

"This is the best way I could thank our heroes!"

Animals bring us such joy and comfort. So when American heroes are deployed overseas and have to leave their pets behind, Linda Spurlin-Dominik steps in to give them the peace of mind—and their furry friends all the love—they need!

Slipping her coffee, Linda Spurlin-Dominik scrolled through the armed forces volunteer message board.

As the daughter of a World War II veteran, the Hot Springs, Arkansas, woman often sought ways to give back to the military. Suddenly, one paragraph seemed to leap off the screen.

A Toledo soldier is about to be deployed, and he has no one to care for his dog, Scooby Doo. He'll have to surrender Scooby to a shelter if he can't find assistance. Can anyone help?

Blinking back tears, Linda thought of how much she loved her own "fur babies." Soldiers on the front lines should never have to worry they'll lose their best friends back home! she thought. And in that instant, she knew: *This is what I was meant to do...*

All for our heroes

From the time she was a little girl, Linda had been surrounded by pets. Even in the days before animal foster care programs, her parents would take in abandoned and injured creatures of all kinds: not only dogs and cats, but ducks, rabbits and squirrels, too!

Linda would also accompany her dad to visit convalescing soldiers in the hospital and to greet military men arriving home at the airport. So when she grew up, Linda kept up the family tradition, volunteering with veteran associations and fostering and adopting dogs.

Now, seeing this desperate message, it was as if Linda's two passions had merged! So though she lived 800 miles away, her fingers flew across the keyboard: *I'll help!*

Fortunately, someone from his hometown stepped up to give Scooby Doo a loving temporary home. Yet Linda couldn't stop thinking of something her dad always used to say: "Where there's one, there are many."

There must be other military heroes in the same position, worrying about what will happen to their furry friends when they're deployed! she realized. And, doing

a search, she found report after report of military pet owners with no one to take care of their dogs, and no such organizations to help.

There *should* be a foster program so soldiers know their pets are safe until they return home. So the pets themselves didn't have to be left at a shelter, at risk of euthanasia, eyes wide with fear and trembling with anxiety as they wondered: Why does nobody love me anymore?

So Linda—with the help of another long-time animal rescuer, Carole Olmedo—created Guardian Angels for Soldier's Pet (GuardianAngelsForSoldiersPet.org), a nonprofit to foster dogs of active-duty service members.

Mission accomplished!

"One of the greatest gifts we receive from dogs is the tenderness they evoke in us."

DEAN KOONTZ

As Linda and Carole began spreading the word about their mission, other animal lovers came forward.

I'd like to start a chapter near me. I'm in the military, and though I'm lucky that I have family who are willing to take my pets, because of you other members of the military won't have to worry, either! one soldier from New Hampshire wrote.

Soon, Linda and Carole were carefully screening potential foster families to find just the right fit, so every soldier who signed up

could be sure his pet would feel at home.

When Holly, an Army National Guard Specialist, was being deployed, she worried her dog, Jasper, would be lonely—and that she would be heartbroken, halfway around the world from Jasper, unable to snuggle with him and toss his favorite ball.

So to keep Holly posted, Jasper's foster mom created a Facebook page.

"Getting to see Jasper's adventures back home was such a gift. And just knowing he was being taken care of and having fun... it gave me peace of mind so I could focus on my work," Holly recalls.

Petty Officer First Class Jamaine felt the same relief when a California couple took in his dog, Miles.

"Miles is my kid. I love him tremendously! So like any parent, I needed to know he would be okay. Guardian Angels lifted that weight off my shoulders. I can't thank them enough!" he beams.

Today, Guardian Angels has fostered more than 725 pets, but for Linda, it's the reunions that matter most.

"When a soldier is reunited with his or her dog, we call it 'Mission Accomplished.' Tails wag. And there's a lot of jumping up and down and crying—from the animals and their owners!" Linda says. "It's a beautiful sight to behold and proof this is the best thing I could ever do to say 'thank you' to our heroes!"

—Michelle Abrams



"Happy reunions are my reward," says Linda. **Above**, Miles greets Jamaïne with a kiss. **Far left**, Buster and Little Girl enjoy a hug from their dad.



More ways you can help military folks!

✓ Send treats to deployed dogs!

They also need heavy-duty toys, big-dog leashes, water bowls and paw pad cream. For a full list of needed supplies, go to PackagesFromHome.org.

✓ Pamper servicewomen with beauty products!

They'd love unopened mani-pedi kits, hair bands, facial masks and lip balms. Go to OperationCourage.org for more suggestions.

Can't foster a pet like Linda did?

Here's how you can help:

✓ Give soldiers the gift of a good book! Have new or gently used paperback books to give away? Send them to the troops to enjoy! Find out more at OperationPaperback.org.

Read or heard a human interest story you think belongs in Woman's World? Send it to us! If you're the first to share it, and we publish it, we'll pay you \$100! E-mail the story with your name, address and phone number to: WWFeatures@WomansWorldMag.com. Or mail to: Scoop, Woman's World, 270 Sylvan Ave., Englewood Cliffs, NJ 07632.

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