

Gina Chen and Olive



When my husband Andrew was six years old, his life was forever changed by an explosion at a campsite. A man, either careless or ill-intentioned, poured propane into a firepit. The blast left Andrew hospitalized for six months, scarred on his left shoulder, and carrying a lifetime of PTSD. Yet we often say that if it weren't for that accident, we might never have had Olive — his service dog.

Olive joined our family in February 2019, 30 years after Andrew's accident. Born in Ukraine, she flew to Colorado and then made the long drive to our home in Washington, DC — all before she was 13 weeks old. I'll never forget the moment she trotted down the hallway of our apartment, fearless and self-assured. I had never considered myself a dog person, but I remember thinking, *This is the most beautiful creature I've ever seen!*



Though Olive came into our lives as Andrew's service dog, she quickly became everyone's best friend. She gave me purpose when I was between jobs, bonded with my dad during the pandemic, and brought joy to my aunt as she went through breast cancer treatment. She's traveled with us all over the country — from California to Maine, New Orleans to New Mexico, and eventually back to Colorado. If I had a nickel for every time someone told us they hadn't even noticed her on a plane or under a restaurant table until she got up, I'd have enough to buy Olive all the treats she could ever

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want. Wherever she went, she spread smiles and joy. Giving Olive the chance to do that even more was the natural next step.



Olive and I became a registered Pet Partners team in August 2023 and started volunteering at the Ronald McDonald House in Denver that October. It quickly became our regular spot. Many families leave their beloved pets behind for months at a time while their children undergo medical treatment. When they see Olive, their eyes light up. I see how desperately they miss their own dogs and how healing the touch of an animal can be. I'll never forget the time when a man in distress locked eyes with Olive and came over to put his face against hers. After a couple of minutes, he got

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up and exhaled, “You have no idea how much I needed that.” Or when a little girl with late-stage cancer couldn’t stop laughing while playing with Olive – her mother telling me that after hours of radiation therapy this was the best part of her day. These are the moments that make us show up every week at the House – because someone would miss Olive if she wasn’t there.



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In the nearly seven years that I've known her, Olive has taught me what it means to be present, selfless, vulnerable, patient, and joyful. I feel grateful and privileged to be her mom and share her with the world.



Though Olive calls Colorado home, her true happy place is the beach. I've never seen her happier and more alive than at Del Mar's Dog Beach in San Diego, racing freely along the shoreline from sunrise to sunset.