



Chris Bell and Tino



Dog Therapy is a Journey. It can be a journey to Healing, Happiness and Health. It can also be a journey Out of Fear, Anxiety, Anger and Stress.

It seems like with most journeys, my trek began with a Road Trip. It was a road-trip south from Denver in search of “puppies for sale” on January 27, 2014. On what has become known in our family as “TINO-DAY”, my wife and I ended up in a horse barn staring down on a tiny six and a half pound, “runt of the litter”, “last one left”, ball of fur in a cardboard box. He was a mixed breed, born in a barn, with soft curls the color of cinnamon.

Well, he seemed OK, squirming around. You know, cute like puppies are...

He wasn't scared of those giant horses snorting around in their stalls. He'd had his shots. The fuzzy little redhead had been born on December first, some six weeks earlier. He looked up with curious soulful brown eyes.



I needed to think about this one...

It had been almost eight years since we lost Duggan, our 140 pound Irish Wolfhound. Even at 14, old for such a big dog, he was the dream pet. We could hardly imagine that another dog could warm our hearts the way that old gentle giant did and he was no trouble. He didn't bark, bite, chew, dig or run off. He was long gone. A puppy would be a new chapter in our lives. This little guy had those same brown eyes. What was he thinking?

Mostly, I was thinking we were out for a sunny afternoon drive. Besides, the folks selling this puppy expected cash or a check. As I began explaining to the breeder that we didn't have either and needed to think about it, Anne was headed back to the car to get her checkbook. Really? Who goes on a drive with their checkbook?



Darn, if he wasn't a handsome devil, wiggling around in Anne's lap while we made our way back to Denver. We had plenty of time to think about all we needed. A bed, a nylabone for his teeth, food, a leash, collar, a brush for that unruly mop of his, food and water bowls? What had we done?

Here I was in my sixties with a puppy. We named him Tino, after a childhood friend from Bolivia whose name was Martino, Tino for short. Little did I know all the ways this puppy would awaken the child in me.

Tino's arrival home was heralded by much squawking, wing flapping and nape bobbing by Lila our 29 year-old yellow-napped Amazon parrot. Our 14 year-old, 18 pound "kittens" Hopkins and Homer knew who was boss and had no interest in this intruder. Tino quickly learned the best place for him was not in his cozy, comfy bed, but curled up under Lila's cage. That wise old bird offered him protection and cooing words of comfort. Lila had on occasion put "the enemy" in their places with quick nips to paws batted between the rungs of the cage.

And so, our happy family carried on, getting used to one another, full of much excitement, comfort, joy and obedience school. As a golden-doodle, Tino was smart like a poodle and willing to please like a golden retriever. I look back on those days and think obedience school was mostly for us.



Time passed. And so did Lila, Hopkins and finally Homer. We lost them all, fairly close to each other during the summer of 2014.

I like to think there will be quite a reunion someday near the RainBow Bridge!

The house felt empty and Tino needed someone to herd around. He had learned how to herd with his buddy "Jack" a Sheltie, during trips to the Big Horn Cabin in Wyoming. Tino was now over 50 pounds and would flop in the corner like an old turtle.

In mid August, we headed to the Dumb Friend's League in search of a kitten. A kitten for sure needs herding! We viewed a pair of Tuxedo Brothers, all-black with white chests and paw tips. They were already named Hemmingway and Holden. Why not add two more poet cats to the family? Little did I know I'd need both of them to help nurse me through the next 9 months, and beyond.

Not even a week later, on August 27, 2014 a man in a Suburban SUV traveling at 45 MPH crossed 3 lanes of south bound traffic on South Broadway and ran a RED light at Cedar Avenue. I just happened to be in that eastern most lane on an eastbound scooter when he chose to be in such a big hurry.

He did stop after he hit me...

I did not stop, sent flying by the impact. Instead of continuing eastbound, I was flying through the air in a southerly direction. I ended up landing unconscious on sweltering summer pavement in the middle of Broadway.



It's a long story. My wife Anne did all the heavy lifting. Tino, Hemmingway and Holden provided nursing support and company. This is where I learned "therapy" came naturally to Tino. It took many months for me to recover and in the process it became clear that it was time for me to retire from my career as an International television cameraman. While bruises, cuts and fractures healed, the subsequent bilateral brain bleed had taken a toll on my memory and stamina.

I began to liquidate my company. I sold off assets and tightened the proverbial belt. It was hard and confusing. But, I also understood that I had to have something in my life. I had to find meaning. I could not just sit around watching soaps on TV. I've always been a doer.

Somehow, I had heard of Denver Pet Partners. But where and how I don't remember. There was a handler training at Swedish Hospital. I emailed Diana McQuarrie, enrolled and stumbled through it. I had heard about Ted Terroux and his long time family's AKC Good Citizen Training Program. We started Saturday classes. Tino got a fancy blue-ribbon indicating he was a "graduate" in March of 2015. Then came the DPP evaluation at CU Health. Tino's exuberance flunked him. While we waited and trained for the next evaluation, we shadowed and trained with an Alliance of Therapy Dogs team. We began visiting Shalom Park Memory Unit in Aurora with that certification.

FINALLY, Tino passed his second DPP evaluation. And recently passed Number Three for another two years of Service on October 6th, 2018 at the Platte Valley Medical Center.

Following are memories of some of our visits. Some visits are more routine than others. Some people are scared of dogs. Some people don't know about the research that shows that growing up with a dog or cat can actually "inoculate" a person against a lifetime of allergies. Some simply have never had the opportunity to visit with, or live with an animal. And so we gently introduce folks to the Wonderful World of Animal Assisted Therapy. And for SOME, well, it's just the BEST. Plain old fashioned nirvana in a furry bundle of Love and Joy. I hope you enjoy and are moved by the patients, family, students, attorneys and professional staff described in these four visits. Woof On, I like to say.





Craig Hospital



We visit the third floor nurses' station amid the usual giggles and flurry of nurses showing their appreciation for what comes so easily and naturally for Tino. After a while, the hubbub diminishes, and I notice a woman off to the side watching. Tino and I walk over and I ask her if she is OK? She starts crying! "Can you come to my son's room?" He had been admitted overnight after flipping an ATV. I follow her next to his bed. He is still, unable to move or speak. "UP!" I command. Like an angel in slow motion, Tino gently settles

next to him belying his seventy-four pound girth. He snuggles his muzzle into the boy's neck. The eyes of that brave young man mist, Mom and I cry. We stay locked in our own worlds for 10 minutes or so. "Down!" then life starts moving slowly on! What happened in those few moments is hard to articulate, but I know it is what being a therapy team is all about.

Swedish Medical Center

We met a Mom and Daughter in the Lobby. They ask if we could visit Grandma. She's not very cognizant they said, but she loves dogs. After Acute Care waiting, ER and surgery waiting we made our way to her room. She couldn't smile and seemed a tad dazed, but she was able to reach out and slowly pet Tino. He returned the love with some nudges. Grandma didn't mind, she was definitely a dog person. She had a sense of relief and calm in Tino's presence. Finally with her eyes fluttering toward shut, we bid adieu. All 3 generations of women were sincere and very grateful. We headed down the hall.

As we were walking, a nurse stopped us and asked if we had time for another room visit. Yes, of course! She began giving us a set of complicated directions, up ramps, down ramps, then, you'll be on a different floor, then left, then right..."Uh, never mind," she said, "follow me." We walked down another hall with several turns, until we finally stopped at a door to a room full of more than the usual piles of beeping equipment full of monitors. Sitting on the bed with an I-pad watching a movie was a young child who looked up slowly with a great deal of uncertainty. Our escort nurse told us she had burns over 85% of her body.

Without missing a beat, the nurse approached our patient, who at this point had been in the hospital for many months. Cheerfully, the nurse asked if she wanted to see a dog. Yes, she nodded, her voice barely above a whisper.

While my heart sank and apprehension set in, Tino stepped right up to the plate. A muzzle on the bed, his huge brown eyes cast upward toward her face. It was slow, and she was not sure. But Tino leaned in and gave her some tentative encouragement.





Our Angel-Nurse began with the up-beat positive chatter. Without finding the charge nurse to let him know what was going on, this young patient walked. Walked for the first time in many months. She held the end of Tino's leash, I held the middle, just to be sure... We traced our steps backwards, all the turns, up the ramps, down the ramps ending at the Elevators.

A miracle. Tino led the first walk for this young patient.. She was so brave, so sure. so ready...Tino with those beautiful brown eyes...was merely the catalyst.

**Adams County, 17th Judicial District,
Child Victims Unit/Prosecution Witness Waiting Office**

She is about 10 years old and in grade school. She seems small for her age and probably weighs less than Tino.

She is already in the kid's area watching a DVD. She is shut down and seems pretty tense. No amount of "Do you have dogs?" or "What grade are you in?" pulls her attention away from the screen to Tino.

I pull out Tino's stuffed tiger and WOOF! Squeaky Toy. He starts chewing Tiger's nose. She notices. She pets him a little. I pull out a brush and ask her, " Will you please brush Tino? He needs some tangles out." She does so, slowly and for only a short time. Not much, but a beginning.



The Prosecuting Attorney shows up and lays a hand on Tino's head before taking the family to his office for a Private Conference. He seems to understand the value of Therapy Animals. The Victims Advocate later calls to ask if we could come back the next morning around 8:30 am, because the case resumes then. Privacy concerns often leave us, as a therapy dog team, in the dark about any kind of personal details concerning the crime or the case.

The next day, when we walk into the Victims/Witness Office, she is not there, presumably in conference again with the Prosecuting Attorney.

When they come out to walk to the courtroom, she can't keep her hands off Tino. BIG, Big, big hugs. I believe that with this day of court so near, she was now ready, empowered and confident to do what she needed to do. The butterflies were gone and now she could accept all that Tino and the Prosecutor had to offer...

Then it was time for the family to head to court.

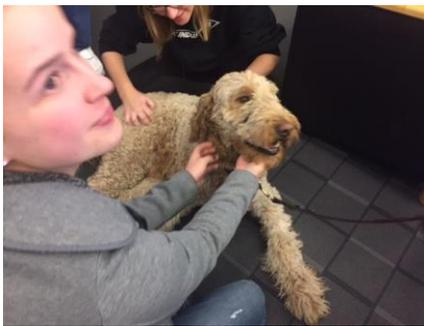
"Can Tino go with her?" I ask. "Yes, but the Jurors cannot see him, and he cannot go inside the courtroom. He must stay out of sight in the witness room between the set of two doors into the courtroom."

With that, I handed her the lead, and off the convoy went to that one courtroom.

While not able to hear any actual words, we could hear her voice, strong and confident in open court as she confronted what had been done to her. A young girl, doing what was right, standing up for herself. A force to be reckoned with. The prosecutor walked in with her after her testimony. He congratulated her and gave a huge thumbs up. It seems, she really must have hit it out of the ballpark!

A couple of weeks after the trial, I got a call from the Victims Advocate, who had a letter addressed to Tino. "Should I mail it on?", she asked. "Yes, please!", I say. Four pages of thank you to the big furry red-head, all written in multiple color crayons.

University of Denver De-Stress Event



A student with the biggest, prettiest eyes I have ever seen sits on the floor next to Tino for a long time. She seems introverted and quiet. I ask questions and try to draw her out. She never stops stroking Tino's abundant soft fur. But when she answers my questions, her eye contact is direct and steady. We talk about how Tino is a mixed breed, born in a barn. She opens up slowly, continuing to pet Tino.

Things were coming to a close. Sandy gives us the five-minute warning.

There were two people tentatively walking up. It was explained to me that one of them has a DEEP, Deep, deep fear of dogs. "Are you studying psychology" I ask, as DU is quite famous for that area of study. "No, I am an engineering student. I just know I need to confront my fears". She answers.

"Well, have you ever chosen the best place, with the best organization, with the friendliest dog on the planet, to confront your fears." Tentatively holding out her hand. Then slowly touching his fur, then kneeling down, followed by shaking not one, but both paws, fears were slowly dissolving in a Furry flurry of giggles.



"Not all dogs are friendly and there is nothing wrong with protecting yourself until you know" says Sandy, our team lead, allaying any sense of embarrassment or shame that this woman might have been feeling, given Tino's warm reception. Darn, now we had a team of three.



Behind Sandy was the last of the last teams there. One more time, we were going to help a woman overcome her fears. Full of Vulnerability, we were a team of seven: a team lead, two handlers, two dogs and two delightful Students!

DPP Team of the Month (February 2019)

DENVER PET PARTNERS



Tino does not have any initials after his name like MD, PA, PT or OT...but he is now as comfortable on a visit as he was in that barn where we found him on that clear January day. In the same way he helped nurse me back to health, he provides therapy one wag, one solemn stare, and one nuzzle at a time. Just by showing up, he intuitively seems to know what people need. And I get to accompany him on the journey.

Lucky Me...

