

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

## 2021 Newsletter – A year in the life of the Safehouse

When I sat down to write the thank you letters for all the wonderful donations the Safehouse received in 2021 (I'm way behind!!) there was so much I wanted to tell everyone so they would know the wonders their gifts had achieved I've ended up writing another newsletter. Although 2021 brought continued uncertainty in the world from the unrelenting Coronavirus pandemic, COVID-19 and now Omicron; one thing for sure, STRAES, with the help of our wonderful family of supporters, got through this past year together bringing kindness and a second chance to the dogs in our care. While I was excited about the holidays and the joy they brought, I am far more excited about all the accomplishments STRAES made for homeless pets in 2021. Compared to 2020 it's been a rather calm year for me; eight new arrivals, one long-term boarder, seven adoptions, one return to owner and, sadly, four resident deaths . . . but so much for the numbers, let's get to the stories behind those statistics.

2021 started out with eleven residents and the goal of establishing a "Pandemic" adoption process. Twenty plus years of PetSmart adoption events out the window!! But STRAES wasn't the only shelter facing this situation so I checked in with my friends at West Suburban Humane Society and found their "Adoptions by Appointment" process modifiable for our situation. Now to put it to work!! Hundreds (yes . . . literally hundreds) of emails requesting applications, Crissy and her son Clippy were the most popular. By end March I had narrowed the field down to four families, Clippy and Crissy took it from there!! The day the final hopeful family came to meet them, the family crouched down outside the "school" door and called to the dogs as they were let out of the house. The two dogs ran full speed directly to the waiting family and jumped into their arms!! It is so much easier when the dogs make the decisions for me!! Unfortunately, the unbelievable joy of that day was destroyed by an equal sadness. My very precious little Buddy(5) died unexpectedly.



Crissy & Clippy



Buddy(5)

After nine years with me, he still allowed no one to touch him but me and (reluctantly) his groomer! Eleven-years-old, Buddy was the most gorgeous and meanest little Shih Tzu around. And, right up until the end, he continued to take his orders from little Cricket!! Our little Cricket was devastated by his death, she moved into his bed and refused to eat or move. I have always believed that dogs love and mourn just like people, and watching this little dog suffer at the loss of her longtime companion merely intensified that belief. More on Cricket later.



Cricket



Jeanie

Remember Shelly the darling little Bichon mix that was adopted last year and only a few months after her adoption died unexpectedly? I contacted her family in early May to see if they might be interested in meeting Jeanie. They had adopted a little homeless terrier from down south earlier in the year and we hoped the two young dogs would be good for each other. After a weekend play date that became permanent, all that was needed to complete the adoption was filling out the paperwork. Speaking of play dates; since early March (when his new mommy met and fell in love with him) our little Shih Tzu puppy, Chewy, had been spending a few days here and there with our twin alumnus Peaches and Cream. Little Peaches was undergoing cancer treatment and needed lots of rest between playful puppy visits. They were finally able to make his new home permanent on the one-year anniversary of Chewy's 2020 arrival here at STRAES!



Chewy



Karen

The month of May was getting busy!! Little Karen, the very shy young Shih Tzu mix that came with the group of MO mill dogs last year appeared to be having eye problems. In mid-May we discovered the optical nerve in her left eye had never developed; she was not only born blind in that eye but glaucoma was causing her severe pain. Karen needed her left eye removed ASAP. Further testing on her right eye indicated that it was in danger of also developing glaucoma and will need lifetime observation and medications. Even shyer now and still easily frightened, she is starting to slowly interact with Tiffany and visiting young pups. I love her and continue to hope for the best; two-years-old and blind seems like such a brutal future.

Just before Memorial Day I received a phone call from the Joliet VCA Animal Hospital. They had a little four-year-old dog named Chocolate that was looking for rescue. A “Shih Tzu” mix (they always say that if the dog has hair!). His photo was too cute for words but “Shih Tzu” was pushing his breed and his brown and white coat made the name Chocolate a puzzle. Because he arrived so close to Memorial Day I renamed him Soldier. Our Chocolate-Soldier is a heart bandit; to meet him is to love him. But this little boy came with a bucketful of health issues, at no time have I been more grateful for our contributors, especially our monthly sustainers, as the bills began to mount. Months of specialists, exams, tests and surgery; an anxious me and an eager hopeful new Mommy who was finally able to welcome her Soldier home in October. At this time, Soldier is doing well, his new family, especially his sister, Dory, are thrilled with their active, lovable Chihuahua / Shih Tzu / Pomeranian mix (we did a DNA test).



**Chocolate-Soldier**

The pandemic has taken its toll on many of us. Two years of unending mandates, home confinement, social distancing, minimal face-to-face interaction, masking, etc., etc; some folks were able to manage better than others. Two of our very dear friends were of the less fortunate; in late June I heard of their situation. Alone, without air conditioning (remember all those 90+ temperatures?) and no longer able to care for herself or her senior Shih Tzu. I offered to help by providing temporary fulltime care for little MillieMae until her Mom was back on her feet. MillieMae is an alumnus and no stranger to the Safehouse or some of our more permanent residents. She has made herself comfortably at-home and is doing quite well. Mom’s rehabilitation is coming along and we hope they will be reuniting later this year. Quick reminder: STRAES is here for our adopters 24/7 in an emergency, just give me a call. Alumni are always welcome and will be safely cared for until you are able to take them home again.



**MillieMae**

Early July I got an email w/photo from Chicago Anti-Cruelty Society. They had a nine-year-old Shih Tzu with cancer that needed senior hospice care. No problem, cute picture and we don’t consider a nine-year-old Shih Tzu OLD!! Upon arrival I quickly discovered that Missy looked nothing like the photo and she was definitely in line to be my next project. Missy needed more than hospice, she needed serious veterinary care. A sweet little (well . . . once we got rid of a few pounds!) Shih Tzu and despite her distress and severe condition, she radiated friendliness and affection. I simply fell in love with her. Poor baby, medical staff determined that Missy did not have cancer but an extremely painful bacteria and fungus skin disease that had migrated to her eyes and ears. Her immune system was compromised, causing her condition to worsen, her hair to fall out and unbearable itchiness. She needed twice a week medicated baths to try to get the infection under control, and her ears . . . well . . . you all know the “fun?” of ear med’s!! Fortunately our vet inserts a pack of medications into the ear and then checks/replaces the pack every week or so as needed. Hooray!! Eye drops are difficult enough without adding ear drops to the routine. Through it all her spirit remained positive, super super sweet and friendly. I knew she would be a wonderful pet. Her soft golden tan and cream hair was growing back and once we got all those horrible infections cleared up and her weight down she would be quickly adopted.



**Missy email photo**



**Missy after arrival**

Mid July I received a phone call from West Suburban Humane Society, “would I have room for three Shih Tzu puppies?” They were out of space and foster homes at the moment and these pups needed immediate rescue. After some serious thinking (about one second!!), I said YES!! And I was able to collect Leonardo and Maximilian, two of the cutest little pups you can possibly imagine (the WSHS groomer had taken one). How can anyone resist little cutie-pie puppies? Certainly not me! Two year old Karen was having the time of her life and we had two of my favorite alumni pups, Buttercup and Dexter, visiting as well. Five two-year-old youngsters playing, wrestling and chasing around the house – it was a crazy time but sooo much fun!!!



**Leonardo & Maximilian**

Several years ago we had a beautiful Shih Tzu named Honey with a horrible condition called megaesophagus. This condition requires very special handling, feeding and diet. Her Daddy adored his girl and gave her everything she needed and more. Sadly after only three years, Honey (renamed Laney) died of cancer. Her Dad

was distraught. He sent me an email in which he poured out his broken heart and sad empty home and arranged to drop off some items he no longer needed. The day of his visit the pups were in rare form, running and climbing all over everything and everyone. Irresistible puppies to play with and help make a broken heart feel a little less painful. That evening I received another email from him, couldn't get those pups out of his mind and heart, could he PLEASE adopt them? Given the home, love and care he provided for Laney could the boys find a better life? In the middle of a pandemic, I was able to adopt two puppies in less than four weeks WOW!!

Remember last August? Hot, hot, hot . . . unrelenting heat, one record ninety degree day after another. Missy needed her twice weekly baths, a chore I could not manage alone. I tried to be careful about scheduling because the holding area at the groomer's was a room with poorly working air conditioning, and the dogs were kept in small cages without water or food for hours on end waiting their turn. I picked Missy up in late afternoon, she was already suffering from the heat and by the time I got her home it was obvious she was overheated, dehydrated and struggling to breathe. I phoned the clinic where she had been groomed and told them I had an emergency and needed to bring her right back. Overheated dogs in Missy's condition are treatable with immediate fluids and cold compresses so I rushed her back to the clinic. I was told to wait in the car (standard procedure during the pandemic). Missy's condition continued to worsen, I turned up the air in the car and held her in front of the vent trying to cool her down. My repeated phone calls received reassurance that it would be shortly. I had assumed the veterinarian would make an exception for an emergency and we would be taken in immediately. Unfortunately, Missy and I waited in my car for hours, until the clinic closed and the vet had taken care of every patient on her schedule. By the time we were allowed to enter, Missy was almost dead and I realized there was no hope. At first the vet agreed with me but then changed her mind and said she wanted see if Missy would respond to fluids, oxygen and cold compresses. Five hundred dollars later, the vet returned to admit that Missy was not going to survive and the kindest thing we could do was to put her out of her misery. This is probably one of the hardest incidents I have ever experienced; I cried for days and still haven't forgiven myself.

In 2019 we took in an aging Chihuahua named Mimi, I had posted Mimi(2) on Petfinder, but, with her seriously deformed legs and severe heart murmur she really wasn't a candidate for adoption but you never know. Mimi had chosen the Safehouse as her permanent home and made that clear to a wonderful lady that came to visit her early in the year. Mimi also made it clear to anyone who tried to pet one of our dogs in the front dog run when Mimi was on-guard!! Our tough little guard dog's heart just wasn't able to hold out and I lost her the week after I lost Missy. It was a very difficult time for me, all I wanted to do was crawl into a hole and cry my eyes out but that kind of pain comes with rescue and I had to go on . . . sometimes that is a blessing but it surely doesn't feel that way at the time.



The day I picked up our Chocolate-Soldier at the Joliet VCA I met a charming All American dog named Elsie. She was found by animal control in early January seriously injured in a dog fight. The medical staff warned me that she was shy and not comfortable with strangers. I was sitting in wait when the door opened and this dog ran in, jumped into my lap and started kissing my face!! Not even close to anything resembling a small furry little dog but how could I say no to this sweetheart? Elsie wasn't ready for a home yet, she was still recovering but I promised to come back for her and in late July, I DID!! I thought of holding a "Name that Breed" contest but sent out her DNA instead and what a surprise! Half Chihuahua and the other half is (among other breeds) Russell Terrier; Parson Russell Terrier; Toy Fox Terrier; Smooth Fox Terrier; Wire Fox Terrier and Lakeland Terrier (there's a lot of energetic terrier there!!).



Since early June I had been corresponding with a woman living in Colorado whose mother (in Orland Park) needed to give up her elderly Shih Tzu. Mom and Dad needed to move to an assisted living facility. The daughter would be in town in August getting her parents settled and wanted to drop off Bernie, their thirteen year old blind Shih Tzu. He was otherwise healthy, had lived with the family since before he was born. Well cared for all his life, vet records going back to the day he was born, daily walks at the park across the street from their home . . . I'm a sucker for old timers. His owner was broken by the need to give up her dog; she felt she was abandoning him. The daughter brought Mom and Bernie to the Safehouse so she could meet me and hopefully find comfort in the obvious care Bernie would receive. It isn't easy to give up a beloved dog and having recently lost my precious little Buddy it was all I could do to keep my own tears under control. Sometimes life throws us a curve and through no fault

of our own, for the dog's sake, we must say goodbye to a piece of our heart. It took several weeks of her nervous phone calls to reassure her that Bernie was adjusting well. I have been so fortunate to be able to welcome some of the friendliest fun loving personalities to the Safehouse over the years. Bernie doesn't know he is thirteen and blind. He is a Shih Tzu with a schedule he has followed all his life and lets me know when I have violated his time-line. These pets bring so much joy to my life, I cannot imagine living in a home without dogs (or cats . . . I can be open minded).

For me the pain of losing a pet was about to hit home hard. In early September I lost Missy, the following month I lost little Mimi and hardest of all in November, two days before her thirteenth birthday, I lost the most beloved of my very special dogs, my Lhasa Apso. Beautiful Malibu had been with me since the age of eighteen months. Over the years Boo had to deal with canine meningitis, hypoglycemia, multi-drug resistant urinary tract infections, meningoencephalitis, urolithes (stones), two portosystemic shunts and myasthenia gravis; all of which left her with only one functioning kidney. This precious dog exhibited a huge will to live and her determination had definitely seen her through some difficult times. I loved her beyond forever. Sadly, Malibu was also Cricket's very best friend and her loss was another staggering blow to our ever happy chatterbox little dog. She has quieted down quite a lot, exhibits less energy now and has become a bit crabby with the other dogs she once happily played with.



I have heard from several of our adopters this past year letting me know they too had lost their special fur-baby and the pain was indescribable. Someone once mentioned to me that since I go through loss more often it must be easier for me to deal with than a "normal" pet owner. Each dog I have welcomed into the Safehouse over the years was treasured during their time at STRAES. When they leave for a loving new home a piece of my heart goes with them, it hurts but there is joy as well knowing I have given each one the gift of a new beginning. One of my greatest thrills is receiving updates from their new home. Even when that news is sad, to know that a sweet dog was cherished for the rest of its lifetime is comforting. When I fail to give a dog the home it so desperately deserved, when their pain and suffering with no hope for recovery become so apparent, I must say goodbye . . . even though it will be the beginning of my pain, I hold that little dog in my arms and with my tears streaming, they find peace.



Life at the Safehouse goes on and in December another new arrival. Her name is Lily and she is a Pekingese. Lily is really a darling; she came to us through the VCA Animal Hospital in Bolingbrook. Her family was going on vacation; they had just acquired a young dog and could only take one dog with them so they wanted Lily "put down". Ethical veterinarians do not euthanize dogs unless the dog is in a natural end-of-life situation. The hospital staff had the family sign a release. Now what to do with Lily? Well one of the staff and a client knew of a rescue that would probably be able to help. One phone call to STRAES and Lily had a new home to go to once she received some very necessary

veterinary care.

So who's still around? Well, Tazz is 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* and continues to be a bit intractable with other dogs. And Tiffany, an older, stunning white coated ten pound female Shih Tzu. I call her Princess. We rescued Tiffany and her many friends from a MO puppy mill in 2020. I have been working with her almost 18 months now and she is still having socialization issues. Dogs that are rescued from puppy mills have adjustment concerns with unique requirements as far as placement and rehabilitation. This is especially true of Tiffany who needs a home with a small companionable adult dog already in residence. This resident dog is needed to help socialize Tiffany and teach her how to be a house dog.



Well that pretty much wraps up 2021. It is your kindness and generosity that has made all this possible. S.T.R.A.E.S. rescue efforts are supported entirely by you, our contributors and our hard working volunteers. All supplies and every penny of the adoption and boarding fees and donations, in-kind and financial, are used for medical care, food and supplements. STRAES has always been a sanctuary; a place of healing, safety and love; even in difficult times this remains true. Our doors are open and I am here caring for these helpless dogs and this special place of refuge; continuing to ensure that these pets are enjoying life, getting the very best care, lots of love, and are available for adoption. Thank you for being a part of this life-saving effort. HAPPY NEW YEAR!!