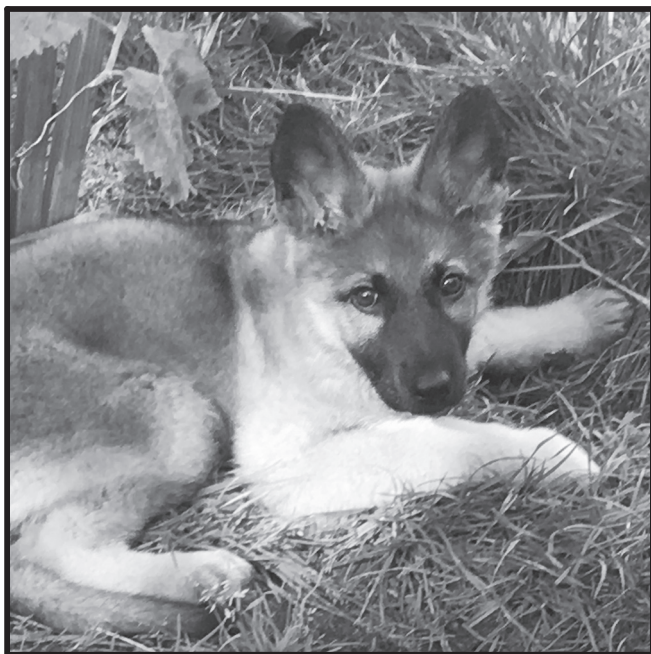




Starfish's STORY

The True Story of How One Little Puppy Learned to Walk



BY BONNIE BADER

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CHAPTER I

FOUND

WHEN ALAINA ONESKO RECEIVED A call that someone spotted an abandoned puppy on Crown Beach in Alameda, California, she hopped in her truck. As an animal control officer, it was Alaina's job to help lost, abandoned, and injured animals. She didn't know the condition of this puppy. All she knew was

the puppy had been left alone on the beach in a cardboard box. There was no time to waste.

It was October 4, 2017. When Alaina arrived at the location, she walked on the beach, her shoes leaving deep prints along the shoreline. It was a beautiful day; the sun was shining and paragliders were zipping along the water.

Alaina spotted the cardboard box. It had been turned on its side, and Alaina saw two little ears sticking out. But where was the rest of the puppy?

“Oh, my,” Alaina said, bending down. “What do we have here?” Alaina straightened out the box.

A puppy was indeed inside, lying on top of some dried dog food. But this puppy was different. Her legs were splayed out around her tiny body. She looked as flat as a pancake!

The puppy tipped her head and looked up at the woman. *Hi there. I was just left here, alone in this box. I can't get out and I'm kind of scared. I think I'm at the beach. I can smell the salt water. And some sand is stuck in my ears. You look nice. I'm nice, too! Can you help me?*

Alaina picked up the puppy and put the dog against her chest.

“It’s okay, little one,” Alaina said. “I’ve got you now.”

Fearing that the puppy was injured, Alaina bundled her up and drove straight to a veterinarian’s office. She hoped that the people who worked there would be able to help this little doggie.

Are you taking me home? the puppy wondered? *I could really use something to eat. And I could probably use a bath, too!*

Alaina parked her car and carefully carried the puppy inside.

“I found her at Crown Beach,” Alaina explained to the receptionist.

The puppy gazed at Alaina with eager eyes as she talked.

“I’m worried she’s hurt,” Alaina continued. “Look at her legs. She looks like a starfish.”

“Starfish!” a volunteer who was standing nearby said. “I think that’s what you should call her.”

The receptionist called the vet and soon ushered Alaina and Starfish inside the examination room.

This table is hard and cold, Starfish thought. But the people around me look nice and friendly, so I don’t feel so scared anymore. Maybe they’ll take me to their home!

The vet felt Starfish's legs.

She touched Starfish's tummy.

She examined Starfish's mouth.

She ran her hands up and down Starfish's spine.

“Well, what I can say is that this is a Belgian Malinois puppy. And she's probably about ten weeks old. I think we should get an ultrasound. Maybe that test will help us figure out why she's so . . . flat.”

Alaina waited nervously as Starfish was taken away for the ultrasound, which would allow the vet to see the organs inside the puppy's body.

As Alaina waited, she wondered what could have happened to this cute little pup. Had she been hit by a car? Maybe, but Alaina didn't notice any blood, and the dog didn't seem to be

in any pain. But she had never seen a flat puppy before.

Alaina shook her head. Who could have abandoned this helpless puppy?

A little later, the vet returned. Starfish was wagging her tail. But the vet didn't look happy.

"I think this puppy was born with some kind of birth defect," the vet reported. "It looks like her internal organs didn't develop properly."

"Is that why she's so flat?" Alaina asked.

The vet nodded. Then she told Alaina the puppy probably wouldn't live very long.

Tears began to form in Alaina's eyes. "Is there any way to help her?"

The vet slowly shook her head. "I'm afraid not."

Sadly, Alaina picked up the puppy. The

little animal nuzzled against Alaina's chest, her tail still wagging. *She seems so alive and happy, Alaina thought. I want her to be able to live a full and happy life.*

Alaina knew that their next stop was the Friends of the Alameda Animal Shelter (FAAS). The people who worked there would decide what to do.



As soon as Alaina walked into FAAS, she heard the yipping, barking, and meowing of the animals waiting to be fostered or adopted.

“Who have you brought us today?” Steve Ferguson, the shelter’s director of operations asked.

Alaina gingerly placed the puppy down.

The staff gasped when they saw that the puppy couldn’t stand on her legs.

“I’m calling her Starfish,” Alaina said.

“What a perfect name!” Steve agreed.

“Poor little thing,” a volunteer said, reaching down to scratch the puppy behind her ears. “Do you think she’s in pain?”

Alaina shrugged. “If she is, she’s not showing it,” Alaina said, motioning to the puppy’s wagging tail.

“But I bet you’re hungry and thirsty,” Steve said. He quickly placed bowls of food and water in front of the puppy.

After Starfish ate, Alaina brought her into the examination room. There, Kim, one of the techs, waited.

Kim, Steve, and Alaina thought Starfish looked so happy. There had to be something they could do to help her. As they stood around the little flat puppy with the bright

eyes and wagging tail, they began to cry. They desperately wanted to save her.

“We need to call John,” Steve said, wiping his eyes. “Maybe he’ll know what to do.”

John, the shelter’s director, was out of the office for the day on business. But when they finally reached him, John heard crying in the background. “I know you’ve seen really sick puppies before,” John said. “Why all the crying this time?”

Steve sniffled. “I—I don’t know,” he said. “This puppy is just so cute. And happy. And, well, *alive*.”

John didn’t say anything for a minute. And although he had a very busy day planned, he knew he had to get back to the shelter to see this puppy. “Give me twenty minutes,” John said. And he hung up the phone.

“Don’t do anything,” Steve said. “We have to wait for John.”

Alaina breathed a big sigh of relief. Maybe John would figure out some way to save this little puppy.