

# DEAR CARE CADETS: A LETTER TO YOU FROM MOLLY GAFFNEY (AS TOLD TO LEE GAFFNEY)



Molly Gaffney in December 1987 on her Adoption Day, a nine-month-old scared puppy. Photograph by Lee Gaffney.

My name is Molly...Molly Gaffney. I am writing to help you understand that your work for the LA/SPCA<sup>1</sup> and the work of the LA/SPCA is really important. You see, I was adopted from the LA/SPCA. Here's my story.

When I was a little puppy, I lived with a young couple who didn't really know a lot about dogs. The man tried to housebreak me by kicking me when I had an accident. It was awful! I was really afraid of him. He made me afraid of most men. The couple cared enough about me to have me spayed, but didn't care enough about me to learn how to help me become a good dog and an important part of their family. After about nine months, the man gave up on me and dropped me off at the LA/SPCA.

When I got there I was really scared. I had never been alone in a small cage. There were so many strange noises and smells and

so many other dogs. I had no idea where I was or what was going to happen to me. Then I met my kennel keeper. He was really nice. He would come in every day and feed me, clean my cage, and talk to me. Sometimes, if he had time, he would even play with me a little. I liked that. It was great to have a new friend in this strange place, even a man.

Once in a while on really special days, a volunteer would come to me and take me outside. Wow! Outside! We would play and walk and just talk and be together. I really liked that. But it didn't happen very often, at least not often enough for me. I kept noticing something I didn't understand. Several times a day people would walk past all of the cages and look at all of us. They would stop and talk and point and put their fingers in the cages to touch the other dogs. They never stopped at my cage. I guess I wasn't much to look at. I kept hearing the words "fuzzy" and "muttly" as they passed me by. I was really getting lonesome.

Then one day a lady and a little boy came into the kennel area. I watched them as they walked around to each one of the cages and kept passing them all. Then it was my turn. When they came to my cage, the lady shouted, "She's it! She's the dog I want!" The little boy said, "Yeah, she's really cute!"

Cute? Me? Can you imagine? Naturally, I liked them, too. Well, that was my big day. I was adopted by the lady and the little boy. They brought me to their house to live with their other dogs. It was a nice house with a big yard and a man. EEEEEEEK!

At first, I spent a lot of time under the bed being afraid of the man. Fortunately, this man was really nice and worked hard to help me like him. He never gave me any reason not to trust him. Soon I was sleeping on the pillow next to him with my head on his shoulder. I feel really safe with him next to me. This man is pretty special. Now, life is good.

One day the lady said, "Molly, the LA/SPCA took really good care of you when you



needed it most. I think we should find a way to pay them back. I think we should join the Visiting Pet Program and show other people how wonderful a rescued dog can be." She went on to explain that we would go to hospitals and nursing homes to visit people who couldn't have pets. All I had to do was sit next to them and let them pet me. I can handle that, I thought.

Let's see. I get to wear a nifty scarf, take a nice ride in the car, be scratched and petted by people for an hour, and then ride home having spent all of that time with the lady. All I have to do is not poop in the building. I knew I could do that and it sounded like fun!

Well, that was five years ago. The lady and I have been to visit people all over town. I can't wait to go to "work." When I see the lady put on her special t-shirt, I know I'm going for a visit. I run to the closet to get my leash and scarf. It's hard to control my excitement. Sometimes I bark with joy a little too much. I'm really tired after a visit, but it's a good tired. It's a tired that comes from having fun and helping people who are lonesome like I was once.

One day we had a really special visit. We met a little girl who had been in a coma for ten days. The lady explained that she was sleeping really, really hard and I should try to wake her. I could tell that the little girl was very sick

because she didn't move or talk and she looked kind of sad. Her mother looked sad too.

The lady put me on the bed right next to the little girl and I tried to wake her like I wake the lady and the man every morning. I licked her face very gently and I snuggled close to her. Suddenly, her closed eyes started to twitch like she was trying to open them. Her mother was very excited. She told the little girl my name and told her to try and reach for me to pet me. To everyone's amazement the little girl picked up her arm and tried to reach for me. I just stayed there as still as I could. I knew it was an important time. I waited to see what I was supposed to do next. I was told to move around the bed. The little girl was told where I was. She responded by reaching for me every time. Her mother got very, very excited.

People have given me a lot of credit for doing something special, but I was just doing my job. Just another day in the life of a Visiting Pet.

**Acknowledgment:** This is a portion of a piece originally written for the campers of the LA/SPCA Care Cadet Camp, a summer program for 10- to 12-year-olds. Lee Gaffney is former Director of the camp and Past-President of the Visiting Pet Program, a 501C-3 non-profit, all volunteer animal-assisted therapy organization. She has been active with Visiting Pets for more than 18 years and continues to serve on their Board of Directors.

Molly worked as a therapy dog for over 13 years, living up to the Visiting Pet Program motto of "bringing love and leaving smiles" everywhere she went. She was always the consummate professional, the role model for other dogs in the Visiting Pet Program. She set the bar that all strive to meet. The white, fuzzy mutt was truly a once-in-a-lifetime friend. Comments concerning this article can be sent to [terriergroup@gmail.com](mailto:terriergroup@gmail.com).

**(Footnote)**

<sup>1</sup> LA/SPCA stands for Louisiana Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.



Molly enjoying music in nursing home. Photograph by Lee Gaffney.

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