

## **More than Books**

### **For the love of Pete**

My five-year-old standard poodle, Pete, died May 2. His death was unexpected but dignified. He had the best of care at Paws & Claws Animal Clinic and, finally, at Walker Pet Crematory. That being said, his final chapter came to soon. Before closing the book on Pete, I want to go back to the beginning of his story.

### **The first chapter**

I don't believe Pete's first chapter was a happy one.

My standard poodle Charley had only been dead a couple of months when I received a call from Freeport Friends Forever Humane Society's then-manager, Mary Jo Dawson. "There's a couple from Dixon who're bringing in a one-year old standard poodle they didn't like," Mary Jo told me. "What's not to like?" I asked her. "They say he's too lively and too much of a clown."

Anyone who remembers Charley will understand that this only served to peak my interest in the dog en route from Dixon. When I met Pete, as he came to be known, he seemed playful and eager, but not quite sure of himself, like he'd been a puppy in a house where they didn't care much for puppies.

### **Midtale 1, the student**

Pete had some big paws to fill. He soon began to earn his dog biscuits, however, by keeping me company whenever I came in to work at the library before or after regular open hours.

We took up where Charley and I left off by attending meetings of the fledgling Freeport Chapter of Therapy Dogs International (TDI). In the fullness of time, Pete completed Beginning, Intermediate, and Advanced Obedience classes at Carlson Canine Camp.

A good student and a great believer in continuing education, Pete earned his B.A. in C.L.A.S.S. (Canine Life and Social Skills) at Carlson's in 2011. He was pursuing his M.A. at the time of his death.

### **Midtale 2, the therapy dog**

Shortly after Pete passed his American Kennel Club Canine Good Citizen test, we were certified together as a TDI therapy dog team.

The Freeport Chapter of TDI has been meeting now for over five years and has a growing number of teams who visit hospitals, nursing homes, schools, and libraries. Pete was always a good visitor. Pete was not always a good listener!

Not all therapy dogs, you see, are suited for the library's "Paws for Reading" program. In order for children to gain confidence by reading aloud to dogs, the dogs have to sit quietly and patiently and at least appear to be listening to the child read. It was only after a few years' practice that Pete showed me he was mature enough to join the library's "Paws" program.

### **Midtale 3, the big brother**

In 2009, Pete and I adopted Frances, a fearful, painfully shy standard poodle, who was rescued from the home of an animal hoarder. Frances's rough start in life had taken its toll, and her rescuers and her foster home wanted Frances placed with a confident, outgoing pooch who could be – I kid you not - a role model for her.

As far as I'm concerned, Pete will forever hold the World's Best Brother Title. With his help, and the help of two- and four-legged friends at Carlson Canine Camp and elsewhere, Frances has blossomed into a nearly perfect "Paws for Reading" listening partner.

### **Conclusion**

More than one person would express surprise when I explained that such a happy, handsome fellow as Pete had been an unloved, unwanted dog, adopted from the Freeport Friends Forever Humane Society. Local author and fellow-TDI handler Shelia Welch remembers Pete as "a sweet and joyful dog." Dog park friend Tom Sullivan maintains, "Pete was an all-round good guy."

It is my hope that Pete's too-short life was a rich and rewarding one.

Following Frances's rehabilitation, Pete took on another rehab project. He spent nearly a year as a foster brother to a fellow Friends Forever alumnus, Kelly, who has recently been adopted by a wonderful human and canine family.

Pete was known as also a community activist and fund-raiser. He was among top earner several years running in the Senior Center's annual Stroll-A-Thon, which raises money to support senior transportation. (A confession: Pete was just a little under the weather during the 2011 Stroll-A-Thon, so I brought Frances in as a ringer.)

This last Christmas dogs were allowed, for the first time, to participate in the local Arthritis Foundation's Jingle Bell Walk, and, thanks to his many generous sponsors, Pete was near the head of the pack.

When he died, he was nowhere near the end of his potential.

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