

Rocky and Jasper's Story



Teri and Rocky



Teri and Jasper

I (Rocky and Jasper's human partner) always dreamed of having a collie. Too many Lassie movies I guess. When my husband and I bought our first house, I was thrilled to get my puppy, Rockefeller. I had always had a dog, but never had taken the time to truly understand or train a dog. Rocky would be my first. We went to puppy kindergarten, and soon learned how much I didn't know. Everyone loved Rocky. He was gentle and kind. Even as a puppy, he didn't rush ahead and knock people over. It was during a visit to the local PetSmart that my husband first got the idea of taking him into hospitals to visit children as we watched in amazement as Rocky patiently sat down by a toddler, waiting to be noticed and petted. As the months went by and Rocky and I progressed in our obedience classes, this idea of visiting patients with Rocky stayed with me. On occasion, I researched the subject of "therapy dogs" on the internet; learning more and more.

I am a psychotherapist by trade, and I run a substance abuse counseling program at a county health department. Our clients are frequently angry they have to come for services, and many have lost custody of their children due to abuse or neglect. The more I learned about therapy dogs, the more I began to wonder if maybe Rocky could help make my job here a little easier. Maybe he could bring a smile to my frustrated clients' faces. Maybe he could decrease the stress that my counselors felt. And so the journey began. I spoke with my boss about the idea. To my amazement, she encouraged me to speak with our Executive Director. Before long the idea was being proposed to the other management staff and then to the Board of Health members themselves. It was an idea that no one had ever considered, but after reading Rocky's impressive curriculum vitae and seeing his sweet face, they were sold. In September of 2003 he was allowed to begin an "internship" to learn his job and help determine if this was indeed a program the health department wanted to add. From that first day that Rocky set paw at the health department, he has been loved and accepted by all.



I must say, it took me a while to really learn how to be Rocky's partner. I initially had grand visions of Rocky and me working with children in Immunizations or visiting with the many clients waiting in the main waiting room. Rocky was patient with me as I learned more about the field of AAA/T and about him as my canine partner. He soon began to tell me what he loved and what he would prefer we didn't do together. It took me some time to understand that my visions needed to change and become more inline with who Rocky is and what he enjoys. It was Rocky who taught me what AAA/T truly is and about the profound respect for humans and dog that is so central. I soon discovered that Rocky's specialty was employee morale. While he likes clients, he prefers to visit in the small waiting room, and then only when clients are already settled and waiting for group to begin. He likes to get to know each client slowly, and then show them the next time that he remembers them and is happy they returned to "his agency." But most of all, he loves to make sure the substance abuse counselors always have a smile on their faces. Each day he works (just one day each week), he makes sure we greet each one. It is his office (technically shared with me) to which they come when they have difficult client cases, to get supervision from me and a warm snuggle and kiss from him. It is Rocky who licks their tears when client decisions bring the compassionate counselors to tears, and it is Rocky who reminds them to smile and remember they did their best. It is by loving the counselors and helping them through the difficult days, that he makes the greatest impact for the clients.



As a result of witnessing the work that Rocky does each day, I found myself compelled to put the lessons I learned into print so that other therapists and agencies such as ours could learn about the power of the human-animal bond and create their own programs. Haworth Press quickly agreed to publish our book, *Animal-Assisted Brief Therapy: A Solution-Focused Approach*, and this has become an amazing avenue for continuing Rocky's work as a quiet ambassador for Delta Society and the field of Animal Assisted Therapy. Rocky is now well-known

throughout the community through his photographs and case examples in our book. In addition, Rocky also loves to co-teach a workshop at the health department to community professionals about the human-animal bond and how trained therapy animals can be successfully incorporated into treatment settings.

In 2004, I fell in love with a tri-color rough coat collie mix pup named Jasper. Jasper's mom was pregnant and rescued by a Collie rescue group in Pueblo, and Jasper was in need of a good home. I had learned a lot about dog training from working with Rocky, but Jasper had a humbling way of reminding me how much I still had to learn. Jasper can best be described as "joyful," and it is hard not to smile when he is around. He loves to play, and keeping his attention can be a full time job. With time, he was able to become the second therapy dog at the health department. His specialty is visiting and working with clients, and he regularly conducts AAT sessions with our clients and their children teaching them about boundaries, parenting, safety, and respect for life. Jasper is specifically helpful in working with children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder since children can relate to his "brain turning off" and forgetting what he is doing. This similarity helps the children "help" him; resulting in the



children learning to be purposeful and pay attention as well. It was realizing how much Jasper changed me as his human partner that inspired my current book, *Transformation of the Heart: A Therapy Dog's True Work*, and made me truly appreciate the human-animal bond.



Rocky and Jasper have changed me forever. They have shown me the importance of slowing down and just being (I can be a perfectionist at times). They have shown me that sometimes I go faster by being slow. They have let me see that success can come from being quiet and steady; that it comes from building relationships one by one. That taking the time to stop and say "hello" is worth the time lost. Most of all they have taught me that it is O.K. to be human and show weakness. I oftentimes have to cover for them with a joke when they snore, belch, or on occasion pass gas during an important meeting. They have no problem being themselves. I am learning. They readily show their emotion and remind me that being vulnerable and making a mistake is not necessarily a bad thing. They are my reminder during a busy work day of what is truly important in this world.

Rocky and Jasper are wonderful examples of what a difference one can make when the perfect match is found between dog and environment. Having their own workplace where each comes one day per week allows them to highlight their unique talents and spread the wonderful message about the power of the human-animal bond. Rocky and Jasper will never be the typical, outgoing therapy dogs that prance through hospitals or are able to manage large groups of children during a school assembly; however they have opened doors and minds for therapy dogs and handlers who come after them. Rocky and Jasper are the epitome of what a therapy dog is all about . . . dogs who have made achievements far beyond what anyone could ever have imagined . . . dogs whose legacy will live on for generations through the countless professionals who first learned about AAA/T through reading about their work and learning about the lives they have touched . . . dogs who are my partners and friends.

