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WordsUncaged Submission  
(Paws for Life Story)

## Big Ol' Bear

Big Ol' Bear is a 100-pound golden Labrador, full of energy and love. I remember when I heard Bear was coming to the Paws for Life Program. The message was, "we have a 120 lb. dog from Compton on the way." That was it—no other information, no picture, nothing! I was new in the program, it was my second round, but because I was on a team with two veterans in the P.F.L. program, we would be getting this giant dog. In my first round, I had a dog that loved me obsessively and weighed maybe 40 lbs! I wasn't sure how this was going to work and I remember feeling anxious as the day of his arrival neared.

Bear came in with the other dogs and as I went into the kennel with him, this giant Golden Lab is bouncing around, excited and happy to see all these people. I sit on the ground near him, and the big guy came over and licked my face! Bear's gentle energy settled my nerves almost instantly. A family that wanted him to become a service dog for a special needs child already adopted him and I could not have chosen a better dog for that job. Bear reminded me that I should not make assumptions, but wait and see, and learn about the dog once they are here. I try to apply that wisdom in all my interactions, canine and human.

Big Ol' Bear is a bundle of love and compassion and, yes, he is BIG because he loves food! He is not a fan of living in his crate (who is?) but his mildness makes him tolerant and after a while, and a few treats and toys to accompany him, he became accustomed to his cramped living space. Those first days crate training Bear were a fun adventure. I would spend hours just hanging out in front of his crate, throwing treats inside it, attempting to entice him into going in, and he would look at me, as if saying, "Do you really think I am that dumb?" We played games right there, making his crate a fun place to be. He had a hard plastic ring, about eight inches wide that had a towel tied to it, and we played tug of war until my hands and arms ached from the contest—he was a big dog, and most of the time, he won!

Once he was in a playful mood, I threw the ring into the crate and he would bound in after it. Now, picture a hundred-pound dog running full-bore into a crate that is only a bit bigger than him, crashing into the back, which shook the whole crate, knocking anything on top of it, off (every time). Then, he somehow turned around—his prize clamped between his jaws—and ran back out towards you! Soon, I began climbing into the crate, holding a fistful of treats. At first, he gave me the funniest looks of disbelief and curiosity, turning his head slightly in that infinitely adorable way dogs do. His trust in me showed during those first few experiments, as he climbed in with me, because it was a tight squeeze but he did not seem to mind. We laid together, two friends in a crate, and while he would snack on his treats, I would scratch his neck and smile, thinking about how nervous I was to meet him, feeling a little foolish.

Once he was used to his crate, he really enjoyed it. His quiet time became important to him and he had no problem making himself comfortable and capitalizing on any opportunities for a nap. I would swear at times he had a magic hole in the back of his crate because each morning when I went down to get him, he was usually on his back, feet straight up, tongue hanging out, face pressed against the front bars looking like he was hung over from a night out on the town!

Bear made it out but not before stealing many treats and many hearts. He has completed his second set of training and is living in a great home, with a great family that loves and adores him. He came to visit during our last graduation and he remembered me, and seeing my buddy, Big Ol' Bear, was an wonderful, emotional experience. Bear is giving back, helping his new family. He still loves his treats and food. Don't we all?