

## **Felicia's Story**

### **“Everybody Loves Felicia”**

It was fall of 1995, and I was personally coming off a summer of loss, and disappointment. Then something remarkable happened, and I was presented with an opportunity to receive a special gift. A friend of my younger sister had a dog, who had just had a litter of 14 puppies. My mom was looking for a poodle at the time, and when she saw that this was not one she wasn't sure about adopting the puppy. However, I jumped at the chance to have her, and she entered my life in a milk crate because she was so small.

She was a distinctive little one because she had shepherd hair, most of which was brown, yet she had a patch of white on her chest and her paws. As I placed her gently in and out of the crate for the next few days I knew it was time to give her a name. Knowing that she was a female I named her Felicia, after a beloved character on the soap opera, General Hospital. She was 7 weeks old (mid-October at this point) and she took to her name immediately. As she grew her first year she was truly in puppy mode. She had no problem playing with slippers, her toys, and trash cans. As she grew everyone (including me) started to notice how Felicia's ears stood straight up like a shepherd when you called her name, or when she was curious about something, or a noise. I got her spayed, and began taking her for her yearly physicals, and shots to Friendship Hospital for Animals, here in D.C.

Speaking of names, Felicia had all sorts of nicknames, but her most widely used ones were “Fee Fee,” “Sweet Girl,” and “Friskabella” (because of her frisky nature). It was her terrier part (mixed with shepherd) that to her friskiness, and her amazing energy. However, what was truly remarkable was her personality, and intelligence. She knew people by their voices, and of course was in charge of security, as the watchdog. She always would let you know when someone was outside the door before the doorbell could be pushed. When my adopted father would visit me he always (like most of my company) made a point to visit Felicia first. Felicia was such a big ham that she would immediately turn on her side so he could rub her stomach and chest, a term he coined as “rub-a-dub.” Felicia was very alert to the point that if a tea kettle was whistling or something on the stove was boiling over she would bark until it was taken care of. She loved laying on the sofa, chaise, and my bed. But the thing was she always knew what furniture to get on, and which ones to stay off on. That was especially important when my mom took care of her when I was out of town because she had quite a few antiques. Felicia was so great, and provided my mom with company, and security.

Felicia loved her walks, and as with most dogs, she loved going for rides in the car. She always rode in the passenger seat, in the front with me. Of course, she loved sticking her head out of the window, and letting the air blow through her hair. However, it was this showboating that made me have to put the window lock on so there would be no accident when her paw would eventually hit the window button on her side. She loved her toys, but she loved people most of all. The welcome I would get when I came home were always the highlight of my day! She would do a “happy dance” as soon as I entered our home. She was becoming a little celebrity when people visited me because everyone always talked, and played with her first. Of course she loved her spa visits over the years. Initially, she went to a groomer named, Adrienne.

She, and her staff loved Felicia, and always gave her extra things such as treatments, treats, and ribbons in her ear. It was during this time phrase, "Everybody Loves Felicia" came into play. My Younger sisters kids loved playing with her, and the fact that they were her age or younger made them closer to her. Felicia always indulged them and played, and licked on them when they visited. When my older sister would visit me from North Carolina she was always amazed at the connection Felicia, and I had. It was even to the point that when I took her to Friendship people commented on that same connection, despite our short visits.

In the fall of 2002, I would buy a new house and my top three requirements were location, a detached home, and a nice size yard for Felicia with a lot of grass so she could have her own domain. The house I bought has a deck that is elevated, so she could overlook the yard as well as the alley. How Felicia loved that yard as she would run around in circles and then run up the deck steps to me. One of things I would do was take a toy newspaper that had the headline, "The Daily Growl" and throw it from chair on the deck and watch fetch it and bring it back to me. She was so fast that most times before it hit the grass, she was already down the deck steps to retrieve it. With the deck elevated she would sit on the top and just look out over the yard and alley to survey, which gave her a new nickname, "Queen of the Valley." There were times when I would come home I would cut through the bottle of the alley (I live at the top end, in the next block) and she would recognize my car and start the "happy dance." I would blow the horn and let her know she was right. When she was inside the house, I always made sure when I opened the door that I did so slowly to see if I could sneak in before she saw me. Most of the time she was behind the door and then I would get the big greeting and hug, and immediately start petting her and playing with her. Now despite the back yard I still walked Felicia 2 to 3 time a day. When I first bought my house I tried to keep the location a secret until I got the house situated. But because I live off 16th Street I would walk Felicia up and down that street, and my friends or people would notice us. I don't know how many times I got, 'Jose do live somewhere off 16 Street because I saw you walking the cutest dog.' Or hey Jose I saw you walking Felicia the other day as I was going north to Maryland off 16 Street, It even got to the point that clerks at the Giant, or CVS would ask me the next to me I came into buy something, "I saw you walking your dog." Sometimes out of the blue when we walked Felicia would challenge me to a race by just starting to run. I could keep up with her but I had to expend major energy to do so. When I would entertain at my new house people would come and Felicia would sit in whatever room we were and act like she was taking part in the conversation. I remember some of my friends would mention that Felicia was the best wing man a guy could want because women just loved her. As one of my college friends use to say she was a "chick magnet.:"

As Felicia hit double digits (10 years) in age everyone was amazed that she still had that energy, and was still able to jump extremely well. My mom moved in with me because of her mobility issues and because she could no longer take care of her house on her own. This provided my mom with company, and security once again (she was retired), and gave Felicia company while I was at work. My mom always marveled that Felicia knew the time I should be home. If I was late or had to work a little longer I would get a call from my mom saying Felicia

wants to know when I am coming home. She said Felicia would either pace back and forth in front of the front door, or sit right in the hallway waiting for me to get home. Once I was home sometimes I would go in my living room and get to floor level with Felicia. I would be opposite her, and we would do a stare down. I would then hit the floor with my hands, and she would run around the room in circles. As my hands would move from side to side she would do the same and start barking. When I stopped she would jump toward me and I would start to tickle her. Other times I pretended to follow her in the kitchen and then I would double back upstairs to one of the bedrooms or go on the third level to my attic. She always flew upstairs to get me. In the middle of the night if I had to get up I would make sure not to roll over because she would be lying next to me. Or if she wasn't next to me in the bed or on the sofa, I made sure to look before I stepped down so she would not be underneath, therefore avoiding stepping on her.

Another example of Felicia being Felicia was when I had to take my mom to an appointment. My mom went through the basement through the garage, and sat in the car (my garage is connected to the basement). When I went to say good-bye to Felicia I could not find her. What my mother, and I didn't know was that Felicia walked right out in the garage with my mom not realizing it. My mom had the garage door up as well so I went frantically to look for her. I checked the alley, and garage again. Finally, I went on 16th Street to search and to my amazement Felicia was on the grass by the sidewalk, down 16th Street. She was going to the bathroom and going the path of our walk as if I was walking with her. I simply said her name, and she turned and walked toward me with her tail wagging. I put her leash on her, took her back home, and breathed a sign of relief.

Felicia loved all weather, but especially the snow. When we had the two blizzards back to back in 2009 she still like the snow even though we could not walk regularly. I dug paths in our backyard so she could roll around in the snow without getting stuck. Whenever, I did yard work in the spring or summer Felicia was right there observing, like she was supervisor. During Christmas she sat next to me or by the tree as our family, and friends exchanged and opened gifts. I did not dress Felicia up in clothes that much. But she did have this red and black wool turtleneck sweater I made her wear when it was cold. She certainly got great compliments from neighbors, and passengers in their cars as we crossed the street while they waited for the light to change. I always notice Felicia got a pep in her step if she felt that someone was watching her. Like I said she was a big ham.

In the summer of 2010, Felicia developed a cut on her lip. A few weeks later it started to grow and it was determined that it was a tumor by the doctor at Friendship Hospital. Friendship recommended I take her to a specialist of animal dentistry to perform the surgery. Then we found out that Felicia had a heart murmur so they wanted to do a chest x-ray to make sure she would be okay at her age (she was a little over 14 at this point) to be able to survive surgery. That is when the x-ray show that she had two small tumors in her chest. I of course was devastated to hear all of this but I wanted to give Felicia a chance and so we went ahead with the surgery for the tumor outside her mouth. Felicia came through the surgery with flying colors and no cancer cells had got in her lymph nodes. As Dr. Taney, who performed the surgery, was talking to me on the

phone Felicia was barking in the background. When I went to pick her up it was like Felicia hadn't seen me in days. As I rode her back from Gaithersburg home she sat in my lap the whole time I was driving. She was so feisty but yet tired. Once it was confirmed that the removed tumor was malignant the doctors in oncology at Friendship immediately tried to give us treatment options for Felicia. We were fortunate enough to get Felicia in a clinical trial, she was 1 of 3 dogs, and despite the cost I felt hopeful. Especially, considering that Felicia's personality, and energy were still intact. She was past 15 at this point and despite some initial costs I was ready for her to start her treatment. The clinical trial she was on was a blessing because for about a year, maybe 13 months you could not tell that Felicia was sick. We made our regular oncology visits and Felicia as usual always got great reports on her behavior. She still went on her walks daily and had no problem going down into the backyard. As a matter of fact there were sometimes we would run up and down 16th Street like in the old days. As a couple of people commented to me on several occasions, "the cute, little dog is winning."

Unfortunately, the clinical study Felicia was on got cancelled and they stopped producing the medicine after 30 days of notifying Friendship. Even though there were ups and downs regarding Felicia's treatments and results over her last 9 months, there was never any downs regarding her attitude, and she still went for walks and rides in my car, despite her illness. She showed me such love, loyalty, and friendship that I was extremely fortunate to be her owner. On September 30, 2012 Felicia fell down the steps. She could not get back up and walk without struggling. I rushed her to Friendship Hospital and I was told that the next 48 hours would be key. She was hardly eating at this point but over the next 2 days I gave her soup, and sardines. I was told to keep her from going up and down the steps so she would not fall again. I stayed off from work the first 2 days, and then had my mom stay with her the third day. I got a phone call from my mom telling me that Felicia had somehow managed to get the board loose we had up to keep her from the steps, but she came up the basement steps anyway. She got on her rug in the kitchen and sat with my mom as she watched television. Once again, I was amazed by Felicia, that maybe somehow she would beat the odds. Her strength and determination were fully on display. On Thursday, October 18th we went in for Felicia's regular oncology appointment at Friendship. She did well regarding her blood work and other factors they regularly checked. But there was concern if something was going on with her neurologically because of her balance being so affected. Unfortunately less than 48 hours later Felicia had some kind of stroke. I rushed her to Friendship on Saturday, October 20, 2012 to emergency. They told me her blood pressure was extremely low, and hooked her to an IV. She was not in any pain and we had her wrapped in a blanket and she sat in a basket. I was then comforted with the decision no pet owner wants to make, ending their companion and loved one's life. I sat for 5 hours in a waiting room with Felicia and made calls to family members and friends. My girlfriend was out of town but I talked to her over the phone as well. A good friend of mine made it to Friendship around 4:30. As I waited I started having flashbacks to all the wonderful, crazy times Felicia and I shared. I petted Her, and looked her in her eyes and said thank you over and over. We said a prayer and then the doctor gave her the shot to end her life. My face was the last thing Felicia saw. I take some comfort that Felicia and I were together when she passed, and that it was peaceful.

Even though I have two adorable cats, I miss Felicia terribly. Once September of this year approached I wondered how I would mark the 1st anniversary of Felicia's passing? She was born in September, and obviously passed in October. I thought about how it went full circle, that Felicia would enter my life in October of 1995, I would buy a house in October of 2002, and then she would pass in October of 2012. Then my girlfriend, my mom, and my older sister pointed out that I did such a great job. And that I provided Felicia with the best medical care, and that not every pet owner could do that even if they wanted to. That is when it hit me to have a fund set up to help other animals, and owners who get this dreaded disease. It would keep Felicia's memory alive and it would help other animals and owners too. What a great tribute to a special little dog! What is engraved on her urn is so true, "Friend, Companion, and Family."

Hopefully, as this fund grows and research is done, and trials are made available, and eventually a cure is found, that just maybe people who never met Felicia will be so appreciative. After all, as it was said so often, that "everybody loves Felicia."

From her fortunate owner,

  
Jose Harris