



Pet Talk

Shelby: Livin' the Dream

Welcome to *Pet Talk*, a periodic column about local homeless- and adopted pets and related topics. Today we present the story of Shelby, a very special adoptee who became a local therapy dog.

Shelby's eventual owner, Yvonne, had recently moved to Whitefish after her husband and her German Shepard had both passed away. In August 2017, Yvonne began examining shelter websites, including the local Flathead County Animal Shelter, looking for an older medium-size dog.

The Flathead shelter didn't happen to have such a dog at the time. So Yvonne consulted the Polson shelter website but found that one potential candidate had just been adopted.

However, a gentle older female who was a "long timer" in that overcrowded shelter had just been transferred to the Missoula shelter. So early the next day, Yvonne drove to Missoula and adopted the dog, who had been named Shelby.

At the time, Shelby was a five-year-old cattle dog mix and had been in the Polson shelter for 7 months.

After a thorough examination by a local veterinarian, the newly adopted dog was found to be in relatively good health—even though an x-ray revealed a large BB lodged in her lung! The vet advised Yvonne that the best course of action would be to simply leave the BB in place.



For the first few months Shelby was very shy, wasn't interested in playing, and didn't bark or

whimper very much. Clearly, the dog had been through some hard times.

So Yvonne and Shelby enrolled in a basic training program to get to know each other better. During the 8 weeks of training, Shelby learned commands quickly but didn't tolerate other dogs very well. There was still no playing or barking at home, but she was slowly gaining confidence with each passing day.

Surprisingly, Shelby seemed enthusiastic when meeting people during her neighborhood walks. At the same time, trainer Donna Jackson was starting a local Intermountain Therapy Dogs chapter and recommended that Yvonne and Shelby enroll in the workshop.

In 2018, Yvonne was recovering from open heart surgery when she and Shelby started training to become a therapy dog team. This started a new chapter in their lives, and they were among the first 6 dog therapy teams registered by Intermountain Therapy Animals in Flathead County.

Shelby then began her new

“career” at Logan Health Whitefish (previously North Valley Hospital) and quickly became a staff favorite with her enthusiastic tail wagging and big smile. She was also one of the first dogs to participate in the *READ* program at the Whitefish Community Library. In fact, many local children now have special Shelby bookmarks after reading to her. Four years later, some of the same children still sign up to read to Shelby in the library.

During the COVID shutdown, Shelby often ventured up to her favorite neighborhood porches for an outside visit during walks. Indeed, many isolated residents of The Lakes neighborhood in Whitefish told Yvonne that they greatly appreciated Shelby's porch visits.

Shelby is now a senior gal at 11 years old. She barks in earnest whenever the UPS delivery truck goes by, hoping that the usual cookie will appear on her doorstep. And she now whimpers happily when playing with her imaginary “dreamtime dogs” during naps.

Today, it's truly amazing to see this previously shy and abused dog stride

confidently into senior citizen centers, hospice facilities, children's day care centers, and local libraries to help brighten peoples' days.

At the supermarket and at local events, people often tap Yvonne on the shoulder and ask, "Are you Shelby's mom? We really love her!"

Well, Yvonne clearly does too and will never regret adopting this gentle creature. And there's no doubt that Shelby the therapy dog would heartily agree with such sentiments.

(Editor's note: I met cute Shelby in the hospital several years ago while recovering from surgery—and she surely brightened my day!)

In closing, please remember that you too can help solve the homeless pet problem in rapidly growing Flathead County.

For example, did you know about the Senior Pet Voucher offered by Flathead Shelter Friends? The free voucher pays up to \$250 toward veterinary care for adopted dogs and cats who are 7+ years old.

For more information, please contact Flathead County Animal Shelter, phone number (406) 758-1310, or visit the website at

<https://flathead.mt.gov/departments-directory/animal>.

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