



*A touching tribute from Stacy ...*

*When Stacy met Ginger, both mom and dog were overcoming past traumas. With patience, understanding and a lot of love, they stepped into a very happy new beginning, hand in paw.*

There is gentle snoring coming from the dog curled by my side. At 14 years old, her sweet face is highlighted by white and grey fur that glistens in the sunlight. She is relaxed and in a blissful state of slumber... my heart melts. This is the life I would wish for any dog, and I am blessed that this is the life of my dog Ginger; a pit bull rescued from Michael Vick's dogfighting operation in 2007.

We began our journey together in November 2007 — she was a terrified dog who had experienced unknown trauma, and I was a recently divorced 30-something. Together we embarked on our new lives together. From the moment I brought Ginger home, I committed to giving her the best life possible. Ginger was overwhelmed by anything new and unfamiliar, so training, walks and everyday life were an exercise in patience and positive rewards. Most frustrating and heartbreaking was her fear of me; her spirit was so broken she did not know how to trust.

We took it slow in our early weeks and months together. We enrolled in basic dog training classes — it took three rounds of five-week sessions before she stopped trying to hide under chairs and bolt from the classroom. As her confidence grew, so did our bond.

While the classroom may have been a challenging environment for her, she thrived in the outdoors and loved riding in the car. Given this, we started to go on adventures. Any hint that we were going for a ride and Ginger would become super playful and leap into the car ready to go. She would do this whether we were driving around the block or to a destination hours away. To see her eyes light up and her tail wagging brought me such joy! We would hit the local trails and explore for miles... with Ginger sniffing every scent and happily trotting around while I held the leash with a sense of contentment and peace.

Now, nearly twelve years after I brought Ginger home, I look back at the love, companionship and a journey I never could have imagined. We have covered hundreds of miles hiking and thousands of miles driving — exploring beaches, fields of wildflowers, rugged mountains, desert landscapes, National Parks, swamps and so much more.

I know she is getting older and slowing down so this spring we took our most epic adventure — we went on a 7,100-mile road trip. This is a trip I never would have embarked on alone, but with my trusty redheaded co-pilot by my side, a lifetime of memories was created. I watched her prance in the snow in Montana, roll in the red dirt of Utah, stroll the streets of Jackson Hole, eyeball the roaming buffalo in South Dakota, and patiently pose for photos in front of Lambeau Field.

As I stroke Ginger's sleeping face I know I did not just give Ginger the best life possible, she gave me my best life possible.