



52 DAYS WITH HERO

With dignity and a heart full of love, **HERO** crossed the rainbow bridge the afternoon of April 30, 2016. This story is dedicated to HERO's memory and all other beings who've entered our lives, opened our hearts and enriched our soul.

EARLY MARCH 2016:

HERO was found on the streets of Riverside by a good Samaritan. He'd been starved, was full of lumps and bumps and severely dehydrated. He was taken to the Riverside shelter, where the staff was shocked by his condition. His head drooped, his tail tucked between his legs and it looked like he'd never smiled a day in his life.

The shelter sent him to the emergency vet who recommended euthanasia due to his severe condition. He had cancer. It was terminal. He had tumors pressing on his liver, anemia, hip dysplasia, growths, swellings and the list went on. This was not a lucky dog.



HERO



HERO when first found - March 2016

OR WAS HE?

The shelter reached out to us to see if we could take HERO and give him a day of love to experience something good after all he'd been through. We were 100% on board. His Knight(ess) in shining armour (Aunty Sandy) picked him up from the shelter and took him back to her boarding facility with instructions to "Spoil the heck out of him" until the next day when we would take him to the vet and put him to sleep with the understanding that he had at least known some human kindness during his life.

THE END OF THE STORY?

(Or was it just the beginning of a mini-massive-miracle?)

Read on...

THE NEXT MORNING

The vet appointment had already been set for the afternoon. HERO woke up. During the last 24 hours, he'd tried cooked food, treats, naps in the sun and Aunty Sandy telling him how beautiful and brave he was (she may have even recited some Shakespeare to him, but she'll never admit it!)

AND

The-discovery-of...THE TENNIS BALL

HERO peered at Aunty Sandy with a look that said: "Can I stay around a bit longer, please?"

He loved his tennis balls. He received over 100 of them from his fans. The only thing better than the tennis ball was the tennis ball that squeaked. He'd squeak it for anyone and everyone. All day and all night. He squeaked it for visitors, for Aunty Sandy (she contemplated wearing ear plugs) and even squeaked it for the vet when he went for his ultra sound.



HERO - Shortly after arriving at Sandy's boarding facility in Riverside



"Hold on. Hold on. What are these???. They look AMAZING!"



"I want ALL of them. I want ALL of them."

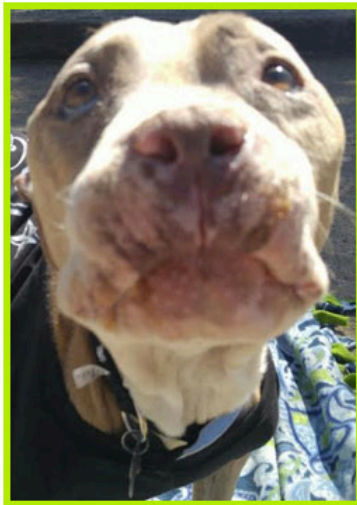


"This is brilliant. I want to give a big wet kiss to whoever invented these things."



THEN A STRANGE THING HAPPENED

Emails poured in. People wanted to know about HERO. How was he? Had he improved? Had he made it through the night? So many people cared. So many people wanted to see him enjoy another day. Enjoy the night. Enjoy another sunrise, another sunset. They wanted him to fight to taste another day. To taste happiness. It was not in vain. HERO felt it. He wanted to stay longer.



"I love this moment."

HERO felt hope. He had hope. He had fans. He had us ALL in his corner fighting right alongside him and OH BOY! OH BOY! He milked it for all it was worth.

His tail appeared from between his legs and it wagged. It was a small wag, but it wagged.

Could it get better? Oh-yes-it-could.

HERO then smiled. It wasn't a big smile, but it was a smile and probably the first smile in a very long time.

Needless to say, the vet appointment was cancelled. We were going to give HERO more time.

7 DAYS:

HERO woke up. He saw Aunt Sandy and his tail wagged. Bigger this time. No ordinary wag. It was like washers in the rain. WAG, WAG, WAG. He also had an appetite. He LOVED hot dogs. Sandy leaned down to give him his breakfast, and he KISSED HER. A gentle one. A sloppy one. An appreciative one.

He then smiled. It was no ordinary smile. It was a big smile. A movie star smile. A big juicy one. A smile to say: "Good morning world, let's get the day going... Where's my tennis ball?"

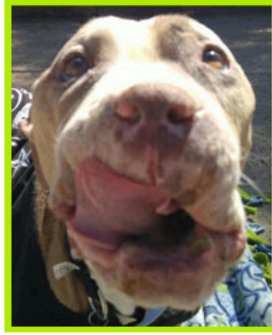
More emails poured in, fans, admirers, prayers. Hope.

HERO was digging it. HERO had made up his mind. **HERO was staying for a while**, and he made his intentions perfectly clear to Aunt Sandy. He said: "I go where my tennis balls go." She didn't quite understand what he was saying as he had a tennis ball in his mouth at the time, which was squeaking, but his actions made it clear...



"George Clooney eat your heart out!"

DON'T YOU THINK?

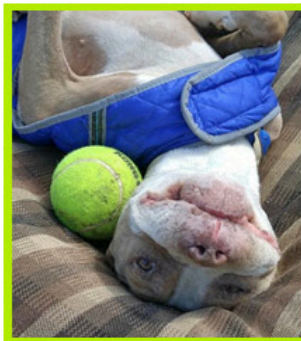


"I'm staying here for a while Aunt Sandy. Got any hot dogs?"

HERO began to have visitors. People wanted to meet him. He brought joy to many folks. We all knew he was sick. He knew. The vet said it was just a matter of time. She was surprised that it had now been over a month and HERO was still hanging in. Enjoying life. Being loved. Giving love. Tennis balls!

He was happy. Which made us happy. It made many people happy.

We received many emails advising us on supplements, nutrients, vitamins, herbs and remedies. It helped. It made him even goofier. His personality shone. His heart shone. We all shone.



"I'm on vacation."

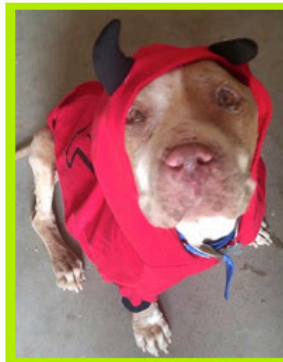
When a month had passed and HERO was still eating, wagging, smiling and loving every minute of every day, he suggested to Aunt Sandy that if he dressed up in disguise, He could hide from Cancer, and it would never find him. He'd live forever. Aunt Sandy told HERO that was a genius idea and she helped him pick out a couple of costumes. He also decided to change his name from HERO to "Super-HERO."

40 DAYS:

Had passed and HERO felt the love. He felt it every morning when Aunt Sandy told him he was important, special, wonderful.

He felt it every evening when he was gently tucked in. Told to have sweet dreams. Told he was loved. He knew it.

But every beginning has an end which has a beginning...



"Shhh, don't be frightened it's me, HERO, but I've changed my name to Super-HERO."



"I'm loved."

50 DAYS:

HERO had lived many lifetimes. We knew the time would come... The time had come.

He began having trouble standing up. He only ate half his food. He still loved his hot dogs and his tennis ball, but he was slowing down.

He now had to be carried out to potty. When the tennis ball rolled away from him. He could no longer retrieve it.

DAY 51:

HERO refused to eat. He gave Aunty Sandy a look as if to say: "It's time for me to move on."

But he had one more request. He wanted to share what he felt over the last 7 weeks and asked Aunty Sandy to help him make a few signs to show you.



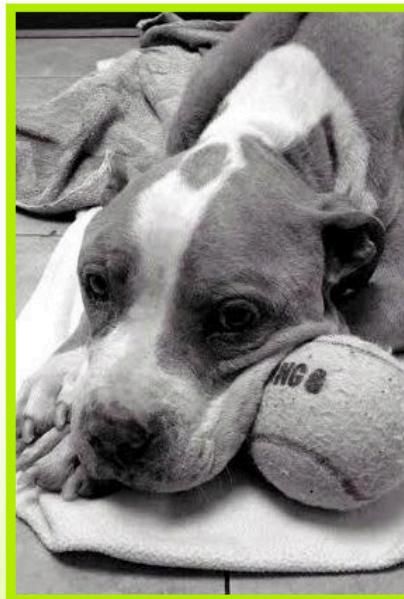
"I've experienced the true meaning of love and it's awesome. I hope you get to be as lucky as me."



DAY 52:

HERO and his tennis ball arrived at the vet. With an aura of unbelievable love, dignity, and peace, he gave his tennis ball one final squeak...Gently closed his eyes...And drifted off into the most peaceful sleep.

HERO will always be a symbol of strength for START. Yes, we helped facilitate his rescue, but he helped us grow and appreciate the important things in life. He reminded us that in the worst of times, all you need is a big, green squeaky ball, a little love and life will be complete. (He and his beloved tennis ball were cremated together).



*As you cross the rainbow bridge,
HERO, you leave behind so many inspired friends.
May you run free, play hard and know you will be loved forever.*