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Marine's Best Friend

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A familiar quote sums up the relationship between humans and dogs: "My goal in life is to be as good of a person as my dog already thinks I am."

One dog and his person are helping convicted inmates at Maine State Prison—many of them veterans—find hope and purpose training service dogs for disabled veterans. Author Craig Grossi details his experiences with his dog Fred in a new book titled *Second Chances: A Marine, His Dog, and Finding Redemption* being published this month by William Morrow & Dey Street Books, a division of HarperCollins Publishers.

The book is the second installment in the tales of Fred and Grossi. The first book, *Craig & Fred: A Marine, A Stray Dog,*

and How They Rescued Each Other, was published in 2017 and details how then-Sergeant Grossi of the U.S. Marine Corps met a stray with "a big goofy head and little legs" while on patrol in a remote part of Afghanistan and began feeding him beef jerky. The little pup with the big heart won over Grossi's RECON unit, who helped him smuggle the dog out of the country after Grossi's tour of duty.

Once stateside, the rescuer became the one who needed rescuing: Fred helped Purple Heart recipient Grossi heal from his wounds and deal with Post Traumatic Stress as the duo began traveling America together, spreading a message of "stubborn positivity."

"Telling the story to strangers in dog parks and street corners around Washing-



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Author Craig Grossi and his dog Fred have shared their uplifting story of courage, friendship and positivity on The TODAY Show, Rachael Ray, and the viral video website The Dodo. Fred's Facebook and Instagram accounts reach more than 120,000 fans. To find out more about Grossi and Fred, visit fredtheafghan.com.



ton, D.C., made me realize how unlikely it was that Fred and I found one another at all," Grossi relates. "It reminded me of how easily it all could have gone wrong for him and for me. Most of all, after a few years of being home and struggling to find purpose with my life after the military, our story became my new mission. It wasn't that I wanted to write about myself—that was the difficult part for me. I wanted people to see how hard we worked on behalf of the people of Sangin [in Afghanistan]. Looking back on a long and confusing conflict, I found peace in memories of my fellow Marines fighting alongside one another to bring stability to a region that needed it badly."


Grossi served in the Marine Corps for eight years, deployed to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, as a correctional specialist and then later to Afghanistan in human and counter intelligence. "After separating in 2011, I worked as a civilian contractor for the Defense Intelligence Agency in Washington, D.C., for a little less than two years. In the fall of 2012, I began college classes at Georgetown University, leaving the DIA to pursue my degree full time.

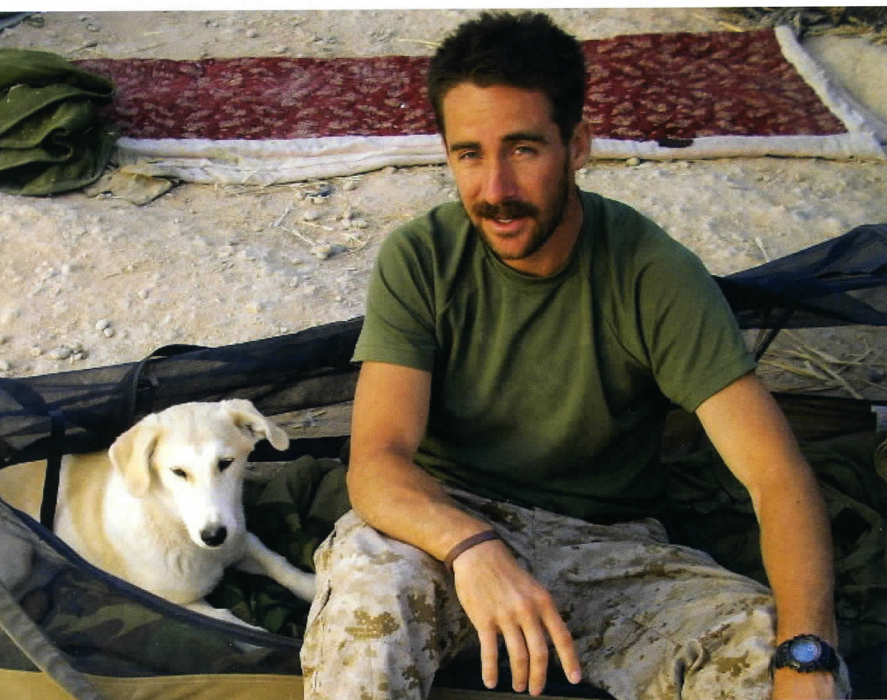
Through academic writing and study, I began to rediscover my love of writing. I had a story to tell, and after my time at Georgetown I realized that telling the story of Fred was not only what I wanted to do, it was what I had to do."

In the course of their travels, Grossi and Fred visited Maine State Prison, the penitentiary that inspired Stephen King's 1982 novella *Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption* and the subsequent movie. He learned of a program run by the nonprofit America's Vet Dogs, in which convicts work to transform puppies into service dogs for disabled veterans. "The idea was to teach inmates who are former members of the military to train purebred Labradors over a period of 18 months," Grossi writes. "Under the guidance of the inmates, the puppies are transformed into service dogs that can be paired with veterans outside the prison who are suffering from physical and mental challenges. These incredible dogs go on to give struggling vets a newfound sense of freedom, freedom that they lost as a result of trauma incurred defending ours." Grossi began volunteering at the prison,

working with imprisoned men who were themselves veterans. "The men at Maine State are given a second chance—something that I believe everyone deserves," he notes. "There was something special going on inside its walls, and it was calling out to me. I quickly realized that the program and its men had something to show the world.

"We're quick to give second chances to celebrities, politicians, and famous athletes when they screw up, but when it comes to those who've been convicted for their mistakes, we too often dismiss them as forever lost," Grossi adds. "It is my hope that the reader understands how important the lives of our nation's incarcerated are. In many ways, they represent everything we are supposed to value as a culture and a country. America loves a comeback story, and our incarcerated men and women are deserving of their own second chances."

When not traveling with Fred, Grossi devotes his time to veterans' organizations, including the USA Warriors Ice Hockey Program and K9s on the Front Line. He lives in Maine with his partner, Nora, and their dogs, Fred and Ruby. "What I love most about our story is that people seem to take whatever they need from it," Grossi says. "For some, it is about love, for others it is about trust and compassion. If there is one common theme to our story, I would have to say it's the power of something I call 'stubborn positivity.' It's an idea that is born from my first moments with Fred, when he wagged his tail at me despite having every reason not to. It was that decision that brought us together and changed both of our lives. So if a little stray dog on a hot Afghan battlefield can find it in himself to wag his tail, then the rest of us should be able to do the same... regardless of how hopeless we might feel." 



From left: Grossi holding Fred in Afghanistan, Grossi and Fred at a speaking gig, and the pair posing in Afghanistan