

Harriet's Story



I did not want another dog. I'm a single mom with a 100+ pound special-needs Bouvier, a Scottie, do fostering for a Greyhound adoption group, and had 3 teenagers still living at home. Unfortunately, I have taken some animal communication courses. Well, Rule 1 of Animal Communication is, "If you didn't put the thought in your head, and it's a little bit different rhythm, someone else put it there". Early last spring, I started thinking about Basset Hounds. Thoughts of Basset Hounds began popping into my head several times a day, and finally in March, I told the kids, "I think we are going to have a Basset in our lives". By early April, a tan-and-white 3 year old small female Basset who called herself Harriet had

"sent" me her picture, and a message: "Come get me". I sent back, "Where are you?" "I'm here. Come get me." This went on for weeks, over and over again.

My animal communication skills are novice, at best. She could not tell me her address! I talked to all my doggy friends, my vet, rescue groups, local animal shelters. No one knew of any such dog. As most people don't accept animal communication as possible, I found myself labeled a kook at the local animal shelters, where I searched for a 3 year old small female tan and white Basset, and they wanted to know when I had lost her! June 1, the insistent nightly "Come get me" was getting to me, and I called Basset Rescue again. This time, they had her address! Her owner had been attempting to find a home for her for months (since March) and had just contacted them again. Basset Rescue had no room for her, and gave me her owner's number. The next day, I drove to Colorado Springs and Harriet climbed into the van.

I should have known, any dog that insistent, that persistent, that demanding from afar would be interesting to live with, but I didn't know what to do with her (all my dogs have work to keep them busy...agility, mouse control, carting). One day, Diana McQuarrie of Denver Pet Partners came to visit and it was obvious to her just what Harriet's work should be. By September, we were taking classes, and in December, Harriet and I became a Pet Partners team at Aurora North Medical Center.

I quickly found I must hide her green vest until we are ready to leave, or we'd be at the hospital hours too early - the sight of it brings on baying as only a Basset can! She starts her visits in the lobby, greeting day surgery patients, relatives of patients, and hospital volunteers. In the Psych ward, she works her way to each patient, missing no one, going around the circle in the day room, and then going room-to-room making sure everyone receives a visit. There's no behavior she can't handle. She treats every patient differently, but is always calming.

She can be pushy, demanding reactions from the withdrawn and depressed, comforting to the weepy ones, cuddly to those looking for love, and gentle with the frail and frightened, sharing her Wheat Thins with all. I won't say nothing throws her....



One of the few times I've seen her speechless (that's saying a lot, about a Basset) is when one

elderly gentlemen popped out his dentures and laid them on his knee right in front of her. Harriet's eyes nearly left her head; she couldn't BELIEVE what she had just seen. She looked again and again from the old man's face, to his teeth on his knee, to me, marveling "Mom, did you SEE the trick he has?!"

After visiting a dozen or more patients in Psych, Harriet goes to the Critical Care ward, where she gently greets very ill patients, sometimes lying on the bed with them. Many of the staff find stroking her long, silky ears is calming and "need an ear fix" weekly!



At another facility, one of Harriet's hospice friends who had not left her bed for some time, requested to be put in a wheelchair when Harriet came, and she and Harriet went outside and sat in the sun together - the friend's last time outdoors. On our next visit, she could no longer move her arms, but could still lift her hands. Harriet crawled up to her side, and gently slid her head under the woman's hands so she could hold her without moving.

The amazing thing is, Harriet is disabled, with arthritis and severe bone deformities in her front legs, shoulders and jaw. She dispenses her love while reclining on pillows in what hospital staff have dubbed "Harriet's Chariot", a red wagon that lifts my "low rider" up to a height where patients in hospital beds and wheelchairs are easily reached.



When Harriet first came to me, I thought, well, Bassets sure have short, funny-looking legs, and then we met a Basset person who told me, not THAT funny! That began an odyssey. We went to two vets who claimed nothing could be done. We then found one who said "Can Do!", found a chiropractor, and then an acupuncturist, who also made braces for her front legs, and then went to CSU Vet School in Fort Collins where orthopedic specialists discovered even more problems, which put hoped-for leg surgery on hold.

At present, Harriet takes medication and supplements to rebuild cartilage in her shoulders and reduce pain and inflammation. She's under strict doctor's orders not to run, jump, or romp... but if you've met Harriet, you know she doesn't obey (OK, she'll do obedience, but just for 1/2 hour every 2 years for her Delta evaluation, a requirement in order to be recertified as a therapy dog)!

When we were preparing for hoped-for surgery at CSU, I asked an animal communicator (who did not know Harriet is a therapy dog) to "talk" to Harri about her surgery, and ask if she had any questions. The puzzled communicator reported back to me that Harri's first question was.... "Will I still be able to go visiting?". My answer was "YES, always!".



Editor's Note: The French origin and meaning of the name, "Harriet", means "Keeper of the Heart" and "Ruler of the Household". I'm sure that Judy will attest to the latter and the patients which Harriet regularly visits can certainly attest to receiving unconditional love from a fine therapy dog that truly lives up to her name, "Keeper of the Heart". Most people suffering from the same ailments that Harriet does would have a very difficult time reaching out beyond their own pain and seemingly hopeless situation. Not Harriet. Despite her leg being in a brace and the inevitable chronic pain she endures as a result of her condition, Harriet, proudly donning her green Delta vest, resists Judy's attempts to have her ride in her wagon but instead romps eagerly toward the hospital wearing a huge smile in anticipation of beginning her work as a therapy dog.

Interacting with Harriet is truly an unforgettable experience, hospital patient or not. Unlike most dogs, she'll look you straight in the eye and when she's focused on you, you're the only thing that she's totally engaged with at that moment, a quality most people don't possess. One can't help but be moved by the warmth and affection which exudes from her big, brown eyes. These eyes are also the eyes of a wise dog who has gone through a lot and knows how to endure and continue to give of herself at the same time.

Immanuel Kant said that, "We can judge the heart of a man by his treatment of animals." Judy, for everything you unselfishly do for and with Harriet, you have a heart of gold! I think we can also say that we can judge the heart of a dog by its treatment of people. Harriet, you possess a big heart and we commend you for your unique ability to face each day with an attitude to give to others from this heart. "The more you give, the more you get"; maybe that's why your heart is so big, Harriet.