

One Whopper

Beloved therapy
dog spreads joy and
sunshine everywhere
he goes

Written by Jennifer Heath

Photography by Suzi Issa

Whopper makes fast friends
with Arianna and Isabella



of a Tale

Each week, Whopper, a Chesapeake Bay retriever, visits the Fort Bend County Women's Center. With every visit, children's program coordinator Vina Gray watches as clients' eyes sparkle upon seeing the therapy dog arrive at the center. Gray remembers one heartfelt moment in particular. "This little boy hardly spoke to anyone. I was surprised to hear him talking to Whopper," she recalls. "I didn't understand everything he was saying, but just to hear him speak and to see how happy he was, made my jaw drop."

The Perfect Puppy

Debbie Glasser of the Katy Area Chamber of Commerce always loved animals and helping others. A former high school math teacher, Glasser tinkered with the idea of working with a therapy dog years ago. She waited for the right circumstances, though, to make the perfect equation.

Then one day, a friend invited Glasser to help out at a dog show. The newest dog of the bunch was still too young to be shown, so Glasser's job was to keep watch of the pup. She instantly fell in love with the 10-week-old puppy, and their bond became stronger when she learned Whopper's grandmother had been a therapy dog. Here was the chance she had been waiting for.

"He was so oversized, and he was going to be sent back to the breeder in New Jersey since he couldn't be a show dog," Glasser shares about Whopper. "He always had the sweetest, sweetest personality. When I found out about his grandmother, I thought, 'Here's my chance to get a therapy dog, because I know he has the temperament.' You can't teach that. You can teach him how to obey, but you can't teach temperament."

Training to Help Others

For the next year and a half, Glasser and Whopper became inseparable. They began therapy training, and Glasser would take Whopper wherever she could, always encouraging people to pet him and interact with him. She taught Whopper basic commands, as well as how to deal with different situations. As a therapy dog in training, Glasser knew Whopper would have to know when to stay calm, out of the way, and peaceful.

"He had to learn how to tolerate being in a hospital with people running back and forth and not freak out," says Glasser. "He learned about people coming up to him in a wheelchair or walking up to a person in a wheelchair and not being afraid. It's hard to describe; you have to have a certain reaction to people like, 'Let me come up to you, and you can love on me.'"



Whopper's sweet and gentle personality makes him the perfect therapy dog

A Paw Above the Rest

To qualify as an official therapy dog, Whopper had to ace a few tests. First, he earned the Canine Good Citizenship certification. Whopper then obtained therapy dog status through Therapy Dogs, Inc. He also worked to become a reading education assistance dog, where he works with children to improve reading scores.

Some of the tests Whopper took involved him having to understand signs and be able to correctly follow their meanings. He also had to have a third-party observer come watch and score him. "Almost any dog can be a therapy dog; it doesn't have to be a purebred," Glasser says. "If you have the time, this is a really good way to help others."

Glasser and Whopper began traveling around the state participating in different National Guard Yellow Ribbon events. The program helps soldiers of all stages of deployment, along with their families.

Spreading Cheer and Smiles

Recently, Whopper and Glasser have spent most of their free time volunteering at the Fort Bend County Women's Center. As part of the Paws 4 Hearts Therapy Dog program, Whopper visits with clients on a regular basis. "The children know when Whopper is coming and they get very excited," shares Gray. "You can hear them call his name down the halls. If a dog can have patience, Whopper has it."

The children love playing, hugging, and just spending time around Whopper, says Glasser. They feel an instant connection and an immediate sense of love.

In 2010, the Fort Bend County Women's Center gave Whopper the President's Award of Programs. "I always thought he'd do awesome," shares Glasser. "What surprised me was how much I have received out of this; the good feelings I've gotten. It's so rewarding."

A Special Pal

In the future, Glasser would love to branch out and help more people in different situations. For now, she and Whopper also spend time helping at the Special Pals animal shelter in Katy. As the shelter's spokesdog, Whopper and Glasser attend events and spread cheer.

For Glasser, watching Whopper interact with others is truly unbelievable and wonderful. She shares, "I've often said that if Whopper could talk, he'd have a lot of stories to tell." **KM**

JENNIFER HEATH is a play-at-home mom with her two boys Landry and Ryan.

To schedule a visit from Whopper through the Paws 4 Hearts working therapy dog program, visit paws4hearts.net or email [Debbie Glasser at dkglass@earthlink.net](mailto:Debbie.Glasser@earthlink.net)



The Scoop on *Whopper*



His real name is Silvercreek's Super Size Me.



His great-grandmother helped in New Jersey after the Sept. 11 attacks.



He has earned the Canine Good Citizenship certification, the Rally Novice Obedience title, Therapy Dog status, certification as a reading education assistance dog, Paws 4 Hearts working therapy dog status, and the American Kennel Club's therapy dog title.

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