

Joann Bush and Sandy



I have always loved animals but never had the opportunity to have a meaningful relationship with a dog. My father had asthma and used it as an excuse not to allow us to have pets. Then it was time for college, a career, marriage and family. No time for animals. The day came when my husband and I retired and we decided to live full time in our motorhome and travel the country.....again no time for a dog. Our travels lasted for five years until he became ill in 2005.

Our grown sons and young grandchildren live in Denver, so it was easy to decide where we would settle. We love the mountains and decided to look for a high-rise apartment with a mountain view.

It must have been fate that an apartment was available facing the Rockies on the 22nd floor of a building across the street from Cherry Creek because there, three doors down, we met Annie and her little Yorkie, Dolly. Dolly would come to visit us and we would see her in the hallway all the time. In my mind when I wanted a dog it has always been a big dog. But here I found a little bundle of joy in a 2 ½ pound Yorkie. I also found out that Annie took Dolly to a nursing home every week to visit the residents.

As time went by, I knew I would soon be living alone. I thought that when that time came perhaps having a dog would be a good idea for companionship. One day I mentioned it to my husband and he said, “why don’t we get one now so I can enjoy her too.” But how do you train a puppy to wait for the elevator and make it down 22 floors when necessary. That’s when I discovered Potty Pads! And so the quest for our companion began. We read books and researched everything we could find about Yorkshire Terriers. A friend who is a veterinarian helped us find a reputable breeder who lives in Longmont. In July 2005 we met the breeder and saw the litter of four that had been born June 20. There were only two females and one had been spoken for, so the no brainer was the other little girl would be ours. Once we met her, we couldn’t keep away. We visited her several times during the next months to hold her and get her used to us.

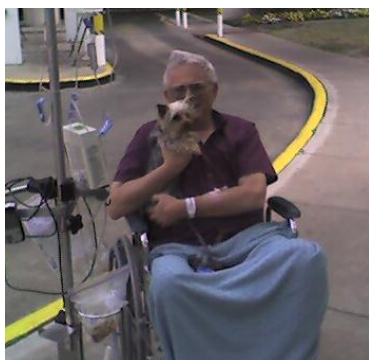




We brought Sandy home in September and that night as I lay in my bed with my arm hanging down in her crate next to me to stop her “crying”, little did I know what an adventure we had begun. The little black ball of fur (all Yorkies are born black) weighed 1.8 pounds the day she came to us and now has topped out at 6 ½ pounds of pure love. Many people I meet think of Yorkies as hyper, yappy dogs. Well, Sandy is just the opposite. She is calm and quiet (except when the doorbell rings). Needless to say,

Dolly and Sandy became best friends. All we had to do was open the apartment door and they would run to each other’s apartments. We dog-sat for each other, went for walks together and had many play dates. Several years later Annie and Dolly moved to Las Vegas. Sandy and I have made a point to stop and visit them when we are in the area, even having doggie overnights.

Our experience having Sandy with us demonstrated how strong and wonderful the human-animal bond can be. The three of us together attended obedience classes and practiced at home. We even taught her several tricks. Because we wanted to get her “socialized”, we took her almost everywhere which helped to get us out of the house and interacting with others. During the last year of my husband’s life, she was his constant companion, making him laugh, cuddling with him, giving him comfort and helping him to forget (even for a little while) what he was going through. Once when he was at MD Anderson hospital, I smuggled her in my purse so he could see



her. The visit cheered him up and made him work harder to be discharged. At our home, the last three days of his life, she never left his side. She seemed to know that he needed her. During that time and in the years since, I have also reaped the benefits of her presence and companionship. Observing all this, it came to me that Little Sandy and I had a purpose. That purpose was that together we would someday bring comfort to hospice patients and their families.

When I began researching on the internet how I might go about fulfilling our goal, I found Pet Partners (formerly Delta Society) and contacted Denver Pet Partners. I signed up for the next available DPP workshop, where I met the wonderful Diana McQuarrie and her husband Ken, and knew I had found what I was looking for. One of the happiest days of my life was the day we passed our evaluation and

became registered Pet Partners. In order to be a hospice volunteer I also had to complete the state required 30 hour class. I took that class through Denver Hospice where I also volunteer. This class was a wonderful experience.

At about this time, I found out that Shalom Park (now Shalom Cares) had started a Hospice Service and was looking for volunteers. I contacted them, told them Little Sandy and I wanted to volunteer and successfully started the process to add them to the list of our DPP facilities. Throughout the five years we have been volunteering at Shalom Cares Hospice, Little Sandy and I have brought comfort to residents on the campus as well as Shalom Hospice Patients residing at other facilities in the metro area and even in their homes. Needless to say, we also visit with family members, the staff and any other residents that we may pass in the hallways. Additionally over the years we have visited clients at Total Longterm Care in Lakewood and Life Care Center in Englewood, helped children smile instead of cry at Shots for Tots, cheered up military families at Buckley AFB, manned booths for DPP, and helped with evaluations. Many times those tricks we taught Sandy came in handy as she enjoys performing them.



One of my most memorable hospice patients was a 92 year old woman who had multiple problems. When they asked me to visit her, the staff told me she was very stubborn and opinionated, insisted on living independently while Hospice nurses and other personnel came to her. She did not talk to them very much, only when she had to. She had no family and no friends left in her life. I knew she was in pain. Sometimes I could hear her moaning through the door as I approached her apartment. But the minute Little Sandy and I entered, her tears turned to laughter and it was if her pain was forgotten. She would hold Sandy in her lap and tell me stories about all her dogs. Every time I came she had some very funny, long involved joke to tell me. The stories I loved the most were about her life in London during WW II, surviving bombings while her new husband went off to war and how she

immigrated to the United States traveling over on the Queen Mary with her Yorkie. She brought out her scrap book to show me the actual papers from her voyage. Little Sandy and I helped her open herself up to others again. She had so much to share about her life and we would talk for hours at a time with Sandy cuddled next to her.

Another memorable assignment I had was visiting the home of a cancer patient who was a single mother. It was not to visit the patient, but to give her respite from her five year old daughter so she could rest. You can also imagine what a diversion Sandy was for that little girl.

I enjoy being able to see the same patients for many months. They want someone to spend time with them, talk to and share a little about their lives. When Sandy snuggles up to them in their bed, their eyes light up and their cares are forgotten for a little while.

We have also spent time with patients who are bed ridden or who can't speak or have dementia. However, my experience has been that when I lay Sandy down next to people in those circumstances and put their hand on her little body, calmness comes to them and even a smile on their faces. For almost a year I visited a man with advanced Parkinson's disease. He could barely speak and hardly move. While talking or reading to him, I would lift his hand and place it on Sandy. His hand would begin to move as he stroked her. He knew we were there and cared about him. Yes, it can be sad when these people pass on, but knowing we have helped them in so many ways during their final months is very rewarding.

Only once have I attended a celebration of life of one of my assignments. I had seen her twice a week for a month. I brought Sandy with me to the funeral. When we walked into the chapel all of her family and friends came over and said "this must be Sandy. We have heard so much about your visits. Thank you for caring." I know that many people may have an apprehension of visiting Hospice Patients, but I can truly say "give it a try, the rewards are overwhelming for all parties".

As I look forward to our third renewal at the end of 2013, I thank Delta Society/Pet Partners and Denver Pet Partners for the opportunity I have been given to share Sandy with others and bring a little laughter and joy to so many people. One never knows where life will take you but I give thanks every day when Sandy looks at me with her soft loving brown eyes and feel the love she brings.

Thank you for honoring us.

Joann and Little Sandy

