

Volunteer Interview

Meet Gina Muré & Earl Grey

By Barbara Digges

When we resume visiting, Pets on Wheels will welcome a new volunteer—a horse of a different color, Earl Grey. Actually Earl is a pony (probably a Welsh/Shetland cross) who stands about 12 hands (48 inches). Some of you may remember a former volunteer, Sparky, who was a miniature horse. For the first years of his life, Earl's coat was a charcoal gray. Today, he's morphed to nearly white, hence he's usually just called Earl.

Before I get ahead of myself, let's introduce Earl's partner, Gina Muré. Gina is a long-time POW volunteer who twirls many plates in the air (probably literally!); she is a realtor, teaches horseback riding, entertains with Earl, partners with her husband in a custom home building and remodeling business, and does some film work. Gina enjoys hiking, mountain biking, photography, writing, singing, horseback riding, and bringing comfort and joy to children and adults.

Gina became a POW volunteer with her two dogs Chloe and Sox 15 years ago, after seeing a POW bumper sticker. The program resonated with Gina as her grandmother had been in assisted living for many years due to Alzheimer's. Chloe and Sox were sisters, lab mixes, and began volunteering at less than a year. They always visited together at Vi and Cortney's Place, a day center for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The two canines were much loved for the plethora of tricks that Gina had taught them; for example, "Bang, bang" (play dead), "touch" (close cabinet or door), balancing a book on head, dancing (Sox did a do si do and Chloe's dance was a waltz), wearing sunglasses, and more. "Go around" was another of their tricks, meaning they'd make a lap through the house or outdoors. Sox would dutifully go around and return to the starting point. Chloe, however, was a bit of a slacker; she'd frequently take a shortcut or just turn around and come back to the starting point without completing the oval. No treats for you, Chloe!

Gina's fondest memory while visiting with "the girls" was waiting at Cortney's Place as the group wrapped up their morning meeting. As they spied the girls in the hallway, they would light up and get very excited that the girls were there to spend time with them. Although Sox did several Zoom



Since he knows how to sit on a couch, Earl is buttering up "Mom" to let him into the house. Photo by Jennifer Alyse.

sessions during COVID, she missed the hugs and kisses she got from many of the students at Cortney's. Chloe crossed the Rainbow Bridge nearly four years ago; Sox joined Chloe last October. Gina shared that she had lost her dad, Chloe, a close friend, and her 30-year-old horse all within a short period of time. Thankfully, Sox was there to provide comfort and kisses. When Sox was gone, the role of comforter fell to Earl.

Although both dogs loved to swim, Sox—who Gina often called Soxy Momma—enjoyed it most. Sox was still swimming laps just days before she passed. Soxy Momma became the inspiration for SoxyDog Swimming. SoxyDog offers swim time—recreational or therapeutic—and swim lessons at Gina's pool or yours. A special offer from SoxyDog to POW volunteers is at the end of this article.

Earl Grey came to live with Gina when he was two years old. He was at the barn where Gina worked. His owners said



Chloe, Gina, & Sox at the Blessing of the Animals



Sox and Chloe - photo by Gina

they didn't have time for Earl and were looking to rehome him. Gina adopted Earl on the spot—that was 20 years ago.

Like Gina, Earl keeps very busy for an equine. He provides riding lessons; since he is smaller than a horse, adults and children with a fear of horses gain a lot of confidence by hanging out with him. Earl has appeared in several commercials. He's known as a "party animal," giving pony rides and entertaining with his tricks at birthday parties and other gatherings. His favorite gig is appearing as a unicorn! Earl has his own Facebook page, Earl Grey Trick Pony.

Gina has taught Earl a number of tricks: he fetches (retrieves his halter or a hat), does yoga stretches, shakes hands, gives kisses, bows, and sits on a couch! Gina offered a couple of tips on teaching tricks to animals: Go with tricks that use an animal's natural behavior or movement, and don't teach tricks that could reinforce unwanted behaviors. She explained she has not taught Earl to count by pawing with his hoof because he frequently paws when impatiently waiting for attention or a treat. This is a behavior she does not want to reinforce.

Gina was diagnosed with a congenital heart condition at an early age. As she got older, many people—including her dad and doctors—told Gina that she was handicapped and that she shouldn't ride horses or do this and couldn't pursue that, etc. She never believed them because she wasn't in a wheelchair, she had all of her limbs, and she wasn't intellectually disabled. She felt that she was the most blessed person on the planet with a heart that ran on a battery and only a few scars. Although Gina has had at least 10 pacemakers, she considers her heart condition the greatest blessing she has because it gave her a sense of appreciation and keen perspective at a very young age as to what really matters in life.

If you are interested in learning more about how equines are integral to providing therapy, healing, trust, and confidence to humans, check out these local non-profits:

[Mini Angel Eyes](#)

[Reigning Grace Ranch](#)

[Tender Little Hearts Mini Tales](#)



Earl and Gina take a drive around their neighborhood. Photo by Sarah Underwood.



Earl is a hit with the ladies. Photo by Shelby Voss.

Free Dog Swims

SoxyDog Swimming, hosted by Gina Muré, is offering POW volunteers 3 free swims this summer at her home's pool in North Scottsdale. Gina is fully insured and experienced with fearful dogs. Whether your dog is a seasoned swimmer or needing some assistance, Gina is happy to help your dog enjoy the water!

For more information, check out SoxyDog Swimming on Facebook or Gina's website at ginasheart.com



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