

Dee Cannon and Fiona Marie



The moment I saw her, I knew that I just had to have that tiny sweet baby, but oblivious to what she would mean to my family and others over the years. I had been on the Board of the Delaware Humane Association (the only no kill animal shelter in Delaware at that time) for five and a half years, doing mostly tasks that kept me out of the shelter, like fundraising and Union negotiations. I couldn't go into the animal holding areas, because I wanted to take all of the dogs home and it broke my heart.

One day, while at the groundbreaking for the shelter's new building, Fiona (named after a German ballerina because she was so graceful) came around the corner under the shelter manager's arm. She immediately went after the beverage in my husband's hand. What a personality that little princess had. Then, my husband and I heard her story. She had been brought to the shelter in a coma, with five tiny pups suckling on her. This was her second litter. The breeder had bred her back-to-back as soon as she was able, and it nearly killed her. We think she was just over a year old.



Known at the time as "Bubbles", Fiona spent three weeks in the ICU, then five months being fostered by the shelter manager. It was such a traumatic experience for her, that I have often wondered if it had contributed to her docile personality. She is a purebred apple head chihuahua, but with none of the stereotypical, annoying behaviors; she is quiet, self-assured and confident, no shaking or nipping. She rarely barks, but likes to talk when being petted or if telling me what she wants.

DPP Team of the Month (June 2024)



When Fiona was about four, I decided to start a Pet Therapy program for the students at the University where I worked on the east coast. She breezed through certification with the Alliance of Therapy Dogs and was a natural. She spent about a half day a month back then entertaining the students. They loved her, and she was an immediate Instagram star. When classes changed, young people would scream out “There’s Fiona!”, as they moved past in large groups. Her tail never stopped wagging with joy. Her certification allowed her to wear clothing when she was on duty, and she had a full wardrobe, which she enjoyed showing off.



During that time of her life, my late husband and I would take her and Hazel, her Boston Terrier sister, to a local nursing home on Thursday nights. Our dogs were the smallest of all the therapy teams, so we were always assigned to the top floor where all the residents were bed ridden. At that facility, dogs were allowed on the beds. Fiona would snuggle up and patiently lie still while she was being stroked and loved. People often told her how she had made their day.

Soon after we moved to Colorado and registered with Pet Partners, Covid hit. That was the end of pet therapy for a couple of years. I was worried that she might have forgotten what to do, or perhaps have no interest in working any longer. Luckily, I was wrong! We got back into our routine at Advent Health Hospital, where we visit the Cancer Center, Radiology, the Emergency Department, the Special Needs area and Infusion Therapy on a weekly basis.

During Covid, Fiona attended a grief support group at a local church, where she visited each person sitting in the circle. There was a lot of crying that evening and she knew just what to do to get everyone through it. She has also visited several middle and high schools to help with stress relief before exams. She just gets passed from student to student at their desks, with tail wagging constantly.



I have always said that Fiona knows how to work a room. She will be eleven on July 18, and is still loving her work. I guess once a therapy dog, always a therapy dog. She told me she is type cast for the role!

DPP Team of the Month (June 2024)

