



Heather Young McAuliffe

In February 2001, my family's first springer, "Blue", was diagnosed with cancer. It was the very saddest moment for all of us. Blue was a lover, a great hunter, a comedian, an adventurer and a loyal best friend to each of us. Thus, with his diagnosis, having moved out of our family home and nearer to PENN, Blue spent time with me to get his treatments and I realized a powerful thing... I don't ever want to be without a dog.



I found MAESSR and began volunteering at events and with adoption interviews, at the time living where I couldn't have a dog. As soon as my lease was up on my rental, I bought a house for Tully, my first MAESSR dog, a "Springador" from the class of '01, but more importantly, my partner, my best boy and co-pilot. During moving week, I scooped up "a returning MAESSR dog in South Jersey in urgent need" and Chloe was home too was home to stay.

Since then, my home and heart have hosted over 200 fosters. Tully decidedly adored Chloe and tolerated the fosters. But, Chloe, oh my Chloe, she was a social butterfly and the most intuitive and observant dog I've ever been graced to know. She read both human and dog body language like no being I've ever seen. She met every foster dog first and I knew, within seconds of seeing her movements, how things were going to go. If they needed a little warming up time, she gave it. If they were scared, she lavished them with bows and gentle nudges. If they were a little assertive, she gave them all sorts of calming signals. She was, simply put, remarkable.

Over the years, Tully, Chloe and I adopted the following seniors: Homer, Class of '03, Dusty, Class of '06, Sanford, Class of '09. In addition, we adopted Louis, a NC mystery hound, and Gunther a setter mistakenly identified as a springer from a shelter in SC. Gunther stayed because I couldn't reasonably and safely place him due to his fear and anxiety, but he was as predictable as they come and was happy and confident with me. He loved his mama more than any dog I've ever had; it was truly a deep and fierce, laser-focused love. We lost our Gunther, at nearly 17, last year and another little piece of my heart went with him. .

After Chloe passed in 2010, after a harrowing experience with gastrointestinal lymphoma, I brought home Ruby aka "Pretty Girl" from the MAESSR Class of '10 and my "crazy dog lady" moniker had to change to the "crazy dog family". My husband David and I married in 2011 and with him came my two stepdaughters, Caeley (22) and Annalisse (13) and their dog, Gizmo, our Shih tzu. The girls were calm and sweet as youngsters and took the dogs coming and going easily in stride and the dogs quickly realized they now had three more pairs of hands giving them treats and dropping snacks.

Gizmo fit right in with the rest of my then pack and now enjoys her golden years snoozing, eating and sitting with her daddy. The girls share their home with "The Brindle Boys"; Graham, a Heinz 57 mix Duke aka "The Meatball" who we adopted last year from a kill shelter in NC.

During all of this time, I have served MAESSR by writing website bios, adoption interviews, vet checks, home visits, foster family mentor and training, intake coordinator and foster home coordinator, helping with training questions and foster dog challenges adoption coordinator, and even on the newsletter team, working at all of the events doing grooming demos (with Chloe), or demonstrating how to not behave (Ruby).

Having had seniors nonstop for so long now, I now spend most of my volunteering time as the MAESSR "cricut" lady, making our vinyl creations to sell at events and traveling to as many of the MAESSR regional events as I can. I also attend the ESSFTA National event in St. Louis to help work the MAESSR store. I have been doing our year-end dog intake stats that are used for our financial reporting and the trends of intake vs adoptions and sex, age, color, and state of origin for our record keeping, which helps the board to understand the MAESSR landscape, how it's changing and if anything needs to be done differently for the overall health of the organization.

Over the years, I have fostered and volunteered for multiple groups and there is not a single one that can compare to MAESSR. The people, the mission, the organization and structure are unparalleled. All because a dog named Blue got cancer and I found MAESSR, I've found some of my very best friends and a focus and purpose of which I could never have dreamed all those years ago.

