Phyllis MacMillan Cunningham, “Phyl”:
Volunteer Extraordinaire, Wife, Mother to Felix and Babe, Scientist, Theologian, Canadian; order to be determined by the reader.

Phyl was many things to many people. You may remember reading about her in one of our recent volunteer spotlights. Phyl did a tremendous amount of work for Peppertree Rescue, leading the fundraising committee, fostering dogs, basically doing anything and everything that needed to be done. It should come as no surprise that anything she involved herself in she did with this very same amount of passion and caring – Phyl was dedicated to many causes in addition to Peppertree; her church, her work, and her family to name a few. Phyl left us too soon this past summer, she went peacefully in her sleep.

She was born in Maple Creek Canada in 1959. Phyl graduated from the University of Alberta with a degree in Laboratory Sciences, and worked in Hospitals around the world including Saudi Arabia. She most recently traveled to Haiti to help technicians use better process and procedures for infectious disease, impervious to the possible danger she may have been in while being there. Phyl was a living breathing example of service to others while drinking from the cup of life, enjoying every possible opportunity.

Marcy from Phyl’s church described with the following words:
“A real person, engaged in living, making meaningful contact with everyone who came into her life. Although Phyl related well with all people, she was deeply engaged with children. Not in an official capacity, but as a person who was genuinely interested in their activities. She played with them, asked them open-ended questions, and admired each piece of artwork they created. And they loved her. During Lent, she learned how to make a Ukrainian egg – the intricately layered wax and dye process that yields stunning results. As usual, she encouraged the children as she was learning herself.”

Peppertree volunteers had this to say about Phyl:

Peg Boughton: “Phyl was truly a force to be reckoned with. She’d kick your butt when it needed to be kicked
but she’d always be the first one there with a hug and kind words when you needed that too. I’ll always love her telling of the stories of how Felix ate the only ripe tomato in the garden or when Babe ran head first into a tree. She’d tell her stories with a glint of mischief in her eye and huge smile on her lips.”

Alissa Barnett: “I started with Peppertree as a foster, but really, I joined through Fundraising, and Fundraising, was, and always will be Phyl. Phyl was clearly in charge, and to put it plainly, she could be intimidating. She told it like it was, she gave orders and she did make you eat weird things, but they were always delicious. She was also the most generous person I know, she truly cared, always rooted for the underdog and she had a sixth sense for detecting when you were at your breaking point and needed a cup of coffee and venting session. I am honored to have worked with her, and to have called her a friend. I will always remember how she smiled while telling a Felix story, and how she still glowed talking about Babe, who is undoubtedly once again by her side.”

Betsy Sommers: “Another great memory of Phyl. When she got lost while we were hunting for Barnum, having left the cell phone with Jack, and we were about to go launch a search for Phyl when all of a sudden she drives up with a whole truckload of hunters! I think she convinced them to help look for the dog for a while, as well as give her a ride back to our place. God, I miss her!”

Sam Stelmaszyk: “When I think of generosity and those that give completely of themselves to what they love, then I think of Phyl. She was one of a kind.”

Mary Ellen Grimaldi: “Phyl was an amazing force of nature. The loss is just incomprehensible. Her smile, her humor, her intelligence, her compassion.”

This loss has been a difficult one for the Peppertree family, however we know that Phyl would want us to keep moving forward with the same energy she always brought to the table. In her memory she continues to generously help Peppetree, her memorial donations have totaled well over $2000, proving that all of those close to Phyl also understand her passion and dedication to our group, thank you.
5th Annual
Spaghetti Dinner

Saturday, October 15th
5p to 8p
Take-out starts at 4p

Cohoes Multi-Service
Senior Citizen Center, Inc.
10 Cayuga Plaza, Cohoes, NY

$12 for adults, $5 for children,
children 5 and under eat for free!

The meals include spaghetti with meat sauce, meatballs and sausage, with a marinara or pesto option for our vegetarian friends. Each meal comes with fresh Italian bread, a Caesar Salad, a beverage and a homemade dessert.

To Benefit Peppertree Rescue
A Rescue for Dogs of Golden Temperament

Peppertree.org
The tradition continues and this year’s Alumni Picnic was again visited by rain, but it never stops us from having fun! Volunteers and visitors alike had a great time meeting each other, meeting dogs and enjoying the delicious food. Joe out did himself with the food, surprising guests with chicken and sausage as well as burgers and hotdogs. All the dogs were well behaved, we expect nothing less from our alumni. Peppertree raised over $800 thanks to all who attended and supported our group and this event. We cannot wait to see you next year, along with the new members of the Peppertree family, even if it rains!
Meet: Heather Rose

Occupation? Social Worker

How long have you been volunteering with Peppertree, and what are your Volunteer Roles? I’ve been with Peppertree since 2006. In the past I’ve been a foster parent for several dogs, although currently my main role is as a member of the Intake Committee. When local shelters reach out to rescue for help with a dog, I evaluate that dog (and with the help of the Committee) determine if it’s a dog we could place or if we could help the dog in another capacity.

4. Name and Breed of dogs in your family? Any other animals in the home?
My dog’s name is Pablo, and he was my first foster (failure) when I started volunteering with Peppertree. He is a lab/hound mix of some sort. We live with two cats - Boris and John John but Pablo doesn’t quite get the idea of co-existing with cats so my boyfriend and I rotate the animals throughout the house.

5. How or why did you come to be a Peppertree volunteer?
I really wanted a dog at the time, but my landlord would not allow it. I also have a passion for helping out in my community, so I thought that dog rescue would be a great way to meet both those needs.

6. What surprised you the most about rescue once you became more involved?
I think what surprised me the most was the community. Everyone in Peppertree is supportive of one another and attempts to help one another out in times of need - I had gotten into rescue for the dogs so it was just a bonus when I discovered that the people were just as great.

7. Do you have a favorite breed?
I grew up with Portuguese Water Dogs and thought I was going to end up with one of those...then Pablo came along and I found myself looking a lot differently at hounds than I ever had before! I do love challenging breeds, although I’ve come to find that I can fall in love with almost any dog and be quite content.

8. What is your favorite activity to do with your dog(s)?
What’s your favorite activity to do with your dog? Going on hikes. Give him a couch and Pablo won’t move all day, but outside on a hike he’s a different dog. He loves scaling rocks (or attempting to, anyway) and howling at squirrels - hiking in the Adirondacks, when we get the chance, is one of my favorite things to do with him.

9. Does one Peppertree Dog stick out in your mind?
Yes! My twice-again foster dog, Tasha, a homely Shar Pei mix. I fostered her once for about four months and she was adopted out. Unfortunately, her owner realized that he was unable to care for Tasha and all of her needs, so she came back to me about a year later and looking a bit worse for the wear. Pablo and I nursed her back to health (she was diagnosed with hypothyroidism and was found to be allergic to several different things, including humans) and after five months she looked fabulous! She was adopted out to a wonderful couple - this time for good - although I have always vowed that if she comes back for a third time she is never leaving my home again.

10. What is your favorite thing about Peppertree Rescue?
The support, I remember when I evaluated this dog at a local shelter and I really liked her, even though she didn’t seem like a good fit for our program at the time. However, I couldn’t bear to leave her there so I pulled her and said that I would foster her...well that was a disaster because Pablo did not like her one bit! Within one day we had a dog with no other place to go that was looking to be a difficult placement. Another foster home stepped up and took her and even though I was upset for making a poor decision, I didn’t receive anything other than support from other members. I don’t think I could do rescue work solo - really, the group is what makes our successes happen.

11. What’s the craziest thing you’ve done for a dog?
Several years ago, I was at my parents’ farm for dinner. My dad told me a stray dog had been hanging around but he wouldn’t come near any humans. I happened to spot him around their pond area - so I headed out with a can of wet dog food and sat down by the pond area. I waited for hours in the rain until the dog, who was absolutely terrified, came to eat the dog food. He warmed up quickly but was still quite skittish. Peppertree agreed to take him and so I ended up fostering him - he ended up becoming TYSON and is now much beloved by a couple and their young son.
If you’re an avid reader of the Peppertree Post then you know that we are constantly fundraising in order to stay true to the Peppertree Mission, which is essentially to rescue dogs based on their temperament first and foremost. This mission means that quite a few dogs come to us in need of serious physical, and emotional rehab, which requires far more resources than specializing in highly adoptable puppies, or other young healthy dogs. What follows is a profile of a dog that epitomizes all things Peppertree, and also demonstrates our dedication to fundraising, so we can continue to place great dogs like Cupid, now Mama.

CUPID, a Mastiff-Shephard mix, came to Peppertree by way of a shelter in New York City. Her owner had been arrested and CUPID was sent to a temporary life behind bars herself.

The shelter reported that she was approximately 9 years old and had a “mass” on her abdomen. There was also a wonderful description written by one of the shelter staff members. This caring volunteer described her as being “charming” with a variety of ear positions, facial expressions and an extended vocabulary.

Peppertree agreed to take her and Cupid arrived at her foster home, straight from the shelter, where it was readily apparent that she had kennel cough. A trip to the Vet the following morning resulted in a diagnosis of pneumonia. The “mass” on her abdomen turned out to be a mammary tumor about the size of a grapefruit. It was rather pendulous and swung from side to side as she walked. Cupid rarely moved faster than a quick walk – we assumed that the swinging of the tumor was fairly uncomfortable.

There was also a second mammary tumor that was less pronounced. The Vet believed that both tumors were operable and her surgery was scheduled after she recovered from the pneumonia. The Vet also believed that the tumor had been present for years in order for it to get as big as it was and to calcify as it did. Based on her medical exam, the vet also estimated that Cupid had had a litter of puppies every time she went into estrus.

Two days before surgery, Cupid developed pyometria. The Vet said the spay would be more involved but given the pyometria is would also be necessary to perform the ovariohysterectomy for her safety. Her surgery was successful and the tumors were removed.

The staff at the vet’s office also found her “charming” and could not believe that after having had such extensive surgery she was still trying to entertain with her vocalizations and facial expressions. As a result of the removal of the tumors and spay, Cupid lost a little over five pounds.

Cupid was then listed on the Peppertree website as being available for adoption. Within a few days an application came in for Cupid. As with all Peppertree adoptions all of Cupid’s medical history was disclosed to potential adopters. The wife was sold but needed to discuss Cupid with her husband. They decided to take Cupid on a trial basis. One of the deciding factors for the husband was that Cupid survived breast cancer as his mother had.

Cupid’s adopters were swept off their feet. They fell in love with her loving nature and especially with her loving nature and especially with her facial expressions, ear gyrations and vocalizations that they describe as a combination of a “Wookie and a cow.” Cupid had found her forever home and has been renamed Mama. She can now run freely without the hindrance of a grapefruit sized tumor.
From Cupid’s Adopter:
(Cupid) Mama’s doing awesome and we’re loving her company and how well she’s fit into our family. We love how she talks to us with little groans and whimpers when she wants a belly rub. She is the sweetest girl, and I love taking her for walks with Bella around my neighborhood. She met some kids coming out of a daycare the other day, and it was so nice to let them pet her without fear that she would be stressed or make a bad impression. She has been polite, kind, patient and loving to everyone who meets her, even my mother loves her and trusts her alone with her Boston Terrier (who she is normally super-protective of with other dogs).

She has been an absolute joy, and we are so grateful that she was saved by everyone at Peppertree. We received her medical records, and read the description of her behavior when she was alone and scared at the pound, scheduled to be euthanized. Even in a strange place, with that huge tumor hanging off her, she was her sweet self with the person doing her temperament test. Thanks again for everything you do, and for hooking us up with the wonderful dog that is Mama! ~Erica and Bob

Cupid’s Financials: $2180 in Vet bills, $1853 after discount, after adoption fee, cost to Peppertree: $1678. Generous donations and attendance at Peppertree events make this work possible.