

My name is Helen Raptis; 2153 NE Sandy Boulevard, Portland; I'm here on behalf of the Oregon Humane Society and Today I'm speaking in support of House Concurrent Resolution Number 16 to name the shelter dog as the state dog. I'm also the host of AM Northwest on KATU TV. And I am a huge supporter of shelter dogs.

Over the past 25 years, I have emceed many fundraisers and telethons for the Oregon Humane Society and other rescue groups. Shelter dogs truly represent the Oregon spirit. Just like Oregonians, shelter dogs come from all backgrounds. They come in all shapes and sizes. They really enjoy the outdoors, rain or shine. They love to socialize. They're caring and loving and they don't mind how you look in the morning.

Shelter dogs who are adopted aren't just saved by the human, but the human can be saved by the dog. As a former newscaster, I have read many news stories where a dog owner is alerted to a fire by their rescue dog, or a shelter dog is used to find someone lost in the wilderness, or a former street dog visits a hospital to comfort kids. Recently a friend of mine was in ICU and the only thing that brightened his day was a visit from his rescue dog.

I did feature story a while back at the Maclaren Youth Facility in Woodburn. They have an incredible program there called Project Pooch. It pairs shelter dogs with young inmates who train the dogs before they are adopted out to families. The young men told me how these dogs, that had been “thrown away”, were a lot like them--they too felt thrown away. But the dogs taught them about responsibility, selflessness, and patience. For some, it was the first time they experienced unconditional love.

Shelter dogs change lives. An elderly neighbor of mine, who was severely depressed and wouldn't leave her house, was given a dog from a shelter and she came out of her depression. She found a reason to get up in the morning and was soon out and about, walking her dog twice a day and actually talking to people.

For my husband and me, every one of the dogs we've had during our 25 year marriage, has come from shelters. The two we have now, Callie and Sophie, both came from the Oregon Humane Society. I can't imagine my life without them. Callie is a golden retriever who was rescued from a puppy mill. She had been used for breeding, had been starved and had spent three years confined to a crate.

Because of that, she had very little fur on her stomach or tail and she had a hard time walking. She also had a fear of confined spaces and random noises. While we rescued her by adopting her, she has given us back so much. Last year, when my co-host Dave Anderson died, she seemed to know exactly how I felt, and was able to comfort me in a way only cuddling with a dog can do. That's a special skill many rescue dogs seem to have—they just know how you feel. And let's face it, there's nothing quite like the reception I get every day when I get home from work!

Shelter dogs are just like so many Oregonians--we've had our hardships, we've struggle through with a little help, and come out the other side with a loving attitude toward others.