

## Smooth Collie and Canine Therapy

I am happy to share with you my experience with canine therapy.

There are different reasons to do good things. Some people have bad personal experiences, some might have a feeling its necessary to do good while you are getting older and some are just born with it and it is spontaneous.

I belong to the first group. When I realised how great company and clever smooth collies are, I had an excellent idea to train my dog to help to my handicapped Mother.

One of my friends introduced me to canine therapy and the assistance dogs community which inspired me so much that I decided to teach my dog, Brontes, some useful tricks. I was surprised how quickly he learnt. The more tricks he knew the quicker he was in learning new ones. I was happy when he successfully took the socks and shoes off, was able to undo shoe laces, brought objects from floor or table, even metal objects and even an orange which I can imagine can be quite awkward for dogs. Brontes also knew how to undo zip, undress, take hats and glasses off and gently pass it to the person.

After he learnt his first trick, he fast became a leader and very soon he was ready to help my Mom. Unfortunately life is cruel sometimes and my Mother died before Brontes was able to help her.

And it was at this time when I made my big decision. As we couldn't help my Mom, let's help some other people who might need it. After passing difficult tests at HelpPes, Brontes got his certificate and yellow vest and was ready to help and enter the world of pain and sadness. We visited the white hospital rooms full of hope and pain. We experienced a lot of sad eyes all asking "why" but also lot of happiness, smiles and surprises.

Each breed is different and all dogs have their own way of helping. Little Yorkshire terriers jump onto the bed and entertain you; "sausage dogs" will let old people to cuddle them. Smooth collies are different. Well, at least, this is how I see my dog. His job is harder as he is choosing patients himself. He is not friend with everyone; he checks the surroundings and chooses people who are interested.

Once I tried to persuade him to go closer to a man who was sitting with his back towards us all the time. Brontes didn't want to go closer and I could feel that it was not comfortable to be close to the man - but I didn't know why he is behaving like that. I forced him to come closer anyway and very soon realized his strange behaviour. The man told me he hates dogs and not to come close to him. I regretted that I didn't believe the dog's instinct.

Canine therapy can be very tiring. I would say those 2 hours in hospital fully concentrating equals ten dog shows.

But let's go back to the beginning. When you pass the tests, your dog is signed in to the canine therapy register with all details and it is then up to the organization to recommend you to some hospitals. We had a few options and I chose Thomayer Hospital in Prague. Since September 2012 we have been members of the non profit organization Lekorice together with 2 other smaller dogs.

On a regular basis we cooperate with the neurology department for adults and children and also with the psychiatric department for kids.

We know in advance which department we are going to visit each week so I have some time to prepare Brontes. When we go to the kids department it is more about playing with children showing their emotions more than normal healthy children.

But when you are in a company of 15 screaming and shouting children, dogs can get a little bit lost at the beginning. He was confused often who to listen first - if to sit, give his paw or bring a ball so it is my job to help him and coordinate the children a little bit and set up rules before we start playing.

Some of the children at this department have experienced a lot of bad in the past but on the other hand you can see the pure love and happiness. For some of them it can be their first experience with a real dog.

When we leave, Brontes and I are tired and also sad from some patients, but to just see their happy eyes it is worth it. After I found out that one little boy started to speak after being quiet for 2 weeks, I can say it is the best reward for me.

When we are back at the department, the walls are decorated with a lot of drawings of Brontes and some children have his photos next to their beds.

It is not so sad to be in adult neurology. Brontes has his favourite nurse there and he comes to say hello and hug her with his paws.

We visit patients' rooms one by one and Brontes is giving the orders: sit, down, paw, socks off, bring, pass.... Minutes are passing and we managed to visit all 12 rooms, 90 minutes is behind us and it is time to go home.

Time to take off the yellow jacket and leave the building. It is dark and Brontes is a normal dog again. He sniffs and disappears in the bushes in the park chasing a rabbit. He is a natural dog but I am happy and proud of his special skills. I have a satisfactory smile on my face, whistle to get Brontes back and we go home. When I turn back I can see a man stood behind the window waving at us good bye. This man and his dog have to be separated because of his stay in hospital and I can almost hear him saying "please come back soon"!

As I prefer happy endings rather than the sad ones, let's finish my story with something positive. Canine therapy is not about sadness, although it is hard and not an easy job, it is rewarding and worth every minute.

I am proud that Brontes is helping people in need, cheering them up during tough times and it is a great feeling to know that there are more smooth collies and dogs doing this great job!

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Renáta Novotná and smooth collie Brontés Bohemia Elenor

