



The passion of Martha Nordbusch, Client Outreach Coordinator for the Central Oregon chapter of Fences For Fido, is not only palpable; but also very contagious. I met with Martha for lunch at McMenamins in downtown Bend, and I asked a million questions...all the while strains of Joe Cocker's *Unchain My Heart* echoed through my head.

How many times have you seen a dog on a chain left outside during all kinds of weather? I'll bet you've wished there was something you could do to help that dog. You can call Fences For Fido, a northwest based non-profit organization whose mission it is to improve the lives of dogs living outdoors on the end of chains, tethers, or in small kennels by building the dog a *free* fenced yard.

It all began in Portland, OR in May of 2009. A small yet determined group of volunteers had heard about a golden lab mix dog named Chopper from a concerned and sympathetic neighbor. The neighbor contacted the fledgling group, Fences For Fido, to see if there was anything that could be done to improve Chopper's situation. Thus, Chopper became Fences For Fido's first labor of love.

Chopper may be the face of Fences For Fido, but Martha Nordbusch has dedicated her heart and soul to this cause.

"Chopper was the first dog Fences For Fido ever unchained in 2009. I know Chopper's story because I immersed myself in all things related to Fences For Fido. Chopper is so special for many reasons. His story embodies Fences For Fido's mission to improve the life of the dog and his relationship with his human, and it has such a happy ending. "

Martha first heard about Fences For Fido about five years ago. She knew she was destined to become a volunteer.

"I just thought, are you serious? These people seriously go and build free fences. I've gotta check this out."

Martha found their website (fencesforfido.org) and immediately volunteered. This was before there was a Central Oregon chapter of Fences For Fido. Martha lives in Prineville, and even though she was working 40 hours a week with the TSA, she found herself going to Portland almost every weekend to help with builds.

"The first time you go, it's just amazing. I like doing the grunt work. I like to do it all. Here's this pick-up truck full of tools and stuff and they unload it all and lay it out very neatly. You don't have to have anything. You just have to have a big heart. That's all you have to bring... your two hands and a big heart. And, baby – they put you to work. And then the moment that the dogs are let off of their chains into their new place, they do their zoomy thing. There's nothing like it on Earth. You're hooked. If you're a dog person, that's it. You'll never miss another one."

Not long after Martha started volunteering, she met with Kelly Peterson, co-founder of the Portland chapter, and they began talking about starting a Central Oregon chapter of Fences For Fido. It took a couple of years before they were able to expand to this area. During this time Martha also met La Donna Sullivan who is now the Central Oregon regional director. La Donna decided to move over to Bend in June of 2014. Then the Central Oregon chapter really got off to a running start. They've built a fence almost every weekend since. They have freed about 150 Central Oregon dogs. That's a lot of dogs that are no longer living on chains. And Fences for Fido has all the chains to prove it.



When Martha hears about a dog, the first thing she does is get into her car, go out and find the dog, and then contacts the family.

"We go out and introduce ourselves, tell people what we are about and offer them a free fence. A lot of times we have to overcome the hesitancy on their part and convince them that it is not a scam. After all, how often do you really *get something for nothing?*"

You may ask, "Why do people have dogs if they are just left outside and chained up day after day? There are many reasons; for instance, culture. Many people are raised not to have dogs in the house. It could also be due income constraints. They may not have enough money to build a fenced enclosure for their dog.

"Most of the people feel bad about having their dog on a chain. They'd just as soon not have them chained. But, what are you going to do? Sometimes people just can't do the things necessary to care for a dog. People innately know that it is not right to have their dogs chained. The majority of them love their dogs but don't have any other way to ensure their safety."

Anyone who sees a dog on a chain is encouraged to contact Fences For Fido.

"It's totally anonymous. You don't have to give us your name or anything. All people have to do is reach out to us and we'll go visit the dog and the family. People can refer them on our web site. That's where we get the majority of our dogs. Either the people who own them found out about us and self-refer themselves, or we get anonymous referrals or by word of mouth."

Usually a build will cost anywhere between \$700 and \$1,000. That's the cost for the fence and the dog house. The group always give the dog some toys and if they need it, a new collar and a leash. Fences For Fido also provides critical veterinary care including vaccinations, spay and neuter services.

"On a typical build you arrive in the morning at 10:00 o'clock. We have a quick group meeting; unload the truck because we have all of the fencing materials on the truck. And we have big totes that are full of hand tools...wire cutters, nippers, needle nosed pliers, hammers, wire ties...things that you need to build a fence."

“We usually have between 9 and 12 people. They don’t have to have any experience at all. It’s real basic stuff. Goodness, three of our best volunteers are in their seventies. Women digging post holes, building dog houses, setting posts in cement. If you can operate a pair of wire cutters, you can help build the fence. And if you can’t do that, you can help put together the dog house.”

“We’ll go out generally on a Tuesday afternoon and set the corner posts in cement. Your corner posts need to be super strong. They are 4x4 pressure treated lumber that we set in concrete. We dig the holes with a jackhammer or an auger, which we’ve bought with donations. Thank you, thank you, thank you. We set the posts and that takes a couple hours. And then we come back on Sundays and do the build.”

Martha’s job doesn’t end there, however. These volunteers are very diligent about checking up on the dogs that have been unchained.

“That’s part of our thing. It’s not just that we build a fence and then walk off. Yeah, we want to know they’re being taken care of. We make sure that they’re being fenced and not chained anymore. We make sure they have plenty of food. If they haven’t already been spayed or neutered, we like to check and see if they’ve changed their minds about that.”

“There are a lot of other skills that are needed as well. Even if you can spend an evening on a First Friday sitting at the table for a couple of hours down at Birkenstock’s just talking to people about it. Working behind the scenes collecting donations... gifts for raffles and stuff like that. Thinking up novel ways to recruit volunteers. There’s all kinds of things that people can do besides just going out and working on the builds.”

Fences For Fido also accepts some donations that aren’t of a monetary nature. There’s a great need for dog food here. Wire framed kennels that come in sections are also a hot commodity. “Those are great for us because we can immediately get a dog off a chain. Which is important because when they are on a chain, they are susceptible to so many things. To attacks from coyotes or other dogs or kids teasing them.”

“We need all kinds of dog-related products; leashes, collars, and we need tools for fence building. That’s another way people can donate.”

If they’re dogs that have to stay out all winter, we’ll give them coats too. We have an Amazon Wish List so people can go to

[http://www.amazon.com/gp/registry/registry.html?ie=UTF8&id=1WQG8NUT6T8LP&type=wishlist.](http://www.amazon.com/gp/registry/registry.html?ie=UTF8&id=1WQG8NUT6T8LP&type=wishlist)

Fences For Fido does a build almost every weekend.

“It never gets old. Never. Each one is just as joyous as the next. I just get great joy from it. And I’m not the only one. You can see it with everyone that does it, and it’s like a drug. If you miss one, you jones for it. It’s a good thing. It’s a really, really good thing. It’s one of the best things I have ever had in my life.”

“We’re not just releasing a dog from a chain. We’re improving the quality of life for that dog, for the dog’s family, for the people in the community, for the little kids that walk by on their way to school every day and see that dog chained. Now they walk by and see it in a brand new fence. People drive by every day and see a dog on a chain and it hurts their hearts. So, when we unchain a dog, it’s not just that dog that we are making a difference to. It’s the entire community. That’s a beautiful thing. What can you say? My gut says it all. Who knew that it could actually be that big of a deal, but it is. “



Martha is a tough lady with a giant heart whose hands are rough and worn from the work she does, but still gets a tear in her eye and a big smile on her face whenever she talks about dogs. Besides all of her “fidos”, Martha has 2 dogs of her own; Rudy and Nikki.

“I have the best dogs in the world, of course. Rudy is a Dalmatian/Heeler mix. He’s a rescue dog out of Coos Bay. I’ve had him 7 years. And then I got a little girl dog. It took me 2 years to find her. I finally saw her picture on Facebook. And I said, that’s the one.” She’s a little half Heeler/half mini Australian Shepherd. And she is just a little doll. She is a rescue out of Freemont, California. She’s 5.

They’re happy dogs. I love them more than anything in the whole world.”

Afterword: As of January 1, 2014 the State of Oregon has passed an anti-tethering law. Signed into effect by Governor Kitzhaber, it is now a violation to tether or chain a dog outside for an extended period of time. Dogs are highly social animals who are “pack” animals. However, when dogs were domesticated, nearly 10,000 years ago, their "pack" was replaced by the human family. Dogs need love, interaction, and just like any living breathing mammal, they need food, water, and a safe shelter in which to rest.

One of Fences For Fido’s main goals is to foster relationships within our community that strengthen loving and humane relationships between dogs and their human companions. We in Central Oregon are lucky to have an organization like Fences For Fido, and people like Martha Nordbusch, to intervene on dogs’ behalf.

--Jackie Johnson

