

Dog as Translator

By Maureen Ross & Dt. Tate McSniff

A short story about a Spanish speaking cancer patient, an English speaking woman and a dog, who helps to break the communication barrier creating a meaningful connection~

Precious moments leave us feeling grateful to have the opportunity to share our pets. Tate (Border Terrier) and I are a registered pet assisted therapy team. We have worked together for several years and visited many people.

All visits are meaningful, but there are some are unforgettable. We visit the cancer unit at Saints Medical Center. One snowy day, at first glance out the window, I thought about rescheduling, which would have been fine with the Volunteer Director. I wondered how many people would show up for treatment today, or did they have a choice. Every infusion chair was occupied.

We ended up parking on the 6th floor of the circular garage, around and around. Deciding to take the stairs to release some energy and a little stress, Tate and I made our way to the main lobby for check-in. Visiting begins meeting and greeting dozen of people, including staff, who have gotten use to the little powerhouse Tate. The smell of Dunkin Donuts (located in the lobby) is an aphrodisiac. A dog is a double-aphrodisiac, ah, coffee, donut and Tate!

After meeting up with our volunteer guide, we headed to the cancer building. It was busy because people wanted to get their treatments before the holiday. We made our way down the aisle to anyone interested in seeing or touching Tate. Upon reaching the last curtained cubicle, we met Anna (name changed). Anna was busy playing with a camera. She was looking at pictures of dogs -- perfect timing. When Anna spotted Tate, little needed to be said. The smile expressed more than enough to welcome us. Carefully placing Tate on Anna's lap I pointed to the camera.

Anna spoke a lot of Spanish. I speak a lot of English and some dog. Tate was our translator. Gleeefully, we learned some new Spanish words like "Hola--hello" and "me ilamo- my name is Moe and this is Tate". Anna asked us in "pseudo-sign-language" to take pictures of Tate and her, not me, but that's okay. I'm use to being addressed as Tate's chauffeur, secretary, groomer, massage therapist and owner.

When it was time to say "adios" to our new "amigo", we hope we see Anna again. We never know.

This is one of many opportunities that dogs help us to break barriers of communication, put a smile on someone's face, share some joy, and makes a connection to be stored in a lifetime of memories. Language doesn't matter. Dogs know people who need and enjoy them.

As we left that day, we decided to climb back up to the 6-flights of stairs to the top, and outside floor, of the parking garage, much to Tate's chagrin. She would prefer to be carried or take the elevator. We both need to lose a few pounds for our well-being.

It was snowing. Tate and I pleasantly collapsed in the car and sat, watching the snow, grateful to be living in the present moment, and hoping that we made a difference.