

# Shih Tzu Rescue Adoption & Education Safehouse (S.T.R.A.E.S.)

## 2020 Newsletter – A year in the life of the Safehouse

WOW!! Has this been a year or what?! It started out pretty normal; eleven homeless dogs in residence, nothing unusual, even a bit quiet; and then Shih Tzu Happened . . . but that's why we're here . . . right? January began nicely enough with the adoption of Chloe by one of our volunteers who just could not resist this charmingly beautiful little Shih Tzu. Later that month the Chicago Anti-Cruelty



Diesel

Society contacted me regarding a young dog named Diesel with a severely damaged eye that would require major specialized surgery. That face said it all, I could not resist and we welcomed the first arrival of 2020. A week later a phone call from an anxious young woman who had purchased a puppy from a breeder and realized, too late, that although cute as a button, puppies are a LOT of work. So Max(9), a darling almost one-year-old AKC Registered pup arrived, healthy, normal, playful, what fun!! Miss Kitty, the little Silky Terrier whose leg we had to amputate in mid-December began underwater treadmill therapy but she hated the water so an exercise program was substituted. Every time she completed an exercise module she got a treat, needless to say she LOVED the physical workouts and graduated at the head of her class! January also brought the start of our darling BJ's three month long, ultimately successful, road to cancer recovery. Another name for BJ could be "patience"; she was so tolerant of the poking and prodding, needles and big scary machines. Planning for the March Chicagoland Family Pet Expo began in earnest. Our monthly PetSmart adoption events were busy and well attended. Kiera found her forever family



Chloe

during our February event; proving once more that there is no love like that of a senior pet and it is a lucky family wise enough to see that. Speaking of senior pets, another email from the Anti-Cruelty Society regarding a very tiny senior Shih Tzu named Zoei; unwanted by her family or anyone else for that matter. It is always amazing that someone would not want a darling little dog just because the dog is aging. Old age is not a disease, or a reason to give up; it is a stage of life and Zoei was more than welcome here. Our adorable dogs were busy working the crowd at our March PetSmart event. A couple who had recently lost their STRAES dog to old age stopped by, Diesel decided they would be a great forever family and set about convincing them that he was their new pet. Miss Kitty also used her charms to persuade a couple who were looking for a playful dog that she was the best possible choice to entertain grandkids and keep up with their active lifestyle. Zoei found a lovely lady who was looking for a little lap dog that could live with a working



Max(9)



Miss Kitty

woman's schedule. It is always joyful to leave an adoption event with applications from potentially perfect adopters. This was especially welcome given the rumors of a very dangerous virus that had begun to circulate. A whole new world was opening up, drowning us in a flood of government mandates and closing our non-essential doors!! Logistics for the adoptions of Diesel and Miss Kitty were something else again!! Medical masks, sterilized environments: door knobs, tables, chairs, anything touchable! NO physical contact - six foot social distancing . . . staggering new rules and regulations. The loss of our PetSmart meet and greet adoption events was disastrous. STRAES is a very unique shelter; our adoption process has been in place for over 20 years; the mere thought of changing our face to face manual to social distancing digital was staggering. Adding the loss of our upcoming pet expos, events we had counted on to sustain us financially, sent me reeling!! . . . Shock . . . Apprehension . . . It is amazing how challenging life had become in such a very short time. But life and homeless dogs don't stop for challenges.



Kiera



Zoei

Another email from the Anti-Cruelty Society. A little eighteen month old pup named Root needed rescue; not neutered but otherwise fully vetted, however he does have severe flea dermatitis with large hairless patches that may not grow back. Oh well . . . been there . . . done that . . . that's why we're here! Only eighteen months old? He has an excellent chance of growing an even more beautiful coat; just watch me make it happen!!

About that same time I received a phone call from a previous adopter: “Elsa was getting up there in age and they were considering purchasing a puppy, could I recommend a good breeder?” “Well, I didn’t know of a good breeder but I did know of a really darling AKC registered puppy that was available for adoption.” “Really?! Could we come out today?!” Here we go again!! Masks, sanitizing, distancing, - - - remember the good old days when life was simple?! Of course they couldn’t resist Max; who can resist a puppy? And, in



Tiffany

spite of COVID-19, another adoption - - - HOORAY!! A wonderful day you say. Unfortunately not. My sweet little Zoei, the little girl I had that third application for, so small, so precious. Zoei died the day Max was adopted . . . totally unexpected . . . a stroke. Losing a dog is heart break, do you ever get used to it? NO . . . NEVER!! The tears just flow, the grief overwhelms and the desire to crawl into a hole happens but there are other dogs that need me so I swallow my pain and get back to work.



Jeanie

Maybe this won’t be such a bad year after all. Financially we weren’t doing to well but the dogs were coming in and going out quickly. And then the roof caved in!! Just before Memorial Day, an email from Ronna, a friend who does specialized rescue, she was involved in closing down a Missouri (MO) puppy mill; could I take some Shih Tzu? Now mill rescues are rough, I’ve been involved in a few over the years; they are dirty and heart wrenching and a LOT of WORK! And you have to move fast before the miller changes her mind. Okay I’ll take a few, maybe four, it all depends on their ages and genders (prefer females although spays cost more than neuters they are usually easier to house train). Well - - - she really needed more help than



Crissy & Clippy

that, so I up’s it to six and later to ten. Ten dogs?! Time to call in reinforcements. Thank God for our remarkable volunteers!! A plea for help and the responses were fast and amazing. I ended up with six dogs; five Shih Tzu: Crissy, Clippy, Chewy, Jeanie and Tiffany and Karen, a Shih Tzu Schnauzer mix. And plenty of help. I had it all well organized and, as usual, reality arrived and my plans went right out the window!! Fortunately, the dogs were young, fairly healthy and well behaved (read: no biters) so I was able to accommodate all of them at the Safehouse. With the pandemic mandates having them all on-site made vetting easier. While all of this was going on I was also in contact with a young woman that needed to rehome her elderly parents senior Shih



Chewy

Tzu, Mimi.

Mimi(3) arrived with a lifetime of medical records and a severe heart murmur. Even I could recognize the cough of a congestive heart. Clearly this little one needed to be seen by a vet ASAP. We already had a Mimi in residence with a severe heart murmur. Mimi(2) had been with us since August 2019, a Chihuahua from Anti-Cruelty (don’t ask!!). Mimi(2), I call her ChiChi, was under the care of a cardiologist. I knew we couldn’t possibly afford that for our newest Mimi. Mimi(3) had been a patient of the Joliet Banfield all her life. The staff knew her and she knew them, that was helpful; and Banfield offers a discount to shelters, so I made arrangements. Even with a discount, the cost of diagnosing a heart issue isn’t cheap!! I got her back on meds and she quickly settled into the routine of the Safehouse. No time to catch my breath, another calamity was about to unfold.



Mimi(3)



Cuddles

A very very special Shih Tzu, a precious love that had been with us for four years lost her battle with cancer in early June. My dearest Cuddles, a wonderful, gentle little dog who loved to show affection. I gave her the best medical care possible and the extraordinary attention she needed and deserved to live as full a life as possible in a loving environment. Cuddles was terminally ill; each day of her life was a gift to celebrate. And now at peace and pain free. Did I give her enough? Could I have done more? Always the questions along with the tears. No time to grieve . . . the living still need my help.

On June 20<sup>th</sup> a special adoption occurred. No one knew how special that day would become. Shelly a darling female Bichon Frise mix.... she was as close to an angel as you can find, determined to greet and love everyone. She had been another transfer (October 2019) from Anti-Cruelty, she came in with two cancerous



tumors. Successful surgery, cancer free and now happily snuggled into the arms of a loving new family. A story that should end here with "happily ever after". Oh . . . if only life could have fairy tale endings! Two unbelievable months of out of this world happiness and love; August 19<sup>th</sup> . . . an email . . . sad news, our Shelly has died. Kidney failure . . . no problem had gone undetected, her kidneys just shut down. More tears, more heart break, and, wrong as it may be, guilt for causing such agony to her loving new family.

A note from an adopter, the love of her life, her world of happiness, the dog she adopted from us thirteen years ago had died earlier this year and she felt she was ready to try again if I had a dog that might work out for her. I mentioned Root, he had recovered well from his skin issues, he was similar to her Snuggles in that he needed a patient caregiver. We arranged a meet at her home (masks and distancing but sanitizing was her problem!!). I arrived with Root, we had a tour of her lovely house and grounds; then sat down to talk; me in a chair, she six feet away on the couch. Without invitation, Root jumped up on the couch next to her and while we talked she unconsciously began petting him as we all do when our dog snuggles in. Root was so content that I suggested we might as well skip the play date and go right to adoption but I would have to go back to the shelter for all the paperwork. Root was comfortable so I felt it was okay to leave without him (nothing like feeling unimportant to the dog you just spent months caring for!!). A few hours later I returned, rang the bell, walked in and no dog!!! Don't dogs run to the door and check to see who has arrived? Apparently not!! There he was in the living room, happily playing with a box of toys he had found. No question, Root had decided he was home. I just love when the dog makes the decision for me.



A week later BJ, our miracle girl, fully recovered from surgery and now cancer free was ready for her adoption. The volunteer that had fallen in love with her months before and had been impatiently waiting for this day was finally able to take BJ home.

Remember those MO mill rescues? In late August I received another email from Ronna, she had four more dogs from that miller, a Shih Tzu, another Shih Tzu Schnauzer mix, and two Schnauzers. Would I be interested in the Shih Tzu and/or the mix? The five-year-old Shih Tzu was a breeder, untouchable; she would need very special accommodations and expert behavior training. These poor dogs that are used for breeding are so horribly abused by mill operators they will cower in fear and bite if you even appear to be about to touch them (human hands only mean pain). I have worked with breeder dogs in the past, they take years

of careful handling; it is a very long, drawn out, intensely time consuming process. I said no to the Shih Tzu; she will be turned over to a unique rescue farm that works with seriously abused animals. The mix turned out to be the sister/sibling of our Karen. Their faces were almost identical, Lucille, the new one, had the hair of a Shih Tzu but the coloring of a Schnauzer. How exciting!! We would love to welcome Lulu. Karen was out on the deck when Lucille arrived, I brought Lulu out and put her down, Karen came over, sniffed her, turned and started to walk away. A few steps and Karen STOPPED . . . turned back and bolted to her sister! They were all over each other in seconds, it was so heartwarming. The two girls and Chewy an earlier rescue from that mill quickly became a puppy threesome, toys and zoomies and wrestling were the order of the day. All three under the age of two, peace and quiet were now a thing of the past but watching all that fun was truly delightful.



No email this time, it's a phone call. Another family in mourning, they want to drop off some items that we can possibly use? Dog beds, food bowls, toys, etc.? We set up a time and when they arrive the deck is filled with excited barking dogs. We don't often get visitors and it is always an occasion. Mimi(3) can't take her eyes off of them, they play with the rescue pups, these dogs need socialization. The couple recently lost their beloved senior Shih Tzu to heart failure; they aren't ready for another dog just yet but it doesn't hurt to visit. A few days later, a phone call, they can't get little Mimi(3) off their minds. That's wonderful but they need to know that our little Mimi has severe heart disease and her time is limited. They just lost a dog and the pain is still so fresh, the idea of taking on another that may go at any time . . . well . . . that's a lot deal with. Another few days, another phone call, they want to adopt Mimi(3). They thought about it and talked about how Mimi just lost the only family and home she has known her entire life and they want to give her a real home again and the chance to sleep on a bed or a sofa and have her very own humans to cuddle

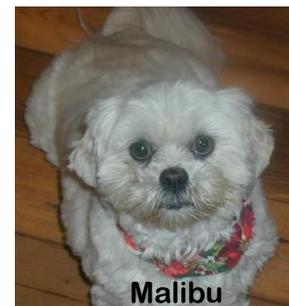
with once more for however long she has left. There really are angels living among us!! Mimi is home again and I'm not sure who is happier, Mimi or her new family!

My goodness . . . I just realized that most of my 2020 adoptions have been to previous adopters, it definitely simplifies the evaluation process. Early September, twelve arrivals and nine adoptions, not bad for a pandemic but having to turn away opportunities for intakes and adoptions due to the virus haunts me. As a no-kill shelter, we believe



Mimi(2)

every dog deserves to have a forever home, and we have resident pets with severe health or behavior issues that make them basically unadoptable but they need and deserve end-of-life care. Although we've lost Cuddles, three special needs residents are still with us. I have posted Mimi(2) our aging Chihuahua on Petfinder, however, with her seriously deformed legs and severe heart murmur she really isn't a candidate for adoption but you never know, maybe Mimi(2), like Mimi(3), will also find herself an angel. Our beautiful Lhasa Apso, Malibu, now twelve years old, has been with us since the age of eighteen months. Over the years Malibu has had to deal with



Malibu

canine meningitis, hypoglycemia, multi-drug resistant urinary tract infections, meningoencephalitis, urolithes (stones), two portosystemic shunts and myasthenia

gravis; all of which have left her with only one functioning kidney. This precious dog has exhibited a huge will to live and her determination has definitely seen her through some difficult times. Boo is now dealing with severe osteoarthritis, it is getting more and more difficult for her to get around but our girl continues to show the amazing stamina of the Lhasa breed and I love her beyond forever.



Buddy(5)

And, finally, there is little Buddy(5). After eight years with us, he still allows no one to touch him but me and (reluctantly) his groomer! Ten-years-old now; Buddy

is still the most gorgeous and meanest little Shih Tzu around. And, he continues to take his orders from little Cricket!! Tazz is also still with us. He is a love and truly tries to be good but he has never really recovered from his experience with that counterfeit dog training business, *Beach for Dogs*.



Tazz



Cricket

Early November, Christmas music already on the radio, won't be celebrating any holidays this year but the spirit of the season is at least uplifting. Another email, this one from one of the very first STRAES adopters. Recently one of her bonded pair died and the survivor appears to be losing interest in life. This is not uncommon in dogs; their grief can be just as devastating as that of humans. She had some doggy items to drop off and while she was here she met a few of the dogs. One in particular was of interest but she wasn't sure if her dog would welcome another and I wasn't sure the dog of her choice, Lulu, was ready for a permanent home. When the mill dogs arrived in May, I had considered foster care. I have

attempted foster care several times in the past and it has always ended in catastrophe. Still, in the right environment it would provide better socialization than the isolation of the Safehouse. This family has had experiences with mill rescues in the past so it was worth a try. Lulu likes other dogs, isn't too fearful and was fostered before she arrived here. So we decided to give it a try . . . the foster lasted one week. A phone call, we just can't bring Lulu back, we love her, our other dog likes her too, and she seems to like us. A good foster failure this time, HOORAY!!

S.T.R.A.E.S. provides a very special haven for dogs that have lost their home or never even had one. We give them new hope and new lives. This year brought an increase in dogs that needed serious medical care. You may have noticed that for the past few years we have been receiving dogs from the Chicago Anti-Cruelty Society. These dogs need intensive medical attention and Anti-Cruelty prefers not to spend the time and expense necessary to provide that specialized care. Caring for sick dogs, nursing them back to health and giving them the extensive medical management they need isn't easy. We give them new life and now they live in comfort in a forever home and in the loving arms of their new family. Rehabilitating puppy mill survivors is not a simple undertaking but seeing hope and trust appear in their sad eyes as they feel for the first time in their lives the gentle touch of loving hands, this is my passion. And, it is your kindness and generosity that makes it all possible. S.T.R.A.E.S. rescue efforts are supported entirely by you; volunteers, supplies, donations, every penny of the adoption and boarding fees and outright donations is used for medical care, food and supplements. Thank you for being part of this work of love.