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WEEKEND BREAK



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'MOBILIZE, DON'T EUTHANIZE'

Meet Miss Melody, the two-legged boxer

By **ALYSSA EVANS**
For Chinook Observer

LONG BEACH, Wash. — At 1.5 years old, Miss Melody has the playful zest you'd expect from a boxer. And true to her breed, she's a quick thinker, full of energy and loyal to her owner, Debra Thompson.

But there's one thing that distinguishes Miss Melody from other dogs. She was born with spina bifida, which resulted in the amputation of her two hind legs.

"People will be like 'Oh no, what happened?'" Thompson said. "She doesn't know any different. Not having legs is so much easier for her."

The loss of her legs hasn't led to a loss of independence or happiness for Miss Melody. With the help of "simple adjustments" made by her owners, she brings her spunk to the Peninsula.

Finding home

After realizing Miss Melody's back two legs didn't work, her breeder contacted Wigglin' Home Boxer Rescue, a non-profit volunteer group. The rescue organization pairs dogs to homes in Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Montana.

"Her breeder gave her a chance at life," Thompson said.

Chinook Coffee owner Kathy Colvin is a board member for the group. Colvin encouraged Thompson, who owns Street-side Taco, to foster Miss Melody.

Not only did Thompson and her partner, David Allen, foster Miss Melody, the pair adopted her into their family.

"The decision was easy," Thompson said. "For all the work she takes, she gives it back in love 100-fold."

Miss Melody soon joined Thompson and Allen's home, becoming sister to fellow dog Nikki.

"She loves to run, play, meet people and have fun," Thompson said.



Debra Thompson
Owner Debra Thompson with Miss Melody as a puppy.

Unknown risks

Miss Melody weighs about 26 pounds and won't continue growing. She's on her fifth wheelchair, donated by nonprofit Gunnar's Wheels. The organization donates wheelchairs to immobile dogs.

"Most spina bifida dogs get put down," Thompson said. "There are more options now for dogs who've gone through accidents or who have deformities."

Before adopting her, Thompson didn't know how much Miss Melody's healthcare would cost. Another concern was the challenges she may face.

"Her vet says she's doing fantastic, but who knows," Thompson said. "Spina bifida dogs haven't been kept alive long enough."

Dogs with spina bifida may be impacted anywhere from minimally to severely. Side effects might include weakness, lack of coordination, paralysis and the inability to control poop and pee. There isn't an effective cure for spina bifida in dogs, according to pet care service Wag.

Since her legs were amputated, Miss Melody's spina bifida spot, a deformity on her lower spine that was once an open wound, has shrunk.

Giving back

The love Miss Melody experiences isn't limited to Thompson and Allen. She loves to play with kids and meet new people.

Thompson often takes Miss Melody out around the Peninsula so she can interact with others. The pair regularly visit Golden Sands, a senior living center in Ocean Park, Wash.

Miss Melody is also the star of two social media accounts: the Facebook page Boxers on Wheels and Instagram account @missmellie2. Between the two, she has more than 800 followers. Thompson uses the accounts to document Miss Melody's life.

"The whole key around disabled dogs is education," Thompson said. "She's brought us so much joy and educated us about the needs of a special needs dog. She's our advocate."

Miss Melody was recently accepted into the nonprofit Love on a Leash, where she will be able to earn a pet therapy certification. Thompson hopes she and Miss Melody can visit children's hospitals and increase their community visits.

Thompson hopes Miss Melody's impact will encourage those who are willing and able to take in pets to adopt disabled and shelter dogs.

"Our motto is 'mobilize, don't euthanize,'" Thompson said.

Miss Melody plays outside and has a good attitude despite a major disability.

Alyssa Evans



Miss Melody, a boxer with spina bifida, stops for a quick photo-op.

Alyssa Evans



Miss Melody leads the way during a walk in downtown Long Beach, Wash.

Alyssa Evans