



# SHELTER DOGS



by Meish Goldish

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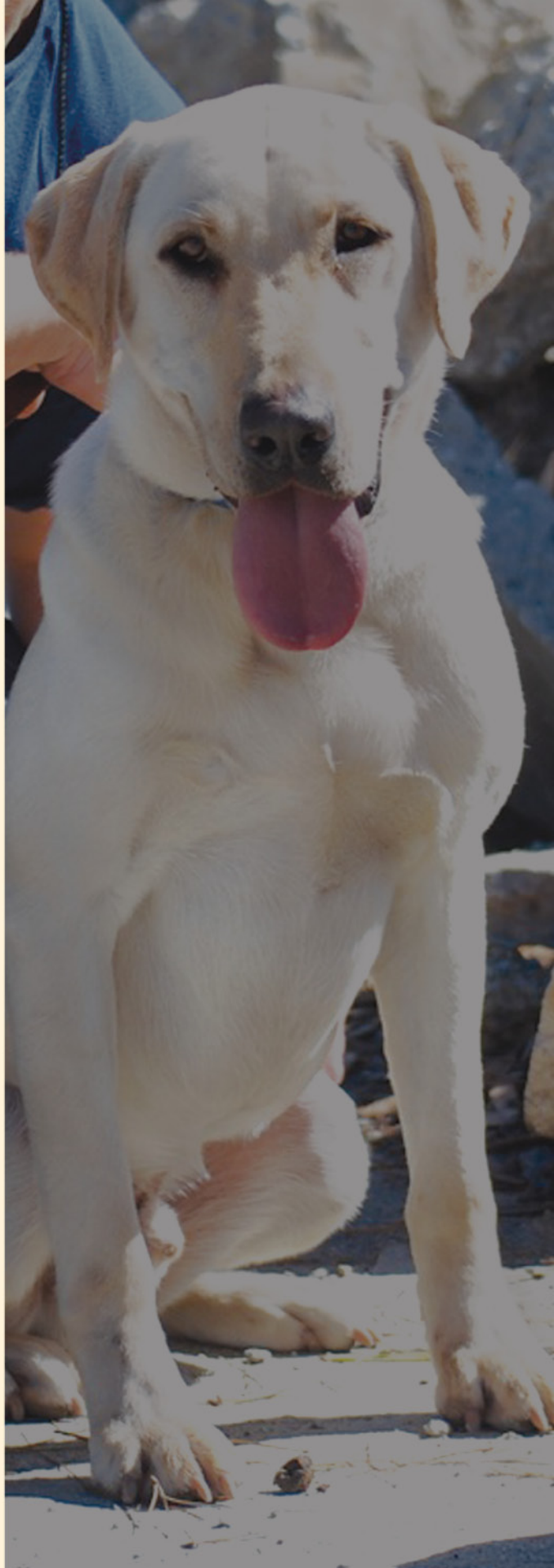
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# A Dog Named Bear

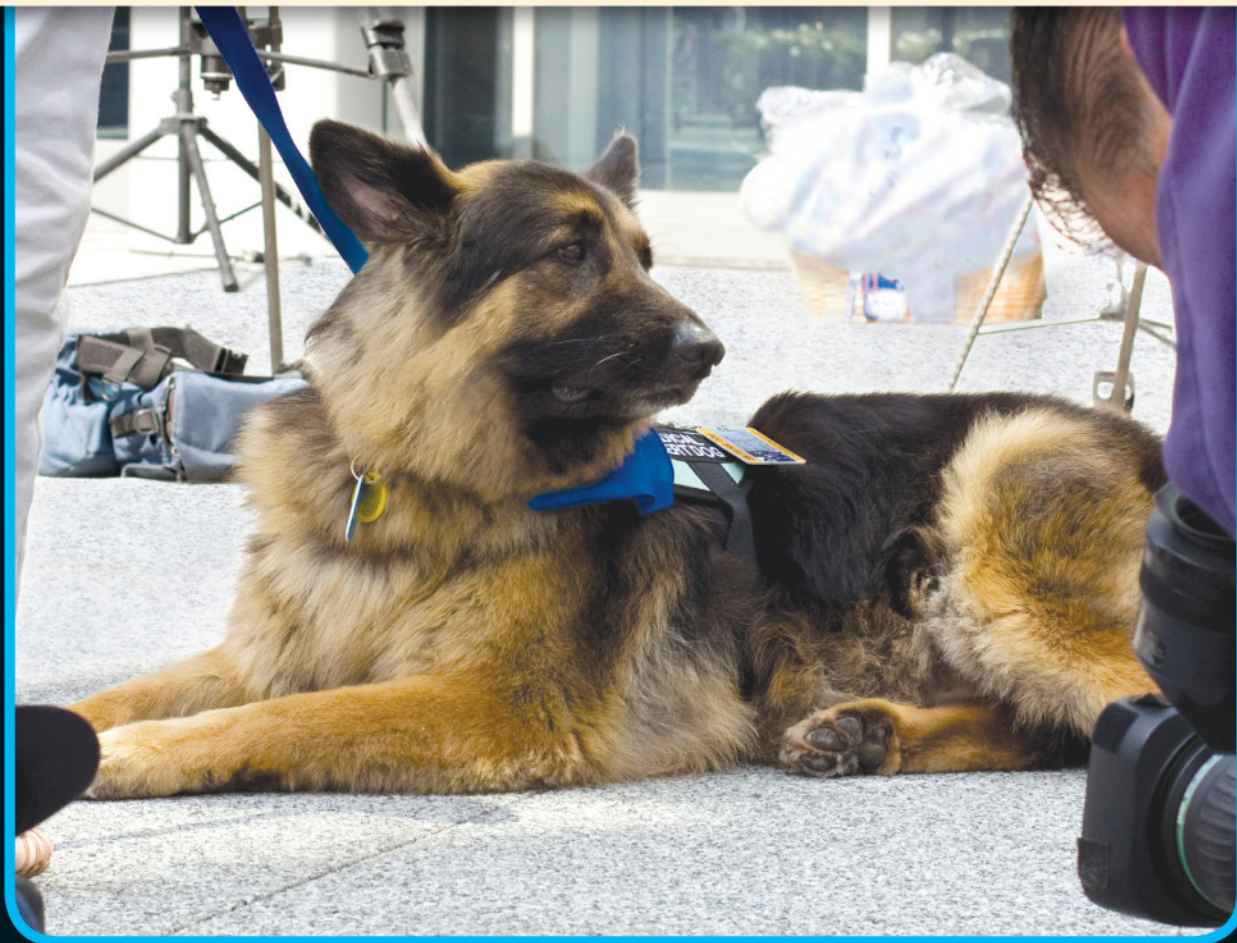
In 2010, Debbie Zeisler **adopted** a huge dog named Bear from an **animal shelter** in Texas. Debbie, who suffers from **seizures**, felt an immediate connection with the 100-pound (45 kg) German shepherd. Little did Debbie know that one day Bear would save her life.



Debbie Zeisler  
with her dog, Bear

Experts believe that Bear can smell a special scent that Debbie's body gives off before she has a seizure.

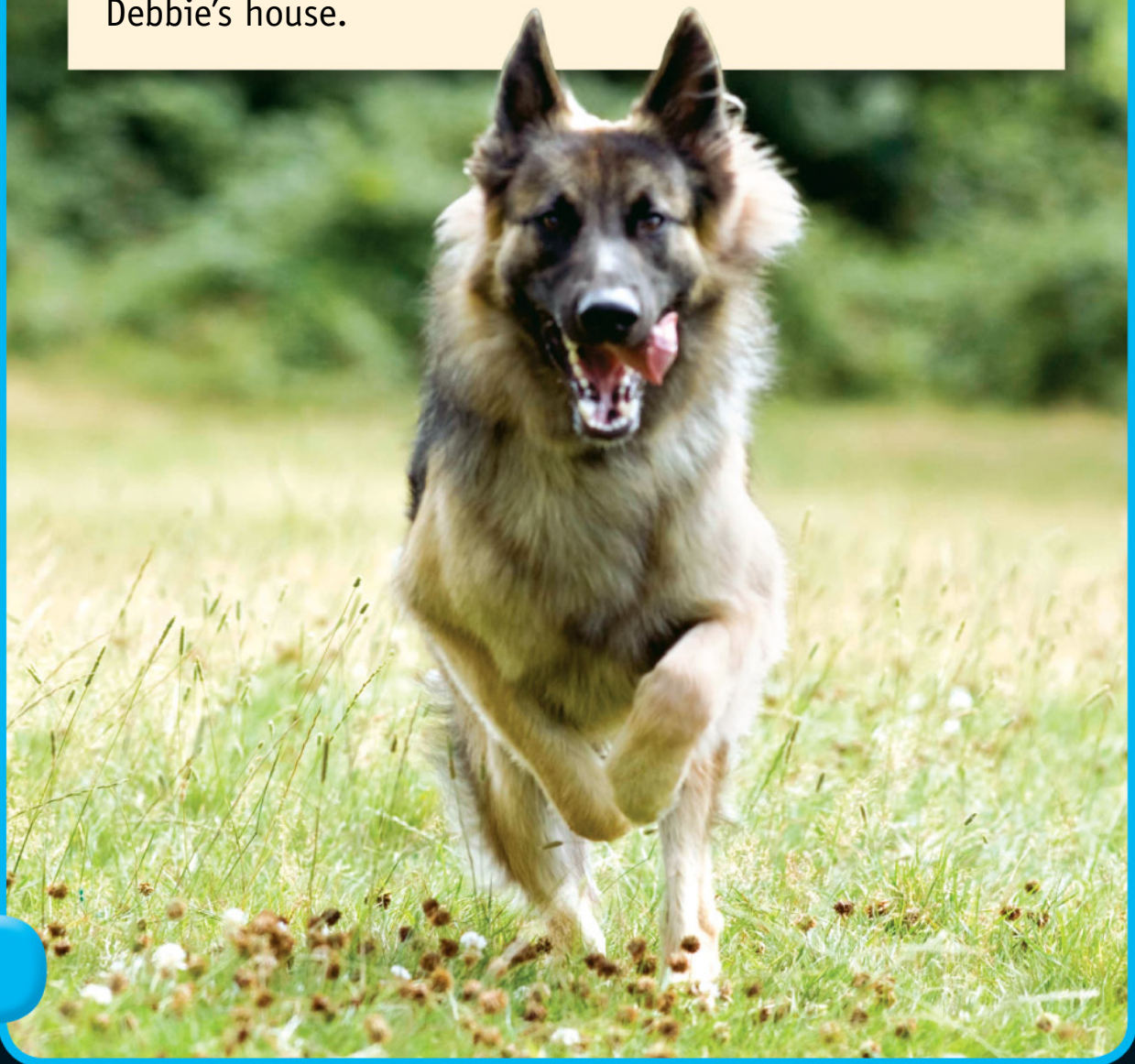
One hot summer day in 2011, Debbie left her house to check her mailbox. All of a sudden, Bear blocked her path by moving his body in front of hers. He sensed that she was going to have a seizure. Unaware of what was coming and eager to get her mail, Debbie continued walking. Then the seizure struck. Debbie fell down and banged her head. She lay **unconscious** in front of her house. Could Bear help her?



Some dogs can be trained to know when their owner is about to have a seizure. However, Bear never received any training.

# Racing Against Time

As Debbie lay on the ground, Bear ran to get help. Using his large paws, Bear scratched on the front door of each neighbor's home. Luckily, two **animal control officers** finally spotted the dog. As soon as they saw the tag on Bear's collar that identified him as a **service dog**, they knew they had to find his owner. The officers quickly searched the neighborhood until they found Debbie's house.



When Bear and the officers arrived, Debbie was awake but dizzy and confused. The officers called an ambulance. Luckily, Debbie recovered quickly from her fall. For his quick action, Bear received the National Hero Dog Award from the SPCA of Los Angeles in 2012. "This just goes to show how amazing shelter dogs can be," said the SPCA's president.



**SPCA stands for the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. The organization works to keep animals healthy and safe from abuse.**

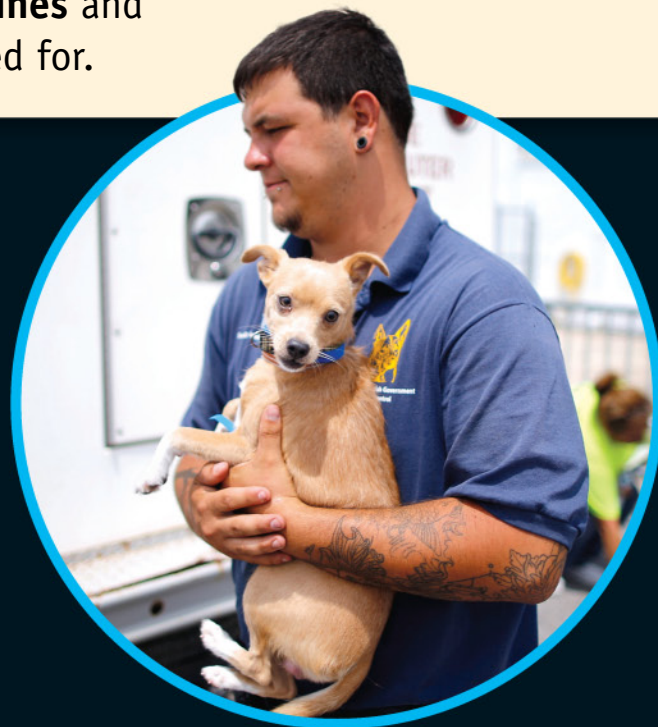
**"I rescued him. He rescued me," said Debbie, speaking of her special companion, Bear.**

# Animal Shelters

Like Bear, many dogs are adopted from animal shelters. These are organizations that care for homeless pets and try to find homes for them. While shelters take in many kinds of animals, most of the pets who live there are dogs and cats. Each year, as many as three million dogs are placed in shelters in the United States.



Why are so many dogs put into shelters? Sometimes, their owners become ill or don't have time to care for them. As a result, owners might drop off their pets at a shelter, hoping someone will adopt them. Other times, people simply **abandon** their pets on the streets. Abandoned dogs become **strays** that are forced to live on their own. Luckily, animal control officers are often able to catch these **canines** and bring them to a shelter to be cared for.



An animal control officer bringing a stray dog to a shelter

There are between 3,500 and 5,000 animal shelters in the United States.

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