

Shelter Dog was Princess in Disguise for Veteran and Her Father

'Taking Leia to the home started as a way to bring my dad joy, but it ended up bringing everyone together and encouraged them to come out of their shells and engage with others'

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A few years ago, Army veteran Heidi Sollars moved her father to an assisted living facility in Arizona so he could be closer to her.

To celebrate his 85th birthday, Sollars decided to get her father a puppy. They went to the shelter and picked one out together.

After she was adopted, Princess Leia, Leia for short, lived with Sollars because it was easier for her to care for the dog. Each day, though, the two visited Sollars' father at his group home.

Soon, Sollars and her father realized how special Leia was.

"We had no idea what a gem we had in Leia," said Sollars. "She is amazing and such a sweet dog."

Others at the assisted living facility recognized that too.

"Leia makes sure to see everyone before we leave and brightens their days with a wagging tail and kisses," said Sollars. "I love to see people light up when she comes by on what would otherwise be a dull day."

Sollars' father passed away in 2019, but because the other residents had grown so fond of Leia, the facility manager asked Sollars if they would keep visiting. She was happy to grant the request.

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Sollars knew Leia was a great comfort to her father, a Navy Korean War veteran. She can tell how much the other veteran residents benefit from spending time with Leia, too.

“Taking Leia to the home started as a way to bring my dad joy, but it ended up bringing everyone together and encouraged them to come out of their shells and engage with others,” she said.

Despite COVID-19, Sollars and Leia have kept visiting, but with a few changes.

“We’ll pass by the windows outside and wave,” she said. “We also participated in a ‘drive-by’ birthday party for a resident who was turning 100. We decorated our car and waved and honked as Leia hung out the window when we drove by the home.”

Sollars cherishes her and Leia’s in-person visits and looks forward to picking them back up once they can do so safely.

“Once COVID-19 restrictions are lifted, I plan to continue making the rounds with Leia. It’s a great joy to hear stories from other veterans, especially those who don’t have nearby family and don’t often get visitors like my dad did. We like to share the love,” she said.

“You realize there are some incredible people if you just take a moment to talk to them. Leia makes that possible.”