

Harley's Story

by Harley's mom, Rudi Taylor

He'd been roughly and unceremoniously pulled from the cramped, filthy cage at the puppy mill — his only home for all of his 10 years. The old dog was tossed in a bucket along with some dead puppies. There, his life would end, painfully and brutally.

Miraculously, a worker at the puppy mill noticed he was still breathing. She retrieved him from the bucket and passed the tiny, disfigured Chihuahua on to a nearby rescue. He immediately received medical care, and afterwards he was placed in the grass (probably for the first time in his life) where his very first photo was taken. He appeared sad and afraid, he was old and crooked, and he had only one eye.

When I saw the photo I knew instinctively that this little Chihuahua was meant to be with me. I called the women who ran the rescue; we spoke for an hour, and the next thing I knew I was on my way to pick up "my boy" a couple states away.

To be honest, my intention was to give this little dog a loving home for his final days, which the vet said would likely be about three months. A soft bed, good food and clean water — but most importantly, love — that is what Dan and I would give him for the first time in his life. We named him Harley ... a name that seemed fitting for a tough little guy who was clearly a survivor.

For all of his 10 years and until the day of his rescue, Harley's only purpose had been to father countless puppies ... puppies who would be sold in pet stores around the country. His life had been rough, he was sick and afraid, and he'd never known a kind human touch. Harley's grizzled appearance is a testament to the care and nurturing that he had never received.

Harley had issues: a diseased heart, a mouth filled with rot, an injured spine, a broken tail, gnarled toes, and legs that were deformed. And then there was the missing eye — the result of his cage being power-washed with him in it (an all too common practice in puppy mills). All of these conditions were the result of years of horrendous neglect and abuse.

But this little one-eyed dog truly was a survivor. Harley thrived on the newfound love and attention he was receiving for the first time in his life. He saw numerous veterinarians and underwent two surgeries. Through it all, Harley had his ups and downs, but overall his physical condition steadily improved. I was awestruck and inspired by his transformation; his courage and his determination to grab this wonderful new life and hold onto it with everything he had ... and I fell more deeply in love with him every day. It was as though he KNEW his life had to serve a greater purpose than fathering hundreds of puppies. He needed to make a difference to other dogs just like him — to give them a chance at the kind of life he'd miraculously fallen into after so many years in misery.

From the beginning, there was something "magical" about Harley. Everyone who met him saw it. People were drawn to him and he was drawn to people. It became clear that Harley had a very important reason to live ... and somehow I was the lucky one chosen to help him in his journey.

In adopting Harley, I found a new depth of compassion within myself, and he indeed made my life complete as a result. Harley spoke through me on his Facebook page to his adoring fans all over the world. There he is known as "a little dog with a big dream" ... to end puppy mills. He would tell his fans about life in the puppy mill and explain just where those adorable pet store puppies really come from. He became the voice for the tens of thousands of dogs who still remain in the mills, and he made a difference to so many of them. During his special appearances at schools and events, he spread awareness with his mantra, "adopt, don't shop".

Along the way, Harley inspired me to create a campaign called "Harley to the Rescue" and through this, he participated in the freeing of more than 700 dogs from puppy mills across the Midwest, and raised the money that gave freedom to hundreds more. Harley would personally go on these rescue missions, and there was no doubt ... he was keenly aware of what was happening! There is something indescribable in the way he communicated with the sad and scared dogs. Harley clearly recognized his role in helping to bridge the gap between canine and human.

Harley lived another five years after we adopted him ... far beyond his original prognosis of three months ... and I know beyond a doubt that it was his knowledge of his mission that strengthened him and kept him going. On March 20, 2016, Harley passed away. Our world was shattered, and for a time we were inconsolable. But Harley's fans gave us strength, and Dan and I knew he would want us to carry on with his mission ... and that we will do as long as we are breathing, or until there are no more puppy mills.

In a world so full of evil and hate, it's easy to become cynical. This special little dog, with such a horrible past, helped me see how much love and caring there really is in the world. Harley taught me to look for (and expect) love and kindness from people, because he only saw the best in people. He truly changed my life in remarkable ways, and I will never be the same. He is forever a part of me. As I continue to share his mission and spread his message about puppy mills, I feel his spirit ever present ... strengthening me and guiding me forward, carrying on in his name.

Learn more about Harley at www.HarleysDream.org.

