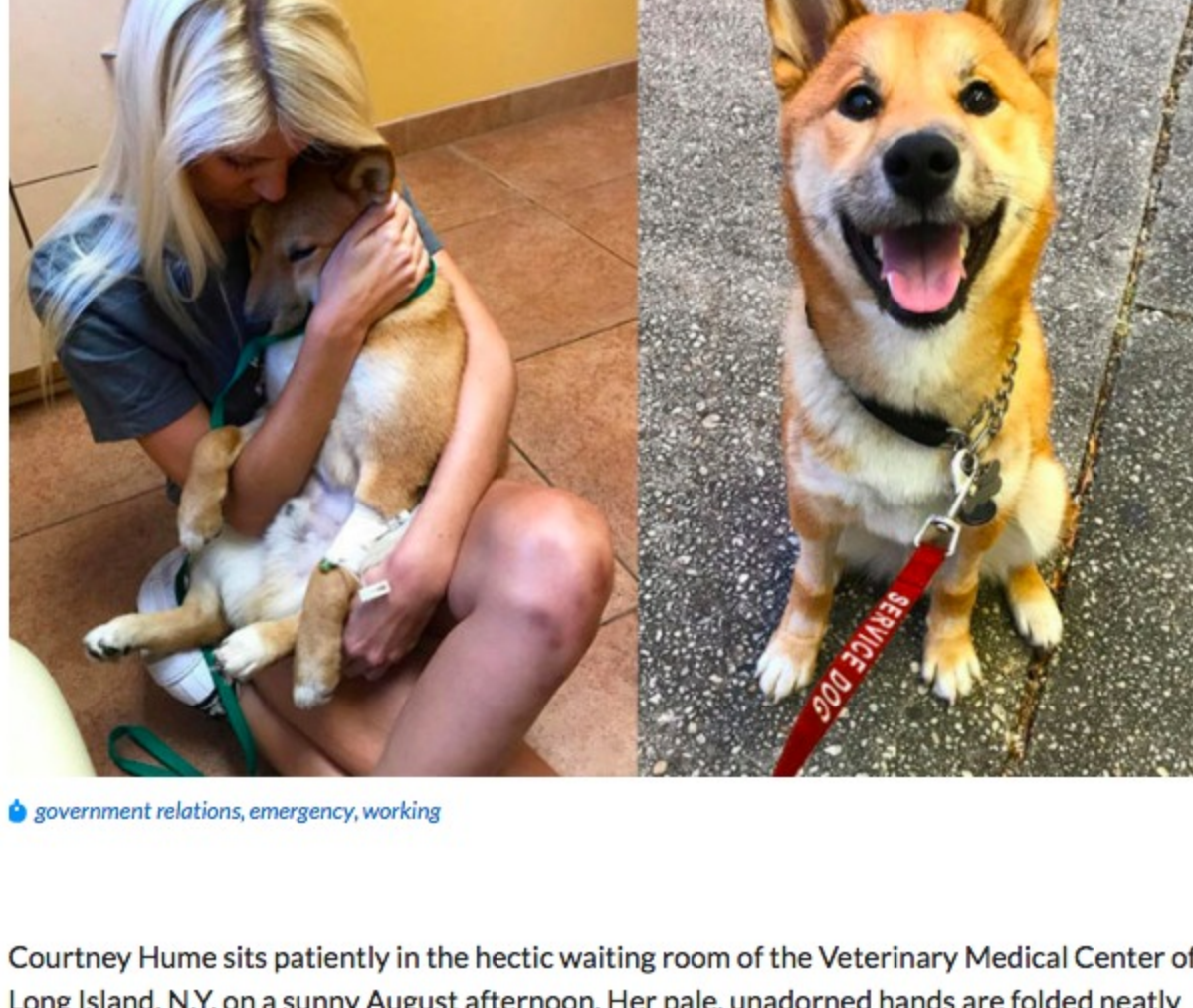




# A Lesson in Not Giving Up: A Dog and His Owner's Story of Survival

By Robin A. Rothman  
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government relations, emergency, working

Courtney Hume sits patiently in the hectic waiting room of the Veterinary Medical Center of Long Island, N.Y., on a sunny August afternoon. Her pale, unadorned hands are folded neatly in her lap, loosely grasping a red leash marked with "Service Dog" in clear white letters along each side. At the end of that leash, facing her with soft, trusting eyes and ignoring the hustle and bustle of other humans and pets, is Chiyo, her eight-month-old red Shiba Inu.

Those eyes, and Courtney's unique ability to interpret them, are the fundamental reason Chiyo is alive at all today. Right now, however, Chiyo is simply communicating with Courtney that he is about to be sick, possibly because of all the excitement, or maybe because of his medication.

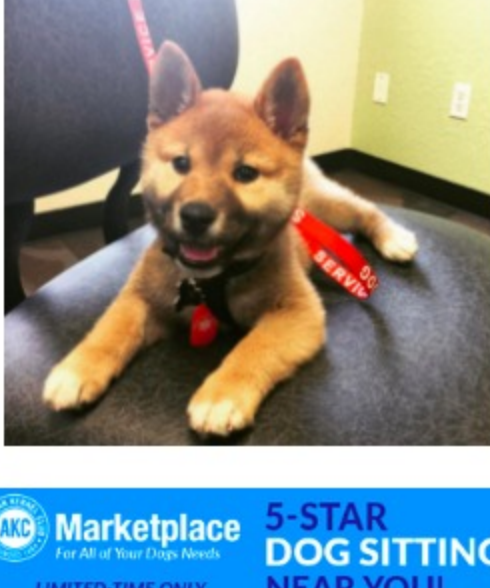
Courtney's mother, who lives on Long Island, and has already checked them in for their appointment, springs into action, while Chiyo works to expel what's troubling him. The mess is quickly cleaned up with no fuss, and Chiyo lies contentedly played out, his shaved bare belly resting on the cool, clinically gray floor. After a quick weigh-in for Chiyo (everyone is thrilled to see that his weight has improved since his last visit), Courtney shares how she and Chiyo found one another.

In that moment, everything about their relationship came down to one simple truth: that there is absolutely no limit to what we will do for those we truly love.

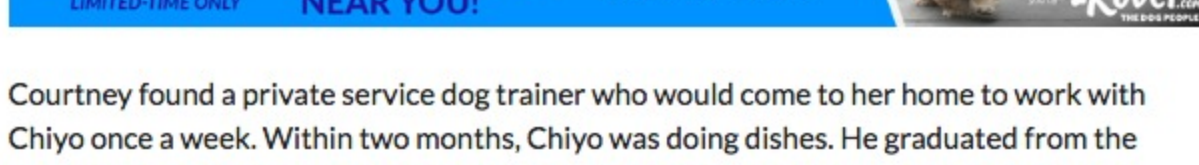
Courtney, who at 29 years old has limited mobility due to severe back issues, was frustrated by what she felt was a lack of independence. "I couldn't do laundry, I couldn't go out on my own because if I dropped something, if I dropped my car keys, oh well." Living in Florida, far from family and with her husband frequently required to work late, her options were limited.

When she stumbled upon an online video of [Helper Dog Harlow](#), she was amazed by the pup's ability to do incredible things for her owner — the very things Courtney felt she needed assistance with. She got the thumbs-up from her orthopedic doctor and researched breeds; she searched her heart. She decided she didn't want a large dog; and she knew she wanted an intelligent dog, a dog that would use his instincts to wake her up if she fainted, not wait for a command.

Courtney's heart was set on a Shiba Inu, but the breeder she contacted was hesitant. "I messaged her and said 'I want a service dog. I've seen other Shiba Inu doing this... I think this is the breed for me.' And she (the breeder) was like, 'I don't know about a service dog, but you can try.'"



Courtney met with the breeder, and as soon as she picked up Chiyo, a dynamic duo was born. "He was shaking, scared, but then he licked my face... I knew."



Courtney found a private service dog trainer who would come to her home to work with Chiyo once a week. Within two months, Chiyo was doing dishes. He graduated from the program, having learned not only how to assist Courtney by loading and unloading the dishwasher and washer and drier, opening and closing the fridge, and retrieving items, and picking up dropped items, but also the proper manners to display in public, and how to concentrate on Courtney's needs and not be distracted. He learned, also, how to handle the very situation Courtney worried about.

"I fainted, and he came over and licked my face to wake me up. He knew what to do," she said.

In that Long Island waiting room, an attendant calls Chiyo's name from the back, and the pup springs to attention. Courtney and her mom follow, as they're led to a room with drab beige walls, sprinkled with pictures of dogs and cats that have handwritten notes on them.

The attendant bends down, reaches her open palm out, cups Chiyo's face, and asks him directly how he's doing.

"He's doing great," Courtney replies, proudly. "He's a normal, regular dog. Like nothing ever happened."

But something did happen.

Two-and-one-half months prior, Courtney had taken Chiyo to the vet for a routine visit. Within 72 hours of that appointment, Courtney says she noticed that Chiyo was uncharacteristically lethargic. Two days after that, she says, he had stopped eating.

"He would still go for a walk, so I didn't know if anything was wrong, but he definitely wasn't himself." The vet advised giving it a couple more days, by which time Chiyo couldn't even stand up. Courtney rushed him to emergency care. She thought maybe it was an infection. She figured they'd get an antibiotic, and then they'd go home. She could handle this. Instead, she found herself leaving the hospital alone, in tears.

Chiyo was diagnosed as severely anemic. Courtney recalls that the vet was surprised Chiyo was still alive. "His platelets were so low that they said he should be spontaneously bleeding," Courtney recalls.

They told her Chiyo needed a blood transfusion. Then they told her one of the most devastating things a person can hear: "Prepare yourself for the worst." When spoken by a person in authority, the shock and fear that simple sentence triggers can be overwhelming. It's natural to take it at face value. But Courtney, through her tears, looked into Chiyo's eyes, and he looked into hers.



"So, he's looking at me, and he just gives me the eyes that say 'I'm going to be okay,'" Courtney says. "That goes against everything they told me in the room," she thought, "I trust the dog; he's never failed me before."

The next day, when Courtney returned to see him, Chiyo seemed to have come back to life, but then, two days after the transfusion, he declined again. They performed another transfusion. Again, he seemed better, but he couldn't stay well. He wasn't simply anemic. With anemia, bone marrow will make up for the loss of red blood cells. Chiyo, they told her, had non-regenerative anemia; his bone marrow wasn't able to make up the difference.

After the third transfusion, the hospital released Chiyo and recommended that Courtney start to "reconsider his quality of life" if Chiyo was still ill after two weeks.

After all Chiyo had done for her, Courtney was unwilling to give up on him that easily. In that moment, everything about their relationship came down to one simple truth: that there is absolutely no limit to what we will do for those we truly love. Courtney's concern was not that she needed Chiyo's help to get through her day. Courtney's only concern was the very life of her best friend.

Through a recommendation made by her in-laws, Courtney contacted a doctor in Massapequa, who agreed to work with her. Though flying is particularly difficult for Courtney, her own pain was the furthest thing from her mind. Having stabilized for four days with a hemocrit -- known also as packed cell volume (PCV) -- of 20 percent, Chiyo was deemed just fit enough to fly; so Courtney and Chiyo were on their way to New York. The next morning, Chiyo's numbers dropped again to 19 percent. Their new doctor immediately recommended the specialists at the Veterinary Medical Center of Long Island.

"They looked at him, and they didn't give me the death sentence that the other hospital did. They said, 'Okay, let's take a look at this, and we're gonna find out; we're going to try and fix this.'"

The process began with a bone marrow aspiration, which revealed that the bone marrow itself was not defective, but that something was amiss within it. The next step was intravenous immunoglobulin (IVig), basically an infusion of antibodies to help Chiyo's body fight infection. The results were immediately positive.



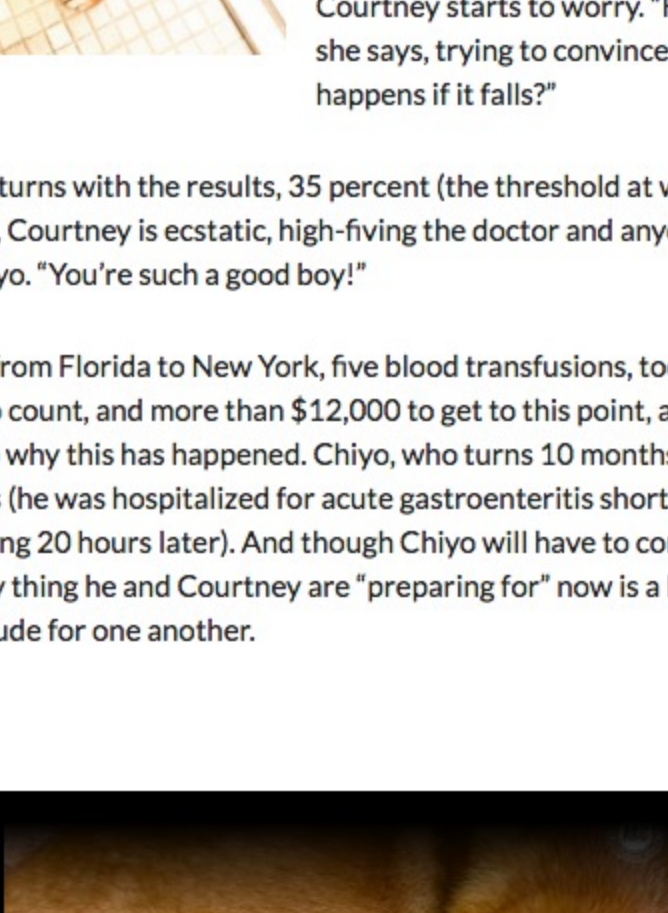
"It was like a miracle cure," Courtney gushes. "It was like 'Bing! Turn the lights back on! Put the batteries in the Shiba; he's back!'"

That was one month before this visit. Now, when Dr. Hillock enters, Courtney announces him as "the amazing doctor himself" before rising to hug him like an old friend. She catches him up on Chiyo's current status, how much he eats and how he acts. And to each statement, Dr. Hillock smiles and emphatically answers "Excellent!" "Good!" However, as soon as the doctor has taken Chiyo from the room, Courtney starts to worry. "He seems normal," she says, trying to convince herself. "What happens if it falls?"

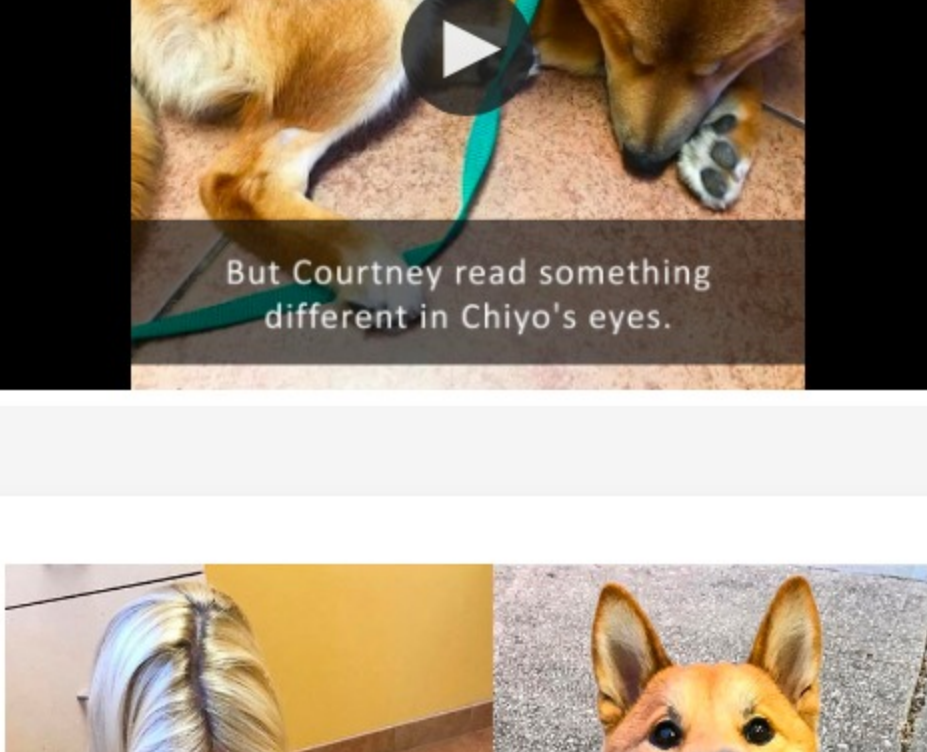
When Dr. Hillock returns with the results, 35 percent (the threshold at which a dog is first considered anemic), Courtney is ecstatic, high-fiving the doctor and anyone else within arm's reach. She hugs Chiyo. "You're such a good boy!"

It's taken two trips from Florida to New York, five blood transfusions, too many IV meds and other procedures to count, and more than \$12,000 to get to this point, and there is no definitive answer to why this has happened. Chiyo, who turns 10 months old today, remains at risk for infections (he was hospitalized for acute gastroenteritis shortly after his visit with Dr. Hillock, recovering 20 hours later). And though Chiyo will have to continue to take medication, the only thing he and Courtney are "preparing for" now is a life together, filled with love and gratitude for one another.

Chiyo



But Courtney read something different in Chiyo's eyes.



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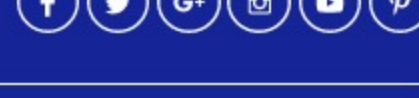
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