



Marleen Puzak & Her Special Needs Dogs

Story by William Given with photo by Jaime Rowe

One of the perks of writing for *Mile High Dog* is that I get to meet some uniquely wonderful people doing rescue work here in Colorado and the Rocky Mountain region. It is my absolute pleasure to introduce you to Marleen Puzak in this issue. She is an incredibly kind, caring and selfless woman. Marleen is a volunteer with French Bulldog Village (FBV) and she is the only person in Colorado doing rescue work on their behalf.

Now you might wonder, as I did, just how many French bulldogs are out there anyway? In 2001, the American Kennel Club registration statistics showed the French bulldog in 64th position out of the 146 breeds recognized. But, in the last ten years they have increased in popularity and are now the 18th most popular breed among the 173 breeds recognized today.

The number of French bulldogs needing rescue, rehabilitation and re-homing is still relatively small when compared to Labrador retrievers or German shepherd dogs, about 800 Frenchies nationwide and only some 50 dogs in the Rocky Mountain region according to Kathy Clayton, Mid-West Manager for French Bulldog Village. “The condition which some of the dogs are in when they come to rescue is truly alarming,” said Marleen. The French bulldog is not the healthiest of breeds and they do have some major health issues.

As a brachiocephalic (short-muzzled) breed, many have breathing problems and are known to wheeze, snort and snore due to elongated soft palates and other factors. Now add in tricky thyroids, bleeding disorders such as von Willebrand’s disease and a plethora of spinal issues including degenerative disc disease, and it becomes pretty clear that the French bulldog is a high-maintenance breed.

Of the 30 plus Frenchies that Marleen has fostered, at least 25 of them have been stricken by differing degrees of paralysis caused by debilitating back problems, or were blind or deaf. “Fostering is a hard job but it is also very rewarding to know that you gave a deaf dog, that might otherwise have been euthanized, a second chance at finding a family to love them,” says Marleen. Many deaf dogs need lots of extra work before they are ready to go to a permanent home. They need training, socialization and guidance before they can be reliably placed.

Foster homes like Marleen’s provide an excellent environment for the learning and growth of deaf and/or blind dogs. Marleen exposes the dogs to the same experiences they would likely get in a real home and gives the dogs an opportunity to learn, socialize with other animals and interact with people. She also puts the dogs in common situations and in the environment around them. Marleen works diligently to prepare deaf and/or blind dogs for real life in a forever home.

Marleen knows she has to plan to keep her foster dogs for long periods of time. She knows there is no normal amount of time that she may have a certain dog and that sometimes it takes many, many months to rehabilitate and re-home a deaf and/or blind dog. “Most people believe these dogs are hard to train and manage, but it is not true,” said Marleen. The length of time it takes a deaf and/or blind dog to be adopted is often directly related to the amount of time and energy put into preparing the dog for adoption. Attending adoption events to promote the adoption of the dog is key. “You have to show that the dog is well socialized, reliably trained and not truly handicapped by its disability,” said Marleen.

“I’ve learned a lot from my deaf dogs. I would love to be able to say they are better, or sweeter and more appreciative than hearing dogs. The truth is they are just like dogs that can hear,” says Marleen. I am told that some of them bark a great deal and some seldom at all. Some are devoted lap dogs while others are quite independent.


Consider the advantages of your four-legged roommate being deaf. Deaf dogs are typically sound sleepers. If you happen to come home from the store and Prince is sleeping, you can put the groceries away before greeting him. If you don’t happen to let the dog sleep on the bed, you can get up in the morning and get ready for work before waking Prince. Better yet, you don’t have to worry about Prince being afraid of thunderstorms or fireworks or the vacuum cleaner. Prince will not drive you crazy while he is trying to rip the squeaker out of the dog toy, nor will he refuse to play with a toy that doesn’t squeak. Deaf dogs truly make great companions.

As you can imagine, FBV, like most rescues has a waiting list for people wanting to adopt a healthy puppy. No such waiting list exists for people looking to adopt an adult dog that is deaf, blind or crippled by a debilitating condition of the spine. The people who adopt these dogs are almost always touched in some special way by a single dog’s particular story and how the dog came to the rescue. The extraordinary people who adopt these special needs dogs are sadly too few and far between.

“Aside from being a very dedicated foster parent for disabled Frenchies, Marleen is one of the most ardent supporters of French Bulldog Village,” said Kathy. Marleen is also incredibly talented as an artist. She does quality pencil and pen & ink sketches of Frenchies and donates them to FBV where they are auctioned to French Bulldog fanciers bidding all across the United States.


Marleen has worked hard—volunteering her time—to transform blind, deaf and crippled French bulldogs into adorable, adoptable pets. I am hoping that all of you reading this story will try in some way to help her in her mission to rescue, rehabilitate and re-home the loving Frenchies that mean so much to her. If you can help out with a donation, so much the better. If you cannot, we truly understand and will be most happy if you just spread the word about her wonderful work with French Bulldog Village. She really is doing amazing work.

For more information on French Bulldog Village, please visit their website at www.frenchbulldogvillage.net.



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