

Licking Loneliness

Talk to the Paw



"Trevor"

Some Beardies are strange. Some are stranger. Trevor, the most inappropriately named dog in the house (CH Oakengates Clever Trevor — he is really not the least bit clever or devious) hates to have his feet touched, brushed, picked

up ... whatever. He HATES to have his feet touched. We always teach our puppies to "shake hands". Usually they have to have the bottom down to do a good shake and it keeps them on the floor instead of jumping up all the time. Trevor refused to learn how to shake hands. No one could decide if he was stubborn or stupid. For years we tried to teach him to shake hands — just because. Every one in the family had a go at it. He would just sit there looking at you ... blank.

As he got older, we quit trying so hard to teach him to shake, but occasionally someone would say "shake" and wait in vain for the lifting of the paw. In the meantime, Trevor became a HABIT (Human Animal Bond in Tennessee) dog. He passed the behavior test and began to visit patients at a mental hospital. He was very good. His empathy was palpable. He would walk up (NEVER jumped on a patient), sit in front and just sympathize with the patient. He was wonderful. Patients loved him. He was beautiful (a brown tri), patient, well behaved, a perfect gentleman, and looked the patients right in the eyes and just gave them all the sympathy they could handle. I didn't train him not to jump (I've never been able to teach a Beardie not to jump), Trevor just knew how to do it. But he never would shake hands ... lots of people asked, but you would have thought he was deaf.

One day, we had a very, very upset patient. She was afraid of strangers, afraid of dogs, and afraid of everything, with sadness surrounding her. She came in and sat down. Trevor wagged his tail (and

everything else) when she came in and as she sat down, he slowly walked up to her and sat directly in front of her and started to give her the big sympathy bit. She was hesitant about speaking to me and hesitant about touching the dog. Eventually she tried to pet him and the tip of his tail just started flipping up and down. She said something to me and then looked at Trevor and said "shake hands". I started to explain to her that Trevor never did such a thing and as I was beginning to explain, Trevor raised his paw and put it in her hand. She smiled ... big. Trevor looked at me and said "don't say anything". So I didn't say any more and the patient and Trevor had a lovely visit. When she left, she was still smiling. I hugged Trevor and told him how proud I was.

That night, I was telling my husband and son about Trevor shaking hands with the patient. We made such a big deal out of it and were so excited because Trevor had finally learned. David went up to Trevor, gave him a big hug and asked him to shake hands ... nothing happened. I tried. Trevor looked at me as if I were the most revolting thing in the world. Shaking hands is NOT something that Trevor does ... except when it's really important. — Mary Jo Steger

Mary Jo was involved in pet therapy in the late 80's through 90's with 6 beardies visiting nursing homes and mental hospitals for teens and adults. She now screen dogs for the HABIT program and is an inspiration to many.

Now's the time.

Start calculating your hours for 2009 and turn them in to Debby Furlow. The official BCCA paperwork/visitation forms can be found on the BCCA web site under "Everything Beardie" then "Therapy."

<http://beardie.net/bcca/therapy/index.shtml>

Be sure to bookmark this site for future updates, photos, shared documents, copies of our "Licking Loneliness" *Beardie Bulletin* articles, and more.

YAHOO! BeardiePetTherapy@yahoogroups.com

A new chat group is online for those interested in sharing pet therapy stories, learning about how to get started in pet therapy, action photos, and more!