



THE DOGGIE IN THE STAGE RIGHT AD: HARLEY'S TALE

By: Harley Wong as told to Carolyn Corsano Wong

My owner has told me that since releasing the ad for STAGE RIGHT'S next show, CHEAPER BY THE DOZEN, she has been asked repeatedly about the dog in the ad. . The show doesn't run until the end of July, but lots of folks have asked about the

pooch pictured prominently with a \$5 price tag hung around his neck. That would be me. My name is Harley. My story is miraculous.

I came into the Wong family quite by accident but it turns out, despite them being Wong; they were the right family for me! Our story together began two years ago. I was left at the Montgomery County Animal Shelter (MCAS). My first owners said they couldn't afford to keep me. They were in a hurry to leave me; they didn't even tell the shelter my name. A volunteer at the shelter named me Harley because of my coloring being similar to the famous make of motorcycle. Despite the kindness of strangers at the shelter, I languished there. I wasn't eating. I had the feeling my time on this earth was limited. You see, the shelter receives about 2,000 dogs and cats a month. That's right, I said 2,000. Even though I was only three, my odds of living to see four weren't so good. Most people want a puppy, don't ask me why; I was already house broken when I came to the shelter. What made matters worse was I had a bad case of

MR. CRAIG + HARLEY



BERNICE + HARLEY



heartworm. If a dog is found to have that at the shelter, they are usually put down. It cost too much to treat heartworm and the likelihood of someone adopting me knowing they were in for some hefty medical bills was not good. They did the test on me, but for some reason, the result was never entered into the computer. I don't know why and I don't know who, but I'm grateful someone didn't follow the rules. I was placed in the adoption room, but despite being what I consider a handsome well behaved dog, no one adopted me. My time ran out,

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due to space limitations, we're only given two weeks to be adopted. Luckily, I was placed in the foster program. The foster program saved my life.

I was fostered by the Parker family. They're a real nice family with three small kids and a dog named Rojo. We got along great even though Rojo is a bit of a nut (he runs into fences, enough said). They really didn't have the room for me and the rambunctious Rojo so I was sure hoping someone somewhere would see me and want to adopt me. That's the whole point of the foster program; it gets shelter dogs out and about meeting folks. It's especially important to get young dogs fostered so they don't catch any nasty bugs at the shelter and develop properly. Well, my time ran out again, but before the Parkers had given up hope, they suggested to one of their neighbors to bring their son over to meet me. You see, I'm real calm. I don't tend to bark and I'm real laid back (honestly, I roll on my back as a sign of submission to just about everyone I meet). The neighbor's son was very afraid of dogs; he was nearly bitten twice when he was out selling popcorn as a Cub Scout and when he was a real little guy a loose dog lunged at him. Those incidents left this kid very wary of canine types. The Mom convinced the kid to come over to the Parkers and just meet me so he could see there are 'nice' dogs. I did my usual bit; lie down, roll over and wait for the tummy rubbing to commence. The boy gently stroked me for a long while. He looked up at his mom and said; "I think this dog likes me, can we

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keep him?" Everyone, including me, was very surprised. The neighbors had no intention of getting a dog, but they could see there was something special about me. The Parker's neighbors decided to foster me for 2 weeks. I almost blew it during those 2 weeks. I got really sick; diarrhea and vomiting (not a pretty picture, yes). I also made it my business to mark my new territory (i.e I peed on just about everything in the house) including their piano. To make matters worse, it was during those two weeks that it was found out I had a bad case of heartworm. I thought I was a goner for sure, especially after the piano fiasco. Despite my 'issues' the neighbors decided to adopt me. I became an official member of the Wong family. I am half Chow, so the Wong name fits, but I'm also half German Shepherd which probably accounts for my liking fried rice with wiener schnitzel.

They take good care of me and have given me a new life with purpose. I'm now free of heartworm and hard at work repaying the debt I owe to Montgomery County (it was the good folks at the Montgomery County Animal Shelter and the Friends of the Montgomery County Animal Shelter that paid for my fostering expenses and got me adopted). My owner and I are proud members of the Montgomery Pet Partners (MPP). They are a non-profit all volunteer organization that is committed to enhancing the quality of life in individuals through the human-animal bond. MPP has four areas for volunteering: Reading Education Assistance Dogs® (R.E.A.D.), hospitals, assisted living facilities and libraries. Their primary focus is development of literacy through R.E.A.D.®. With R.E.A.D.®, certified teams work one-on-one with emerging readers as well as with students who may be identified as at-risk to help improve reading skills in a school or library setting. I gotta tell ya, it's a lot more than just a kid reading to a dog. For example, one of my MPP buds, Moses, went to a school for the R.E.A.D.® program. One of the children identified for the program had never spoken in school. For months this kid wouldn't say a word to anyone. After only one visit with Moses the child raised a hand and asked a question in class that very day. Pretty amazing stuff, don't you think?

My personal gig is nursing home visitation. The folks I visit don't remember my owner's name, but you should hear them call my name when I walk through the doors. They know I'm always ready for a good tummy rubbing, ear scratching, tail waggin' good time. I regularly visit two veterans of WWII. What an honor it is to sit at their feet and just listen. One of them, Mr. Melvin Craig, from the Fightin' Texas Aggie Class of 1943 (my owner made me write that since she went to the same school) is a survivor of the Battle of the Bulge. He also captured two German soldiers by himself! Oh, the stories I've heard. I also regularly visit the sweet as peaches old fashioned Texas women you could ever hope to meet. They don't come that genteel anymore and I get to see them all the time. They pat my head, give me kisses and tell me all about the pets they had, their children, their husbands, and their struggles. Just petting me brings back a lot of memories. It also lets them know they're not forgotten.

Well, that's my story. I told you it was miraculous. If you'd like more information about the Montgomery Pet Partners check out their web site www.montgomerypetpartners.org. If you're a dog

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and think you and your owner have what it takes to be a therapy team; I urge you to look into it! You need to like people and other dogs, be able to sit, stay, come and go down on command and a bunch of other stuff. I went through a home study course with my owner and we were certified as a therapy team by the Delta Society after passing an aptitude and skills test. Don't worry; you won't need a #2 pencil, just some training. We need teams. We have facilities on waiting lists just screamin' for us to visit, but we don't have enough teams to cover them all.

If you'd like to adopt a dog, I urge you to check out your local shelter. Don't buy some poor pent up puppy mill pooch off the side of the road; go to your shelter. With 2,000 pets coming in every month you could easily find a diamond in the rough like me. Better yet, foster a dog like I was. That saved my bacon you can bet. For information on the foster program check out the web site for the Friends of the Montgomery County Texas Animal Shelter (FMCTAS) www.fmctas.org or call Belinda 936-520-1604.

If none of this canine stuff interests you and you just want to see a good old fashioned heart warming family comedy: come see me in the STAGE RIGHT production of CHEAPER BY THE DOZEN from July 31 to Aug. 16 at the historic Crighton Theatre in downtown Conroe (call my buddy Jim Bingham in the box office for tickets: 936-441-SHOW). I shouldn't say that quite yet though because I'll have to audition to get the part, but I figure with my connections I've got a leg up on the competition. But, I generally put a leg up on just about everything except pianos; I've learned that lesson the hard way! ♦

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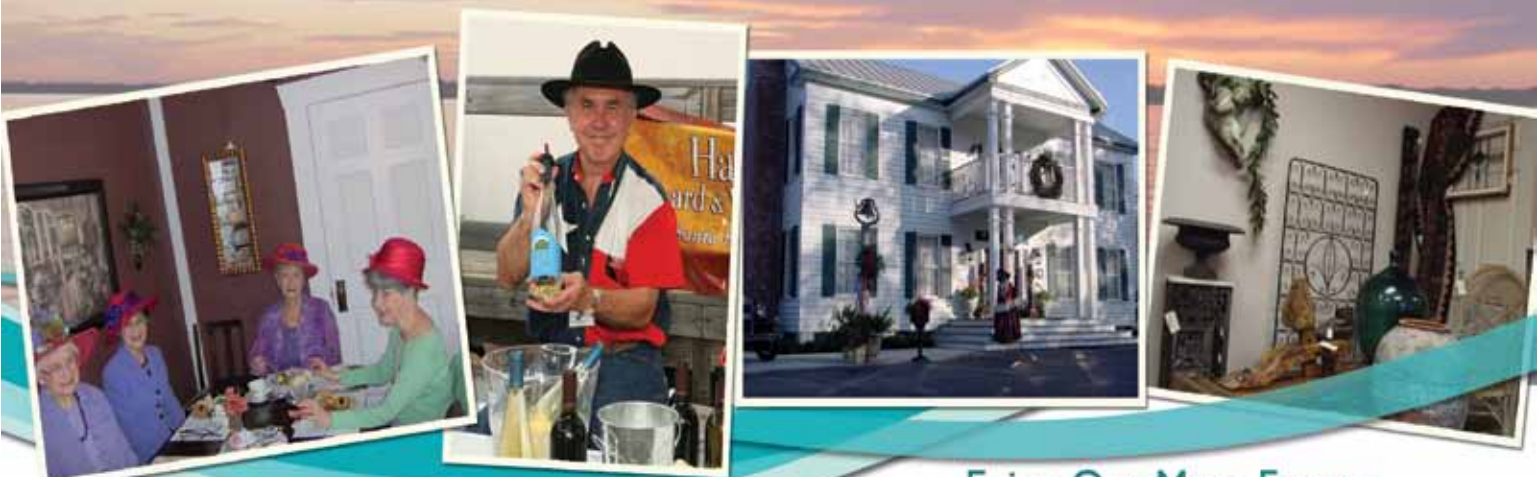
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