. We cherish spending her golden years with her.

—Daina Bray





SKY

{ 12 YEARS || AUSTRALIAN SHEPHERD || ALASKA }

Sunshine or snow, hell or high water, Sky likes things to be happening. Her job as an avalanche rescue dog has the sort of intensity that allows her to shine.

We paid for an Australian Shepherd puppy, but Sky turned out to look more like ... well, let's say if she weren't so beautiful she would be "undesirable" to those who might care about a breed standard. But those things are not of the utmost concern for a dog whose job is in the mountains, far from most human eyes, doing difficult work with tremendous style. Always with style.

Sky is older now, still strong but unable to hear much. No time for reminiscing though, it's better to help her remain engaged. Keep things happening. If we work together, maybe, just maybe we can do things with grace. And with style.

—Paul Brusseau





OLIVIA 🐾

{ 11+ YEARS || GOLDEN RETRIEVER || VERMONT }

There is a term that describes a very special bond between a dog and its human partners. You may have had many dogs in your life, but only one is connected to you in a way that no other dog has been. This is your “heart dog.”

Perhaps it’s because Olivia and I have trained together, traveled together, competed together, and visited hospitals, nursing homes, and schools together. Perhaps it’s because she has taught me so much more than I could ever teach her. She is kind, patient, loving, so smart, and funny too. She makes me laugh, and someday she will make me cry. She is the best friend, companion, and partner I could have ever imagined.

Olivia is my heart dog.

—Annie Glendenning

