



Maezie

by Christine Crews

I remember the first time I saw her; she was a chunky red and white puppy, the last puppy left in her litter. She seemed to have a permanent smiling expression on her face, and I thought she would be the perfect companion for my husband. We picked out the Staffordshire Bull Terrier breed because of their silly personality and their big hearts with enough love and sloppy kisses to go around. We realized when we brought her home that Maezie was all of these things, and more. The little dog who was originally meant to be a couch buddy for my husband, quickly bonded to me, and made it clear the couch life just wasn't for her; she wanted a purpose and was happiest when she was learning new things. What started out as teaching her a few cute party tricks, quickly escalated into obedience classes, agility classes, and rally classes.

As we trained more and more we were finally ready to enter shows. We began to travel more and spent many weekends together competing in Agility, Obedience and Rally. Maezie and I made many friends

and teachers during our training and travel and Maezie loved to show her stuff to anyone who would watch. After a year of traveling and showing, I learned about the Staffordshire Bull Terrier National Specialty, a show where over one-hundred dogs of Maezie's breed would come together to compete in Conformation, Agility, Rally and Obedience. The location of the show for 2016 was St. Louis, Missouri at the 'famous-to-the-dog-world' Purina Farms, a place I had always dreamed of visiting, and now was my chance to go with my furry partner and best friend, Maezie.

I had my entire trip planned in my head well over a year in advance only to find out a month later I was pregnant! I canceled all of my plans figuring traveling with a dog and a baby just wasn't feasible, but Maezie and I continued to train and show locally for the remainder of the year, and the remainder of my pregnancy. Maezie finished 2015 as one of the top 10 in her breed for both Agility and Rally, I felt she really deserved the trip to show her stuff. After the birth of a happy,



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healthy baby boy, and surviving the sleeplessness of his first few months of life I decided we would brave the trip after all, two dogs, my husband and a 5 month old baby... Maybe it was the deliriousness from all those months lacking in sleep, but we were heading to St. Louis, Missouri to Purina Farms after all.

I could see Maezie's excitement building as we started loading the car. She was very familiar with watching us puzzle piece all the dog show gear into the car, and there was nothing she loved more than a good road trip. Her whole body wagged as we loaded the crates, beds, bowls, food, toys, treats, all this on top of all the gear needed for a 5 month old human infant. The car was packed full, but Maezie happily claimed her spot in the back and laid in her bed in the car while we crammed in the last of the odds and ends. Maezie was happily asleep before we ever made it to the highway for the long 16+ hour drive ahead of us.

The drive was long, but thankfully uneventful, Maezie looked forward to all of the rest areas where people would smile and tell her how cute she was. For the most part she slept the whole trip except for when the baby would fuss I would see her stand up and peer over the back seat to make sure he was alright, Maezie has always lived up to the Staffordshire Bull

Terriers' role of being a "nanny dog" and checks on the baby frequently to make sure he's ok. Between the dogs and the baby, our 16 hour trip turned into an 18 hour one.

We arrived in Saint Louis in the early afternoon which gave us enough time to get to Purina Farms and set up all of our things before the events started the next morning. As we pulled through the gates we saw the iconic red roofs that Purina is known for. The grounds were immaculate; I dubbed it "Doggy Disneyland" jokingly with my husband. Finally after driving all through the night and into the next day, we were here.





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We spent the next few hours roaming the quiet building. We were one of the first to arrive to set up and the building was almost empty, aside from the crisp white rings that were already set up for the shows starting in the morning. We took advantage of the quietness and did some quick training in the hallways. We practiced our heeling, our sits, our downs, then spent some time just exploring while Maezie sniffed around the building. I wanted her to be settled and comfortable, so after our training I was happy to let her sniff, roll, and we ended our evening with a quick game of fetch while watching more people trickle in to set up.

The quietness of Purina was quickly gone as we got to our hotel. We decided to stay at the “host hotel” which is where the majority of the other competitors were staying. When we got out of the car there were dogs everywhere! Dogs in the parking lot, dogs walking with their owners down the sidewalks, dogs in the lobby, the hallways, no matter where we turned there were dogs everywhere! Maezie and I took a long walk with the baby in tow while my husband hauled all of our gear to our room. It’s mind boggling all of the things needed for two dogs, two adults, and a baby for a weekend stay in a hotel! Maezie happily greeted all the new people and dogs with her full body wagging. She had always loved traveling

and staying in hotels, but this was her first time being at one with so many other Staffordshire Bull Terriers and she was just smitten with all the attention she was getting around the hotel. We scoped out dinner to go and had a quiet evening eating in the hotel room, saving a few bites for the dogs, of course.

The next morning as the alarm went off at a way too early 5am, it was evident Maezie knew today was all about her! She bound out of her crate and jumped at the door as I grabbed her leash and dashed for the elevator as soon as the door opened. After a short car ride, we were back at Purina Farms ; this time the quietness of the building we saw the day before was gone and replaced with people and dogs filing in, the bustle of everyone setting up the last of their things, people playing with their dogs, dogs bring groomed, and people chattering to each other and their dogs.

Our first event of the day was Rally, a type of Obedience where there are signs in the ring telling the handler what they are to do. Some are as easy as ‘sit’, others are much more complicated like having the dog back up while staying in heel position or requiring the dog to work away from the handler. The handler gets to walk the course and get familiar with the signs before bringing the



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dog into the ring to compete. I felt myself get a little nervous walking the course, with a new baby at home, Maezie and I hadn't trained as much as I would have liked in the months leading up to the show. I reminded myself I had come for the experience, not the ribbons and Maezie sure didn't know if we came in first or last place; as long as she got a biscuit when we were done she was happy.

I got Maezie out of her crate and warmed her up with a walk around the building, and then we warmed up back in the building, waiting on our turn. Finally our number was called and we stood at the ring entrance as the judge invited us in. The judge looked and asked "are you ready?" I took a deep breath and answered "Ready" as I looked down at Maezie. She looked back at me with her silly Stafford smile and we made our way around the course together. We did each sign as a team. Our performance was not perfect but we made it through the course, both smiling together from beginning to end. As we finished and the spectators started to clap and Maezie wiggled her whole body with excitement, I knew the whole trip was worth it.

Here I was with my supportive family, my amazing dog, and all the friends we had made on our journey, both old and new, I wasn't prepared for how much a 14" tall dog

could change my life and I am forever grateful for each day we have together, especially days like these where everything seems to come together perfectly. We had a very successful weekend with lots of blue ribbons, trophy's, and dog toys; but the best moments of the trip were spent sitting in the grass outside of the show building watching the dogs happily chase my husband up and down the rolling hills while I sat with the baby, who would giggle every time Maezie would come up and lick his toes.

As we started our long journey home, I couldn't help but think that, win or lose, I was driving home with the best dog at the show ... my silly, wiggly, wagging, smiling little friend who has opened up so many doors for me, but has helped me make so many new friends, and always has extra kisses waiting for me on both the good days

