

Heartfelt Havens for Hospice Dogs

Reverend Sarah Whitten-Grigsby and her foundation ensure terminally ill dogs spend their final days in loving homes, demonstrating the deep bond between humans and their pets.

Analysis by [Dr. Karen Shaw Becker](#)

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- This month's Pet Game Changer is Reverend Sarah Whitten-Grigsby, founder and president of ONE MORE DAY Fospice in southwest Florida
- Rev. Sarah is incredibly grateful for the gift of love dogs offer us, and her foundation is a way to give back by placing homeless dogs with a terminal illness in loving forever homes
- Rev. Sarah's organization uses Facebook to get the word out about hospice dogs in need of guardians, and it is rare that a guardian angel doesn't step up and give each dog a place to live out the rest of their days
- The ONE MORE DAY foundation is a 501(c)3, and is always in need of two essentials: fospice guardians, and private donations

My guest today is Reverend Sarah Whitten-Grigsby, who was nominated for a Game Changer award by Briana E. Rev. Sarah is the founder and president of ONE MORE DAY Fospice, a wonderful organization that provides homeless dogs with foster hospice care in private, peaceful, loving, forever homes.

Giving Back to the Dogs Who Give Us So Much

Rev. Sarah describes herself as an interfaith reverend with an animal specialty.

*"I have a small foundation that places homeless **hospice** dogs in loving forever homes," she explains. "When I was of an age where I began losing loved ones, my dogs were absolutely a great healing presence in my life. I think anyone with a dog is probably nodding vehemently at this point. So, I wanted to give back to dogs for all they give to us. Having been with each of my parents at last breath, I thought, how can we do this for dogs?"*

Given the chance, dogs will stay with us until their last breath. But sometimes they are abandoned, surrendered, or orphaned. There are many reasons a senior dog with a life limiting, non-treatable illness winds up in a shelter or at a rescue or on the street. I did some research and learned about fospice, which means foster hospice.

I think the phrase is a tiny bit misleading, because we think of foster as temporary, but our commitment to our dogs is throughout last breath. Anyway, the word is on the back of our T-shirts and people ask about it, which gives us a great opportunity to talk about what we do.

My co-founder and I created ONE MORE DAY so we could be with dogs throughout last breath. It took us about a year to get up and running, build a reputation, and begin getting referrals. We partner with many rescues and shelters in southwest Florida, so our dogs are mostly local.

The shelters reach out to us when senior dogs with terminal illness are brought to them or found. Once a dog has been qualified for fospice, because we're very specific about that niche, we post them on our Facebook page. And then the angels appear.

These angels are fospice guardians. I don't like the word owner when you're talking about animals. I feel as if we can't own a dog any more than we can own the sea or the sky. And so, 'guardian' seems like a wonderful way to describe someone who's shepherding a dog through their last chapter. Some dogs come back to life and are with their guardians for another year or two.

We've had a couple that lived on for another three years. And then some dogs, by the time we get them, may have only have a week or so, and it's very, very painful. People say, 'I could never do what you do.' I never downplay how difficult it is, but it's also enormously rewarding."

Fospice Guardian Angels Step Up in a Big Way

Social media played a big role in getting the word out about ONE MORE DAY Fospice.

"It started as word of mouth, but definitely Facebook was a big part of how we got the word out," Rev. Sarah explains. "I live in a smallish community and was volunteering for the Humane Society, so they immediately started spreading the word. We started small by approaching the rescues and shelters, asking if we could help, and in due course, the rescues and shelters grew with us in partnership.

Initially I had a picture in my head that we would have like a stable of volunteers waiting to receive our dogs, but it didn't unfold that way. Instead, a dog would come to us, and we would post about him or her on Facebook, and then someone or several people would respond.

We have an application process, of course, but I also always listen to my instincts. I think you can tell when someone's going to be a really wonderful fospice guardian. And the people I've met and worked with over the last seven years are amazing.

Some of them are on their fourth dog with us, one dog at a time. But needless to say, it's emotionally difficult work, and yet there are these incredible human beings who are willing to step up and go through that more than once."

I asked Rev. Sarah if she's able to place each dog quickly. Is there ever a shortage of available guardians? She replied that there are available guardians about 80% of the time.

"Maybe 20% of the time, someone doesn't step up and I feel as if we've failed," she says. "But that is unusual. Sometimes I'll think, 'Oh, this is an incredibly difficult case and no one's going to step up.' And then, people do. So, for the most part, we're successful, I feel. Occasionally not, but that is the exception."

Working in Fospice Is a Mutually Transformative Experience

For those of you who'd like to learn more about Rev. Sarah and the work she's doing, you can visit the **ONE MORE DAY Fospice** site.

*"However, I like people to email me," she says. "I really like people to email me at **onemoredayfoundationinc@gmail.com**. That way I can really give substantial information. They can also see a lot of what we do on our **Facebook** page, and I'm just about to start doing webcasts again."*

We're a 501(c)3 foundation and always looking for donations because we're entirely privately funded. And we're always looking for fospice guardians. Those are the two things we must have, fospice guardians and donations."

I asked Rev. Sarah what she loves most about her work.

"It is incredibly rewarding," she replies. "It is mutually healing. I asked some fospice guardians to write testimonials a couple of years ago for our Christmas mailing, and they wrote amazing things about how their fospice dogs changed their lives. A lovely senior woman wrote, 'This dog, Lucky, is the best thing that's ever happened to me.' The stories of happiness and love and joy and reward are really what make it all worthwhile."

I personally believe fospice is mutually transformative. It's transformative for the dogs, who are able to have a good death surrounded by love. It's the best final gift we can give them. And there are lessons for us, as we support dogs through the process. I think people underestimate how much we grow and evolve and expand our consciousness doing difficult work as volunteers. Emotionally difficult jobs sometimes lead to the greatest growth.

*"I feel the enormity of each loss, even with dogs I haven't met," says Rev. Sarah. "I always feel that departure and spend time doing a bit of grief counseling with my fospice guardians. I've also written a tiny book called **The Staggering Loss of Your Dog: Some Ways to Get Through** to help people navigate the loss of a dog and to know that even though it is so enormously painful, you're not going crazy. Millions of us feel that way."*

Finally, I asked Rev. Sarah, "If you could share one thing from your heart, a tip or trick or idea or thought or concept or wise words, what would it be?"

"I believe it would be to say that if we humans can have loving respect for all the non-human sentient beings, and in this case particularly dogs, but all creatures, the world will be a better place," she replies. "I really believe that. I think we become better people when we do this work, and then the world becomes a better place. I really, truly think that when we are kind and compassionate, those ripples indeed go outward."
