

A MOMENT IN TIME - MENTORING A YOUNG WRITER

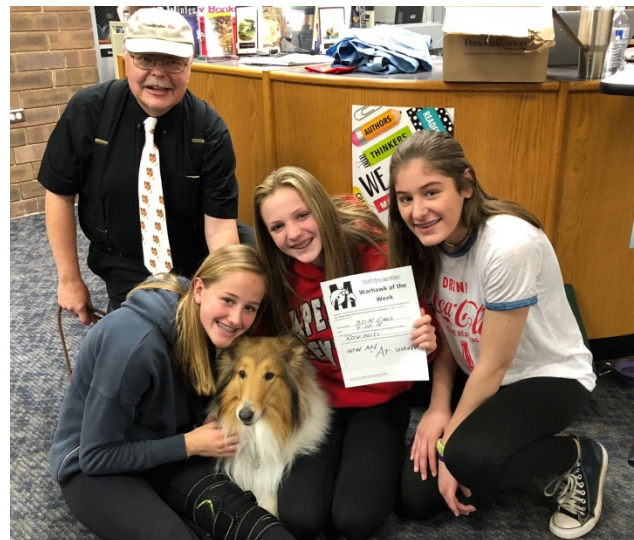
By Ted Slupik

I started my therapy dog career with a rough coated collie named Sophie in 2002. Sophie was the most gentle and loving dog you could ever hope to meet. She became your best friend immediately. We worked primarily at a local hospital for 3 hours every week for over 12-1/2 years. We met and gave comfort to over 10,000 patients and visitors during that time period and many of them left the hospital with happy memories. But none of our visits were as special as meeting Daly Dodsworth. About five years ago as a 3rd grader, she was hospitalized with very high sugar levels and was diagnosed with Type 1 Diabetes. I'm sure the experience was very scary for Daly. While in the hospital, Daly met Sophie and me.

Trying to get her mind off a scary diagnosis, we spent some time with her. We really didn't think our visit would be so significant in the long run, nor did we think our paths would ever cross again. A visit is usually a one-time experience; but this time it was not.

Fast forward 3-1/2 years later to when I began visiting middle schools with my current therapy dog Rosebud, another collie. I was invited there to speak about volunteering and animal assisted therapy. The first school that I was invited to speak at about volunteering and my book "Sophie...best friends are forever" happened to be Daly's junior high school. After my presentation, Daly came up to me and Rosebud and said "I remember you and Sophie visiting me in the hospital and making me feel better!" I was amazed, but after asking Daly a few questions and listening to her memory of Sophie, I knew we had in fact met. Not only was Sophie the only collie in the animal assisted therapy program at the hospital at that time, but Daly described Sophie perfectly.

During that school visit, Daly and her friends, Natalie and Blanca told me they were interested in coming to watch Rosebud and me do animal assisted therapy work at a local nursing home we visited. The three young girls wanted to learn how to become junior handlers and experience visiting seniors with companion dogs. Daly and her friends, who have become known as the "BDN Girls" (Blanca, Daly, and Natalie), have since made multiple visits to the nursing home. They enjoyed their visits immensely. They realized how much their visit brightened the day of the residents and employees. Knowing they were doing something good made them feel good about themselves. This feeling is what they shared with their fellow classmates.



The following year, Daly (now in 7th grade), assisted me in my presentation at her school to the 6th graders and talked about her meaningful experiences. Daly's teacher, Mrs. Konrad, suggested that Daly

write an essay about her experience with animal assisted therapy work as a class assignment. Daly and Mrs. Konrad sent me the essay a week later. It was wonderfully written; full of emotion that conveyed her true feelings about how she felt about volunteering.

I realized that I had stumbled upon a promising young writer. The article was published in 2018 Summer Edition of Dog Writers Association of America newsletter, ruffDRAFTS and was later entered in the Young Writers Competition.

When the essay was originally written, no one had any idea that it would be published or eligible for any competition. It's been a wonderful surprise for both of us.

Daly expressed an interest in doing more writing and I was happy to assist her in any way I could. She wrote another story about visiting patients at the nursing home where she beautifully recalled her experiences. Daly not only shared her own emotions and reactions, but also described those of the people she interacted with. It was touching and heartfelt.

Daly's most recent story was the result of her interest in meeting the attendees who were volunteers at a breed specific rescue picnic. Daly interviewed various volunteers who perform many different roles; foster caregivers, transporters, intake coordinators, and adoptive families. I had six or seven volunteers lined up for her to talk to. I got her started with the first one; introducing her. As she finished with the first volunteer and we were moving on to the next person to interview, she looked at me with a gleam in her eye as if to say, "I got it"! As we moved to other people, I did not need to even speak. Daly's questions were very insightful. Each volunteer she interviewed had a unique contribution to the organization's success. They opened up and shared their personal stories because Daly was able to tap into each person's emotions. She was proactive and intuitive, as she elicited sincere responses to her thoughtful questions. Several foster volunteers and adopters became very emotional and were almost brought to tears while telling Daly how and why they volunteered to help abandoned animals. At age 13, Daly had the ability to engage these volunteers and one by one, got them to open up their hearts to describe what they did. Yet another great story by Daly Dodsworth!



Daly will be going to New York this February (2019) to attend the annual Dog Writer's Association of America banquet. I hope that any readers attending the banquet are able to meet her to find out first-hand what a phenomenal young person she is.

Daly's next story will be inspired by her trip to New York as she hopes to interview handlers of senior dogs (aged 7 and older) at the Westminster Kennel Club Dog show in New York. As Frank Sinatra said, "If I can make it there, I'll make it anywhere".

I can hardly wait for the results.

Postscript: On December 5, 2018, Daly was announced as a 2018 DWAA Young Writers Award winner.

