Canine Serendipity

“Beauty is in the eye of the beholder”—even if it appears in the pouring rain, covered in mud and slobber. As dog lovers can attest, it’s the magnetism that counts; it can’t be explained, dissected, or ignored. You have suddenly found your new friend.

Margie Ficarra had just lost her beloved dog, Smiley, who was adopted from the Robin I. Kroogman New Haven Animal Shelter in 2018, to complications from diabetes. In her mind, Smiley was irreplaceable. As any of us who have gone through a similar experience, the sadness runs deep and feels permanent. Time may eventually heal, but the memories remain forever.

“I didn’t want another dog,” she said, “it was too emotional to go through again.”

As if the ordeal of Smiley’s death wasn’t enough, Margie’s husband Tony succumbed to stage 4 prostate cancer in 2019. For the next few years, Margie immersed herself with family and her career as a nurse’s aide for pre-kindergarten students in the Waterford school system. Before long, the house felt empty. Something was clearly missing.

While checking out the Friends of the New Haven Animal Shelter website (www.findafriendforlife.org), Margie found a video of a big, black-and-white pitbull named Hendrix who, she said, “was just beautiful.” He reminded her of Petey, the canine companion of the classic Hal Roach series “Our Gang.” And so, on a rainy February day in 2023, Margie and her children Dominic and Tia met this gentle giant, whose mud-splashing antics completely charmed them.

“Tito has become a protector of the family in a warm-hearted way. He always underfoot and very cuddly. He stays right beside her whether she’s doing household chores, watching television or including him in one of his favorite activities, a car ride. His big “panda-like” head pops out the window, catching the admiration of everyone. Tito has become a protector of the family in a warm-hearted way. At 60 pounds he might seem a bit intimidating, but he’s an easygoing goofball at heart.

Dominic always arrives home from work before Margie and tends to Tito’s afternoon meals, bathroom breaks and snuggles. Cats Stella and Tiki have become close pals. “They are so gentle with one another,” Margie says, “and I really believe that it’s love.”

Bedtime is a family affair, with Margie, the cats and Tito sleeping comfortably together. The cats are the first to rise, signaling that it’s time for breakfast. Tito, on the other hand, loves to sleep in. After a sizeable bowl of kibble, Tito’s routine might include an energetic jump from couch to couch, or a vigorous roll in the blanket the shelter gave him as a parting gift, until his head pops out.

There isn’t much that Tito doesn’t like. At first, he was, as Margie describes it, “a revenge pooper.” Sigmund Freud might have a field day analyzing that, but Margie believes he experienced a bit of separation anxiety. As he became more comfortable, that behavior thankfully disappeared. He doesn’t like the rain, despite that first frolicsome meeting with Margie during a downpour. Adding to his list of dislikes are car horns and barking dogs on television.

On the whole, Tito Ficarra is one happy dog.
New Volunteers Onboard

When I pull into the parking lot, before I even exit my car, I see their curious, beaming faces at the fence. I like to think they are greeting me, excited that there is a visitor. I affix my volunteer pin to my shirt and walk to the front door with a smile on my face, waving to the dogs in the outdoor run and feeling glad to unplug for the next few hours.

Like everyone else, my life is full. I run my own business and have two kids. I am usually tethered to my phone and at the mercy of my calendar and all the appointments and “to do’s” in my life. Volunteering at the Robin I. Kroogman New Haven Animal Shelter take time out of my day too, but I get to spend it with some incredible souls, so it doesn’t feel like an obligation.

I call them “my little angels” when I walk into the kennel area. I have special nicknames for every one of them. When I am with them, I give them my undivided attention because that’s what they deserve. So many of them have felt only pain and sorrow, and when I am with them I want them to see my warm smile, hear a soft voice and feel a warm hand. Every single time I volunteer, I think, “I am the best part of their day today,” and I don’t take that lightly.

I have always been an animal lover and always had cats and dogs, so it was a natural fit to start volunteering at the shelter. But to be honest, I didn’t think I was going to love it as much I do. It feels so good to spend time with them. I want to say that it is rewarding, but that doesn’t feel sufficient. It’s SO much more.

Many times I’ll leave a client meeting and head straight to the shelter. When I get there I change out of my fancy clothes and into my “play clothes.” As I leave, I look down and there’s always dirt and mud on my shoes and pants. It makes me smile and think, “This was a good day.”

Katie Geddes, volunteer  

I am a lifelong animal lover, raised by two veterinarians, and I can never spend enough time with dogs. I used to volunteer at an animal shelter with my dad when I was a kid, and I have fond memories of playing fetch and walking the dogs.

After moving across the county to New Haven, I was looking for ways to get more connected and involved in my new community, and volunteering with the Friends of the New Haven Animal Shelter fit the bill perfectly. Hanging out with the dogs at the animal shelter always puts a smile on my face. If I didn’t have my own dog, I’d be taking every one of them home with me!

I’ve been lucky enough to rescue my dog—a senior golden retriever named Moose—so I know firsthand that all dogs deserve and can thrive with a second chance. As my own sweet girl slows down with arthritis, it’s wonderful to be able to spend time with dogs from all life stages at the shelter, from the high-energy young guys to the sweet seniors.

I know that just taking a dog outside and spending some time with them makes all the difference in their well-being, and I’m happy to be able to provide that for these dogs.

Mac Murray, volunteer  

If I didn’t have my own dog, I’d be taking every one of them home with me!
We're Home

Works of Art

Our big thanks to Wet Clay Works of New Haven and their talented artisans for designing these unique and colorful food bowls. What dog or cat wouldn’t want to feast on kibble or quench their thirst from these? Four paws way up (and more if we had them!)
In Memoriam

Janice Abelein memory of Martha and Margret.
Brian Blakeley & Teresa Freeman in memory of Kate, Nell-Bob, and Betty.
John & Eileen Brannigan in memory of "the late Chaz, AKA Gizmo."
Michelle Calini in memory of Solana and Lola.
Laurel Casey in honor of Fred the Chihuahua.
Laurie Cecarelli in memory of Dusty, "my special boy."
The Coletta Family in memory of Mrs. Dorothy Coletta.
Alyssa Daley in memory of Elizabeth Hughes-Picard.
Edward Danaher in memory of Seamus and in honor of Dorothee.
Stephen DiNino in memory of Rocky 1, 2, 3, and 4.
Gerald Gaab in memory of Barbara Gaab and in honor of Sheba.
Erin Keesecker in memory of Piko.
Sharon Kiley in memory of Elliott John Moscato.
Elaine Kittler in memory of Chunky, Sam, Trump, Jessica, and Jordan.
Cindy Koepke in memory of "Dad and Wrinkles — love you and miss you always."
Michael and Adria Link in memory of Marquita Vallee.
Laura Margolin and James Johnson in memory of Samy Short-ears.
The Marino Family in memory of Parker.
Patrick McCarthy in memory of Karen McCarthy.
Tim McNamara in memory of Nyles.
Joanne Miceli in memory of Benny Joseph Miceli.
John H. Morgan in memory of Leighton B. Carlson.
Russ Reynolds in memory of Skipper, Kasper, White Socks, and Oscar.
Charlene Rohloff in memory of Ric Rohloff.
Edward Saccu in memory of Lois Sills; "someday we will meet again."
Priscilla & David Sepulveda in memory of Jordan Webber.
Joann Sierojko in memory of Brian Egan.
Anna Simeone in memory of "my dogs and one cat."
Sarah Strickland in memory of Franklin, "our best pittie boy."
Louis Wasser in memory of Cheeto and Haze.
Susan Wilber in memory of Dr. Sarah Wilber.
Karlene Wood in memory of Don Bennett.
Nancy Zalenski in memory of Charlie, Benjamin, and Bella.

In honor of

Kathleen & Angelo Baldino in honor of Buddy.
Sharon Bornholz in honor of "all your wonderful volunteers."
Evelyn Blum & Leo Harvey in honor of “Nathan Dachshund, King of the Carolinas.”
Joan Emmet in honor of "all pets ever loved."
Carl Goldfield & Gaylord Bourne in honor of Bruno, "our beloved adoptee from the Robin Kroogman Animal Shelter."
Jennifer Feri in honor of Jack and Sophia.

Among FRIENDS

The newsletter of The Friends of the New Haven Animal Shelter

WE THANK YOU
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The REAP Foundation
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Wash and Wag

Amazon and Chewy Wish List Donors

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Donna Walker
Hannah Yarborough in honor of Ayedin Mangi's birthday
Shelter graduate 2016 Ruby
and many other anonymous donors!
Spring 2024

AmongFRIENDS contributors:
Katie Geddes, Patricia Grandjean, Mac Murray, Terry Nolan, Elaine Spinato, Deb Wan.

Four paws way up to our adopters and supporters. Despite some shelter staff changes, the FNHAS is still going strong, carrying out our mission to save animals through the greater New Haven area. We could never carry out our mission without you. We – and our animals – are so thankful.