

Northwoods Humane Society – Susan Sams, Shelter Volunteer Coordinator

This is a continuation of last week's article where shelter volunteers shared some of their favorite memories. The shelter has about 87 acres with a variety of walking paths. Walking the dogs is a win-win for our walkers and our dogs. Please see the following from one of our great dog walkers on why she looks forward to coming every week-The reasons are too many to number so I will start by saying what happens when you walk dogs at the wonderful shelter.

The minute you walk in, grab a leash and fill your senses with all the sights, sounds and smells of the shelter, time stands still. You are overcome with the sense of excitement and wonder that the dogs are atomizing throughout the kennels. It is contagious so be forewarned! Which dog to pick to walk? The choices are always "RIGHT", each dog is Oh So Special, and the decision must be made carefully. And if you have all day, you can walk them all and feel that energetic connection that is certain to lift you through the remainder of your day. As you open the first kennel door of the day, you will be greeted with so much energy it may knock you over. And kisses galore, so be ready for some sloppy wets.

All of the dogs will remain in my memories forever, as I think back to the fun and connection we shared during our walks. Almost all of them are now in their forever homes as I run through the photo album in my mind of the walks, snuggles, play and treats we shared. I am comforted by all the humans that step forward and welcome these fur babies into their families and put their own names to their faces and personalities they see.

Wonder was the most touching and lovely dog I have ever walked. Named by the shelter staff after "Stevie Wonder" he felt and smelled his way through his first harrowing days of life before he was rescued and taken into the warm embrace of the shelter. He was born both deaf and blind. What he was missing in those two senses, however, he made up for in sweetness and love.

Both his vulnerability and trust were evident in our first meeting. As I hunkered down in his kennel to let him smell my hand, his curious nose filled my hand with wetness and snorts and he figured out that I may become his friend. I did become his friend indeed, and was eager to lead him outside in the rain to explore the wet grass. But not before all the volunteers and staff hugged and snuggled this big white bundle of love. His skin and face were so full of softness and love that it was impossible to resist petting and feeding him treats. His reactions of trust and love were truly overwhelming. I walked him through the door and as the surface that met his feet changed in both temperature and texture, he hesitated. This walk would require a lot of patience and gentle leading, as Wonder learned to navigate his world in a fashion that seemed limited to us.

His big paws splayed across the ground and I could imagine them absorbing the information and transmitting it to his senses as he learned what felt dangerous and what felt safe. It was as if he were truly like a blind person reading braille. He learned to softly "bump" into his leading human as we walked him so he would know where his leader was at all times. I wondered how intense his sense of smell must be, in order to make up for his lack of sight and hearing. His senses of feeling and smell had big shoes to fill if he were to make it in his world of darkness and quiet. With a little help from his friends, he would learn that this is a safe and wonderful world.

Glenda, the most wonderful and soft-hearted volunteer, made Wonder a fuzzy blanket to chew and snuggle while in his kennel. In fact, all the dogs received this treat from her. In addition, he was

treated to her broth-infused carrot snack bowl. Wonder sure did enjoy eating! And that was a good thing, as he would soon grow into his huge white paws as he became what his large breed is.

To everyone's happy surprise, Wonder soon had a following and there were many who stepped up to adopt him. There was a waiting line! He was destined to be with Jamie, a big-hearted, happy-go-lucky caring staff member who knew Wonder's special needs. He soon went home with her to meet his new family of fur babies and humans and got a brand new name to boot ~~ Lou ~~ and it is very fitting to this day. We all could continue to get our doses of joy from Lou as Jamie would bring him to work to hang out while she worked. He also has his own facebook page that keeps us posted on his adventures, complete with videos of play, barking, toys, friends, and walking adventures.

And that is just one of many fun adventures dog walking brings. I could go on for days and fill many pages with words and stories and pictures, but I will just close with a shout out to the ones who persevered and were adopted, bringing tears of joy each time. Artemis was the Shelter mascot who had us all well trained. He was happy every single moment of every single day. He had his kindred spirit in Steve, his loyal dog walker for so many years. Yes, Artie spent a great chunk of his life at the shelter and receive the utmost care. He is missed to be sure.

Lucy, was the lovely girl, so timid and sweet, who was adopted after several years at the shelter. She was Bob's dog, a loyal and fierce dog-walker I am happy to have befriended. He showed me the ropes of walking Lucy, as she required special leading to guide her through things that seemed to frighten her. She was trusting and sweet, however, and a wonderful human took her under their wing forever. Tears of joy, once again.

Abby ~~ Never Crabby Abby, as she bursted out of her kennel for her walks. She would shine her two colored mischievous eyes at me as we began our walk. She would spring through the door in her teenage puppy fashion, eager to zoom around, bite at shoelaces, bump into walkers on purpose, and engage in anything playful. I knew she would make someone a happy bubbling playmate and was soon adopted.

I admit that it was hard not to take them all home, as I whispered stories to my own two golden retrievers of our daily walk adventures. Mine would sniff and snort at my hands and clothing, filling their own dog senses with the adventures I had at the shelter. All leave a wonderful and lasting imprint on me and I am forever humbled and grateful to not only volunteer, but be part of the team of big hearted volunteers that make the shelter a special.

Being a volunteer at the shelter is a rewarding and humbling experience I hope everyone gets the chance to experience.

Walk On, wonderful dog walkers!

We hope these stories encourage you to join our wonderful teams, there are so many ways in which you can help.