

The Arlington Connection

Why We Rescue

Denise Elliott, Gabby's new "mom," has the undivided attention of at least four poodles. Gabby was rescued by Arlington-based Lost Dog & Cat Rescue Foundation and soon after gave birth to 10 puppies.

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Why We Rescue

The miraculous story of Gabby and her Valley poodle pups. Adopt don't shop.

By ASHLEY SIMPSON
THE CONNECTION

There wasn't a single dry eye at Gabby's long overdue family reunion in early June. At the time, Gabby hadn't seen her children since they were nine weeks old. Still, as six of her fully grown sons walked into her sprawling Arlington backyard, Gabby greeted each of them as if no time had passed at all.

"Oh, she knew exactly who the 'puppies' were," said Jan Clements, who was one of Gabby the poodle's foster mothers. "She greeted each of them at the gate of her backyard, sniffing them up and down. Every time a different one of her puppies would show up, Gabby would go up to him with her tail wagging, so excited. There were people there, but she wasn't interested in them at all. ... it was all about the puppies for her."

In case you missed it: Gabby and her children are all purebred Standard Poodles. The puppies have been adopted into new homes in Fairfax, Arlington and what made their early summer reunion – and their story in general – remarkable is that not one of their

lives was ever a given.

Gabby's Christmas Miracle

This story began just a few days before Christmas 2019, when Gabby came into the care of the Lost Dog and Cat Rescue Foundation (LDCRF), Arlington-based animal rescue organization. Roughly two years old and pregnant with at least her second litter of puppies, the starving and dejected Gabby had just been removed from an especially inhumane backyard breeding operation in southern Virginia.

"Her hair was badly matted, and she was so malnourished that her coat was the color of rust," said Jan, who is a long-time Lost Dog volunteer. "It was obvious that Gabby had been badly mistreated. That's what you get with backyard breeding situations – people making a lot of money off animals suffering."

Jan and her close friend, Amy Hintosh – another Lost Dog volunteer – first met Gabby when Amy was called into Lost Dog's Rescue Care Center for



From left, Katherine Chang, Amy Hintosh, Laurice Attia, Kim Williams and Jan Clements and oodles of poodles at the reunion of Gabby's puppies. The poodles now live in Arlington, Falls Church, Fairfax County, Herndon and Charlottesville.



Laurice Attia doles out some attention at the Arlington poodle reunion.

what was likely Gabby's first ever grooming session. Amy is a professional dog trainer and former groomer, and Jan – with her expertise as a retired physical therapist – came along to soothe this greatly neglected, and thus understandably very anxious, dog.

"They were worried her matted hair would hinder delivery and make it difficult for her pups to access the 'milk bar,'" Amy explained. "Jan came with me as back up in case I needed help and to give Gabby comfort. Once we saw her, we both knew she was special. It broke our hearts to see her in such terrible condition."

Right then and there, Jan and Amy decided to give Gabby a home for Christmas... and for delivering her puppies, whenever that would be.

"We didn't know how pregnant she was, but whenever it was going to happen, I just couldn't see her giving birth outside of a home," Jan said. "She needed a Christmas

miracle and that was something I could give her."

The Arrival: Puppies, Puppies, and More Puppies

Jan brought the emaciated, pregnant Gabby home, where the plan was for her to take the "day shift," while Amy would stay over and take care of Gabby at nights. Around the clock, Gabby was showered with love and care unlike anything she had ever experienced.

"Gabby hadn't had a lot of love and affection, and she really craved it," Jan recalled. "The first thing we did was try to get her to eat because we had to get food into her to feed the puppies. We also took her to the Shenandoah Valley and went camping, where she really thrived. All the while, she was so thin that we thought she had at least another month to deliver."

As it turned out though, Gabby was only at

PHOTOS CONTRIBUTED



One of the 10 newborn puppies has a big yawn and loving care.



One of the 10 newborn standard poodle puppies.



Gabby nursing her 10 puppies shortly after they were born.



Count the cute fuzzies; 10 puppies.

Jan's house for 12 days before delivering her puppies. In the wee hours of New Year's Day 2020, Gabby delivered her first healthy puppy, and then the next, and then the next...

"I just kind of braced myself," Jan said. "We were expecting four to five puppies at most, with Gabby being so thin and having lacked proper care and prenatal vitamins. We also weren't necessarily expecting live births. But then the puppies came, and as sick as Gabby was, she was licking and taking care of them, nursing them, and just being such a good mom."

It didn't stop there, either. Even though the average litter size for a healthy Standard Poodle is seven puppies, Gabby went on to deliver ten in total – three girls and seven boys, each of them with either chocolate brown or black coats. And even though some weighed less than a pound at birth, they all survived – thanks to Gabby, Jan, and Amy (and the support of a large community of Lost Dog volunteers).

"For weeks, it was all day, all night feed-

ing puppies," Jan said. "We didn't get a lot of sleep, and that's the commitment you make as a foster parent – doing whatever it took to keep those puppies healthy until they could be adopted."

Nurturing these newborns involved monitoring the puppies' weight regularly to make sure they were eating enough and feeding them when Gabby was too sick to nurse.

Jan and Amy named all ten of these puppies after different areas of the Shenandoah Valley – a region very special to both. In birth order, the puppies were named: Detrick, Markham, Luray, Linden, Royal, Elizabeth, Carmel, Riverton, Helmuth, and Woodstock.

Saying 'See You Later' (Never Goodbye)

In March 2020, all of Gabby's nine-week-old puppies – and Gabby – were adopted through LDCRF. And since day one of each of the dogs' new lives, all 11 of their families have kept in touch through a private Facebook page that Jan set up for sharing photos, updates, and anecdotes.



Gabby before giving birth, in Shenandoah.

"We wanted Gabby's puppies to have the advantage of growing up together," Jan said. "Amy adopted one of the puppies, Detrick, and the other puppies were officially adopted through a special event. Then Gabby was adopted the next day by her now mother, Denise Elliott, who is the most wonderful pet parent. I really believe God chose her to take Gabby and raise her. Gabby is loved and spoiled and just the sweetest thing, and she lives so close, so we have had the privilege of watching her grow and get healthy."

These days, Gabby is not only the picture of health: in Jan's words, she is also the "poster child for rescue."

"We weren't even sure she would survive labor and delivery, let alone ten healthy puppies," Jan said. "She's the poster child for rescue – this is what it's all about. Dogs come in terrible shape, but if we volunteers can take them into our homes and give them love and affection and let them know they are wanted, lives change. Take Gabby, for example: because one dog came into a rescue, 11 families have been blessed."

And even though not all 10 "puppies" and their families were available for this summer's reunion, Amy said it was still an unforgettable day – especially after a year (plus) marked by COVID-19.

"It was magical," Amy said. "To see Gabby go up to each of the boys as they arrived, sniff them, and start to dance – you could tell she immediately recognized them as her pups. The boys all seemed to recognize her, too. And ... it's been wonderful to remain in touch with all the pups and their adopters. The Facebook page helped so much during the initial pandemic lockdown. The adopters were able to reach out to us, and each other with questions and concerns. We get to see their growth and development and have been able to compare personalities."

The goal for the next reunion is to have Gabby and all ten of her Valley Pups, with their varying personalities, there in the flesh. This gathering is tentatively planned for the fall, and, of course, the Shenandoah Valley is on the shortlist of locations.

As Gabby and the Valley Poodle Pups continue to flourish, LDCRF staff will be telling Gabby's story for years to come. They are just one reason – or 11, rather – why people should adopt, and "not shop" when bringing a new pet home.

In order for LDCRF to continue saving these dogs and cats; donations are always appreciated. You can find more information on Lost Dog and Cat Rescue Foundation at www.lostdogrescue.org



Denise Elliott, Gabby's new "mom," has the undivided attention of at least four poodles

Instagram Influencer Saving Cats

A globally influential 'cat corner of the Internet.'

BY ASHLEY SIMPSON
THE CONNECTION

Instagram – the ubiquitous social media platform – has given rise to Internet celebrities and influencers. Not every social media influencer is in it for self-promotion and profit, though. In fact, with more than 160,000 followers hailing from places all over the world, local resident Jen Boger leverages her Instagram account, @pokeypotpie, to improve life for cats on a global scale.

From the handle @pokeypotpie, Jen posts on behalf of what she has dubbed “The Playschool for Wayward Kittens,” the rotation of cats that she and her husband, Ian, foster in their home. Jen and Ian typically foster a few cats at a time, and until they are adopted, they are all regularly featured on the very popular @pokeypotpie Instagram feed along with their ever popular resident cats.

“Instagram has been amazing,” Jen said. “I started the account a really long time ago specifically to post pictures of my cat, Pokey (whose nickname is Pokey Pot Pie), so the page is named after him ... It was originally a place for me to post photos and updates about him and it has continued to be a page for me to post cat-related content. Now, it features my five resident cats, who are all foster fails. And then the other cats you see are all the cats I foster,” through Lost Dog and Cat Rescue Foundation.

Boger also works with City Kitties DC @citykittiesdc and helps with a group in Chincoteague periodically.

While fostering cats and kittens with special needs might seem like a full time job, Jen and her husband Ian have full time jobs too. Jen is an attorney and Ian is a doctor.

On the @pokeypotpie page, you will find adorable images and videos of all Jen Boger’s current cat residents and fosters, many with disabilities. Jen has been the cat intake coordinator at the Arlington-based LDCRF for six years, and the cats she likes to bring home are those who need a little extra help.

“We foster a lot of special needs cases,” Jen said. “I try to reserve space in the house for cats with medical needs; I’m a sucker for



Pokey himself.



Hagrid, a starring resident cat with @pokeypotpie.



Boop and Bop.



Poppy, Petunia and Peggy, kitten fosters with Jen Boger of @pokeypotpie. The three kittens have eye defects.

medical cases, like when a cat has had a leg removed, eyes removed. I love any blind cat ... as anyone will tell you, once you have a blind cat, you'll always have one.”

And what Boger does for these cats by fostering and promoting them on her Instagram feed is life-changing for them, whether or not they have special needs.

She has found that “good PR” has been incredible in landing so many of these cats in fantastic forever homes.

“Cats who we foster definitely get adopted more quickly because of their presence on Instagram,” Jen said. “There’s nothing better about any of our fosters than the other cats with [Lost Dog and Cat Rescue Foundation], either. They just have better PR, so people get more insight into them. They get to see the cat come into the house and observe how he or she progresses and grows. So, if you’re going to choose between that kitten and one on another rescue website, you’re going to pick the one you know better.”

@Pokeypotpie has also become far more than an avenue for getting foster cats into forever homes.

“The account brings attention to the cats, to the rescue, and so much more,” Jen said. “I use Instagram for education and advocacy – about the importance of fostering cats, adopting them, and spay/

neuter. These messages are reaching people all over the world.”

When Jen started this Instagram account, a big following was certainly not the goal. But then, a @pokeypotpie post caught the attention of so many people that one of her cats went viral. And, then it happened again, and again, and again ...

“The focus was never on big numbers, but instead local followers, because that is where adoptions come from,” Jen, who has to date fostered 175 cats, said. “But then, what tends to happen is, when the cat community finds something particularly cute or endearing, a bigger account will pick it up, and that always brings in more followers. We’ve gotten the attention of some big rescue communities, and we have had certain cats go viral.”

It all started taking off in 2018, when Pokey himself made Internet waves after a video featuring him landed on The Dodo, a popular website that showcases particularly heart-warming and extraordinary animal stories.

Then there was the dramatic and determined Wilford, a 28-pound cat whose story was told by People.com and a host of other media outlets.

“Wilford got attention all over the world,” Jen recalled. “He’s definitely the one that went the biggest [no pun intended]. He seemed to be everywhere for a while – he was even on morning shows. We have followers in France who told us they saw him on their local news.”

Pokey and Wilford are not the only @pokeypotpie stars who became viral sensations, either. Still, the Bogers have never been, and will never be, on Instagram for fame or fortune.

Especially these days, when logging onto the Internet and plugging into social media often brings reminders of all that is wrong in the world, Jen relishes the ability to push out some positivity by way of @pokeypotpie.

“It’s a really cool corner of the internet,” Boger said. “It’s a feel-good place where you’re not looking at someone who is trying to tell you how to feel – it’s cute cats surrounded by a good message about how to make the world a better place for the cats around them. People all over seem to enjoy it. We have followers in Australia, France, the Netherlands, and so many more places that we love to connect with.”

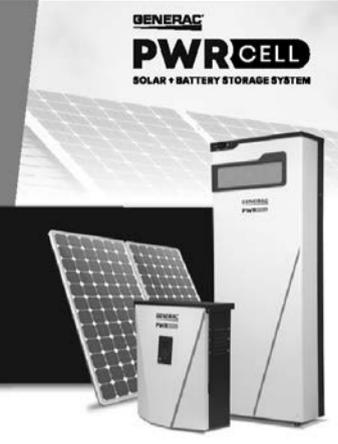
To learn more about the Playschool of Wayward Kittens, follow Jen and her gang on Instagram, @pokeypotpie.

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AR PETS



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Wendy herself, celebrating her 21st birthday

Wendy's Celebration

BY ASHLEY SIMPSON
ARLINGTON CONNECTION

Sixteen years ago, Arlington resident George Hobart walked into the Animal Welfare League of Arlington's animal shelter and, right away, a five-year-old Beagle/Jack Russell Terrier mix named Wednesday caught his eye.

"When I saw her at the AWLA, I asked the staff if I could take her out in the backyard, and she immediately rolled over," George recalled. "I gave her a belly rub, and that was it."

George brought her home that day and he and his wife, Marjorie, renamed their new dog Wendy to better fit her sunny disposition. And the rest is history – ongoing history. On Sunday, April 18th, Wendy's tribe – George and Marjorie Hobart, George's son, Ted Hobart, and Wendy's foster parents, Kit and Gary Putnam – gathered to celebrate her 21st birthday. And, yes, you read that right: Wendy is 21 years old by human definition, making her 147 years old in some measure of "dog years."

"Wendy asked me to help her coordinate the celebration, so I was the event planner," Ted said. "It was a small backyard celebration that included me, my parents, and Kit and Gary [who took her in full time amid the pandemic last year]. During this afternoon soiree, Wendy enjoyed her favorite – Gary's delicious grilled chicken – and the rest of us enjoyed hot dogs, macaroni and cheese, cole slaw, and apple pie in her honor."

Decorations were hung and everyone wore party hats, including Wendy. It was a party where each human in attendance had at least a hundred heartwarming memories of Wendy.

"When Dad got Wendy, my brother and I fell in love with her immediately," Ted said. "She just became a member of the family."



PHOTOS CONTRIBUTED

George and Marjorie Hobart, George's son, Ted Hobart, and Wendy's pandemic foster parents, Kit and Gary Putnam gathered to celebrate Wendy's 21st birthday.

Wendy's Celebration

FROM PAGE 10

She and Dad did everything together — he always brought her everywhere because she just gets along with everyone. She is so personable and only barks in joy or happiness, never aggression. She is a wonderful soul.”

In her 21 years, she has played quite a few roles in the lives of the people who love her — and in the community.

For instance, she served as the indoor pool mascot at Ballston's Jefferson Independent Living and Retirement Home, where she lived with George and Marjorie until last April. She's also been a motivating running buddy, even having participated in the inaugural Arlington Bunny Hop 5K in 2018.

Through it all, she has made more friends than she could count on two paws.

“She lived in Lyon Park with my dad and Marjorie until they all went to live at the Jefferson, where it was like she became the official Jefferson dog,” Ted said. “Everyone there knew and loved Wendy. There was even a musical about her, and Wendy herself made a cameo.”

Wendy was also perhaps Lyon Park's most popular resident for the many years that the Hobarts lived there.

“She was literally the neighborhood petting zoo,” George recalled. “Wendy was usually the only four-legged guest at all the kids' birthday parties, and everyone loved to pet her. Then our next-door neighbors had a son named Adam, and Wendy would visit him frequently. One day when Adam was in kindergarten, the teacher asked the class if any of the students had a dog, and Adam raised his hand and said, ‘I have a dog named Wendy!’”

Wendy moved to what the Hobarts call “Camp Putnam” (also in Arlington) last year when coronavirus-related restrictions put a damper on her previously active social life at The Jefferson. This transition, though, didn't mean new owners for Wendy — it just meant that her family got bigger.

“I visit her every other day at the Putnams' no matter what the weather conditions are, www.connectionnewspapers.com



Happy Birthday, Wendy!

and my two sons go over there as often as possible to play with her and walk her,” George said. “Kit and Gary lost a dog right before the pandemic, so Wendy was as great for them as they are for her. They love her as much as we do. She takes several naps a day with Gary.”

If you ask Marjorie, those naps just might be the key to Wendy's longevity.

“If she could tell you her secret to living a long and healthy life, I think she'd say it was all about napping enthusiastically,” Marjorie said. “She saves her energy for what's most important to her, like food and playtime with her people.”

As she embraces her 22nd year of life, Wendy will get plenty more time with these people — especially George, who has no plans to stop regularly visiting the most special dog he's ever known.

“I think one of the reasons Wendy has such a great personality and why she's always smiling is because she absorbed some of my dad's energy,” Ted said. “He was always socially and civically involved in Arlington, and Wendy went with him everywhere. They continue to be inseparable. They're a match made in heaven.”

Wendy was first featured in the Connection in August.

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Cats in the Belfry



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

Have I mentioned in print lately that we, resident owners of “Belly Acres” in Burtonsville, are back to being a five-indoor-cat household? A few months back on a Sunday afternoon, my wife Dina offered up the seemingly harmless explanation for her need to go out that day. She said she was going to the local CVS for a few things, things which I had no interest or need to be involved in, so off she drove, with yours truly having nary a worry in the world. Little did I realize what actually was going on.

I don't recall exactly the time element because when my wife goes to the store — of any kind, without a chaperone, I know from decades of experience that left to her own devices, she won't be returning home anytime soon. So how ever long she was gone, I hadn't a clue or a concern. I know the drill. She's a big girl, but she is deliberate. At her main adult employer, the former Tivoli's Restaurant in Roslyn, the owners jokingly nicknamed her “Speedy,” because she wasn't. Nonetheless, she was however, a valued, trusted and appreciated employee.

Eventually, I saw Dina drive down our driveway. She parked in her usual spot alongside the house. A few seconds later she walked empty-handed into the house and asked for my assistance in unloading whatever was still in the car. “Whatever,” unbeknownst to me, were the two two-year-old tabby siblings she had just “rescued” waiting patiently in their cat carriers on the back seat. Dina could barely control her excitement as she opened the back door for me. At first glance, it became quite obvious what the “whatever” was: it was Louie and Mia. I grabbed one of the cat carriers and walked into the house. Dina had not really mentioned, until she did, that she had been wanting to increase our cat count to five after last year's two losses: Biscuit and Chino, who both died within six months of one another, from complications due to their diabetes. Brothers in more than arms, Biscuit and Chino, who were nicknamed “The Buff Boys” due to their color, were the sweetest, most loving and affectionate cats one could ever hope to have.

Six months or so since the surviving brother, Biscuit had succumbed to his illness, Dina began her search for a new pair of cat siblings. After a few fits and starts and an application that was rejected, Dina's month-long

search was finally rewarded on this Sunday. She met the owners in Beltsville, Md. where they exchanged the necessary pleasantries. The couple had to give up the cats because their infant daughter was allergic to them/their dander. Regrettably they needed to find a new home for these two cats whom they had nurtured since they were kittens. They were very generous with their supplies. They gave us wet and dry food, litter, a litter box and some toys. After a few sad goodbyes, Dina drove off for home, cats in tow where cluelessly I had been minding my own business.

We each brought in a cat carrier and once inside, opened their doors and introduced the cats to their new home. Out they scampered and of course began to sniff. Our other cats were nowhere to be found which given the territorial disputes which often occur when new cats are introduced to an existing cat home, was fortunate in that their first steps were not in retreat from some unexpected cat attack. Though I wasn't of similar mind with respect to Dina's feeling that we needed more cats, I have nevertheless embraced their arrival. There is no doubt that their presence has brought new life (no pun intended) into our home. Now, everywhere I go, or look, there seems to be a cat to talk to (or a hissing/growling fight to break up). No matter. It's nothing that experienced cat owners wouldn't expect. And though I was definitely surprised when I saw the two cat carriers secured in the backseat, now nearly two months later, I couldn't imagine our life without them.

Kenny Lourie is an Advertising Representative for The Potomac Almanac & The Connection Newspapers.