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SECTION C1

# Saved from Death Row, Sparky Lives the Good Life

BY HEATHER RETZLAFF  
 hretzlaff@bcnnew.com

From coast to coast, kids are jumping on the bandwagon to cheer on one lucky dog. Sparky, a pointer-pit bull mix, was saved five years ago from a New York City pound by Adopt-A-Dog, a Greenwich-based animal rescue agency. After spending a few months at the organization's Armonk, N.Y., facility, the 1-year-old puppy was taken home by the Arruzza family, who had seen a picture of the dog at an adoption open house at Best Friends Kennel in Norwalk.

"When Sparky came out of the door, she saw my son, sort of ran up to him, knocked him to the floor, pinned him to the floor and kept licking his face," said Rick Arruzza. "That was it, we had to take Sparky. We always say we chose Sparky, but Sparky chose us."

From the start, Sparky showered her love and playfulness on the Arruzza family, who lives in Stamford. When the family picked up Sparky in Armonk, Arruzza asked his son, David, who was eight at the time, to hold onto Sparky's leash so she wouldn't run into the street.

"The next thing we see is Sparky running down, my son is holding on [and he's being dragged] on his butt, going

"If it wasn't for that kennel worker, whose name we don't know, and Adopt-A-Dog, Sparky wouldn't be here at all. She was rescued from death row just in the nick of time," said Arruzza.

As a sort of payback to Adopt-A-Dog, Arruzza decided to write *Sparky's Walk*, a book about his dog and her adventures during her twice-daily walks through the neighborhood. "After three years of walking a dog every night, it gives me a lot of time to think. Maybe if I put a few of these together, maybe I can make a nice little story out of it. She basically wrote the story herself," said Arruzza.

"She would meet people at night or meet some of the animals in the book at night and come across these little stories or incidents along the way."

In the nine-month process, Arruzza cre-

ated *Sparky's Walk* at local bookstores, Arruzza and Sparky visit schools in Cos Cob, Stamford, San Francisco and Miami Beach, Fla. At each school, Arruzza reads Sparky's Walk to children in preschool through fifth-grade, discusses Sparky's background and her ties to Adopt-A-Dog, a person's value to his or her community and how everyone possesses a special talent.

"Most of the attention I've gotten at schools is embarrassing in a good way because it's only me," said Arruzza, telling how students will ask question after question, hug him when he leaves and send him thank-you notes.



GREENWICH CITIZEN photos / Heather Retzlaff

Sparky enjoys the shade of a tree on a warm day earlier this week.



Rick Arruzza scratches Sparky's ear while she relaxes in her backyard.

down the driveway. But he held on so Sparky didn't run out into the street," said Arruzza. "It was like a scene from 'The Little Rascals.'"

For the Arruzza family, life with Sparky hasn't calmed down that much over the past five years. Still as youthful as ever, Sparky greets visitors with doggie kisses and a constantly wagging tail.

"We thought she would grow out of the puppy stage, but actually I think she's just happy to be alive after all the things she's gone through. She's just loving life," said Arruzza.

In Sparky's earliest years lies the biggest story for the black and white specked dog: a kind kennel worker and an even kinder Adopt-A-Dog worker.

"In New York City, the kennels are really packed, so usually the dogs are either euthanized as soon as they show up or they get a couple days reprieve. And they have an arrival date, so when your number's up, your number's up," Arruzza explained.

"There was a kennel worker there who fell in love with Sparky and kept hiding her and changing her arrival date, waiting for someone to adopt her or an organization like Adopt-A-Dog to come and get her. Adopt-A-Dog came one day and loaded up their van with animals and the guy came out and said, 'You have to take one more dog,'" Arruzza said.

Although the van was filled, Sparky rode shotgun with the driver, showering him with licks and kisses until they reached Greenwich.

ated the text, found an illustrator and printed the first run of the 24-page black and white book. With a self-imposed deadline of Adopt-A-Dog's annual fund-raiser, Puttin' on the Dog, Arruzza completed the book and began selling copies for \$7.95 each. One dollar from each sale is donated to the organization that helped save Sparky's life. To date, more than \$1,700 has been donated through the sale of the books.

"He's fantastic. He keeps going and going like the Energizer Bunny," said Kerrin Coyle, director of operations at Adopt-A-Dog. "It's so nice that there are wonderful people like [Arruzza] out there would do something like [write a book and donate profits]. And he does it first because he loves the dog, but also because he's thankful for Adopt-A-Dog for saving Sparky."

In addition to signing copies

"One thing that I've loved, that's been unbelievable, is that we get all this fan mail and thank yous. People are so appreciative. There's a place on the Web site ([www.sparkyswalk.com](http://www.sparkyswalk.com)) where the kids can send in messages to Sparky or questions and we get [messages from] all around the country," he said.

With all his long hours spent at the computer writing *Sparky's Walk*, working with illustrator Pilar Newton, signing copies at bookstores and visiting schools, Arruzza said it's been worth the effort and expense.

"It's been a totally positive experience. It's been a lot of work but a lot of fun."

Copies of *Sparky's Walk* are available at local bookstores and online at [www.sparkyswalk.com](http://www.sparkyswalk.com). Upcoming events for Sparky include Adopt-A-Dog's "A Chance to Howl and Wine" benefit on April 30, the Fairfield County Chapter of the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society's annual dinner dance on May 6 and a book signing at Just Books, Too on June 5.



Contributed photo

Co-chairs of Adopt-A-Dog's April 30 benefit, "A Chance to Howl and Wine," spend time with some four-legged friends at the Delamar Hotel where the event will take place from 6:30-9:30 p.m. For information, call 629-9494.