



**StubbyDog™**

Rediscover the pit bull.

## Honey, My Heart Dog

*After being saved by a veterinarian, Honey finds a home and a way to share her love*

*By Melissa Lipani*

I have always been a dog lover, having spent my childhood with two wonderful family dogs. So when I left for college, I found an apartment that allowed dogs and immediately went to the local shelter. There, I adopted my first pit bull type dog, named Winnie. When Winnie was about 8, my husband Adam and I decided to adopt a friend for her, another pit bull type dog named Tiggs, a happy puppy with a zest for life. The two of them were great friends and for Winnie, that was somewhat miraculous, since she didn't really enjoy the company of other dogs.

Tiggs has had some serious health problems. He's in remission from two deadly autoimmune blood diseases: autoimmune hemolytic anemia and immune-mediated thrombocytopenia. For a while we were doing everything in our power to nurse him back to health, and he was losing his zest for life.



### **Along Came Honey**

Honey had been left at a vet clinic after her people brought her in to be euthanized. At 2 years she was 15 pounds overweight and nearly bald. Her knees were the size of grapefruits. Despite all that, the vet took one look and fell in love with her sweet demeanor. He knew he could help and told the people that he would not euthanize her, but would care for and find her a new family instead.

It turned out that she had a severe case of untreated hypothyroidism and two bum knees – two fairly simple things to treat. Honey spent almost three months at the vet hospital and became their mascot and a friend to every staff member and patient that passed through their door.

Eventually, they knew it was time to find the right home for Honey. The vet called No More Homeless Pets in Utah (now a program of Best Friends Animal Society), and they agreed to help find Honey a foster or forever home. That's when we got a phone call about a special needs pit bull. Would we be willing to foster her? I remember wondering if I could handle three dogs in my home, especially since Winnie was not fond of other dogs. I reached out to other rescuers and I learned about the concept of "crate and rotate." Adam and I decided to give it a try with Honey and our two dogs.

Tiggs came with me when I went to pick up Honey. Though he was feeling lousy still at the time, I saw him completely perk up when he met her. It seemed Honey could bring back his zest for life! During the first week we fostered her, we desperately tried to convince ourselves that we would find Honey a great home, but she had already stolen our hearts, unpacked her suitcase, and dug in her paws into our hearts and home. There was no way she would be leaving us and we adopted her!

For nearly two years we kept the girls separate, except for on walks. Last year, Winnie peacefully passed away after 14 wonderful years with us. After she passed, we were able to foster more dogs, and we really got to see Honey's exceptional gift with helping other dogs and people.

Every dog we bring home just gravitates towards Honey. It doesn't matter if they are big or small, they all want to cuddle with her, a role which Honey takes very seriously.



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## Honey Finds a Job

While we were busy fostering, Honey trained for and passed her Canine Good Citizen test. Our friend, Best Friends Animal Society trainer, Skye Poitras, told us she thought Honey had the right stuff to do therapy work. Her clownish expressions, cartoon character eyes, huge underbite, massive head tilt and extreme wiggle butt had the power to make people feel better.



The day of her therapy test, I was so nervous, but everyone at Therapy Animals of Utah, a Delta Society Affiliate, rooted for us and we floated through the test. Honey became an official therapy dog. Now Honey visits the University Neuropsych Institute (UNI), where she participates in a group therapy session for teenagers. The kids light up whenever Honey comes, and the staff have treats ready for her when they see her coming.

Here's what the kids at UNI say about their time with Honey:

"I love when Honey comes. She makes me feel so happy inside that I forget about all of my problems."

"Honey is such a sweetheart. I can't stop smiling when she's around because she does so many funny things. She loves everyone and gives us all a chance to love her back."

"Honey is so smart. I love working with her on new tricks. She is so happy to see us every time she comes."

Annie, the certified therapeutic rec specialist said, "When Honey arrives, the mood and the energy of the group immediately brightens. No matter what the teens are going through, Honey has a way of breaking down emotional walls and connecting with the patients in a way that no one else can. Oftentimes, patients struggle with basic social skills. When interacting with Honey, fears and inhibitions diminish, and the ability to have positive interactions increases dramatically."

She has also visited an ESL school for refugees and new immigrant families. Sometimes she convinces her new not-so-little brother Captain to join her! Honey has many talents, like singing "opera" and swimming, and she loves slow walks to (literally) smell the flowers, golf cart rides with her grandpa and dressing up. She lights up when she sees her tutu and pearls! Honey is so busy changing people's minds about pit bull type dogs that she also really enjoys a good nap, burrowed under the covers.

You can follow Honey on Facebook and see her adventures!



Honey is a once in a lifetime kind of dog. She is my heart dog, my soul dog. We are so connected and in tune with each other. Our relationship grows stronger every day. I am so proud of her and all she has accomplished. I can't help but think what a shame it would've been if the vet had put her to sleep that fateful day. Ironically, that day may have turned out to be the luckiest day of her life, for Honey and our family.