

In the novel *Dreamers of the Day*, the life of the main character, Agnes, is made richer by her dachshund, Rosie, whom she saved when her mother threatened to kill the puppy since it had a slight birth defect. Rosie was Agnes' constant companion, even accompanying her on her trip across the ocean to Egypt. Upon their return to Cleveland, Rosie also joined Agnes as she became the school librarian, interacting with the children who came to visit the library and read with Agnes. When reading this part of the novel, I was instantly reminded of our own special friends who have been part of many library programs at the Greene County Public Library for over 7 years, the Miami Valley Pet Therapy Association.

The Miami Valley Pet Therapy Association is a group of over 100 volunteers and their amazing dogs and other animals who take the time to visit numerous hospitals, nursing homes, assisted living residents, and public libraries across the Miami Valley on a regular basis. They are a nonprofit agency who put in countless hours of community service while also teaching youngsters the compassionate treatment of animals. Their dogs undergo stringent training in order to obtain certification as therapy animals, and are held to specific standards. The volunteers make a huge commitment of time and expense in offering this service, and the rewards to the people of the Miami Valley have been immeasurable. Ironically, I can attest to this both professionally and personally.

I worked with the Miami Valley Pet Therapy Association while I was the Head of the Youth Services Department at the Xenia Community Library in the Greene County Public Library system. They have been the stars of our "Paws to Read" program held throughout the library system for over 7 years, and have also been guests at many story times as well. "Paws to Read" is a program where the association's wonderful dogs and human companions come to the library so that children may read aloud to the dogs. On a typical program day at Xenia, there would be six teams from MVPTA seated throughout the children's department, each with a crowd of children surrounding them. The children would each take turns reading aloud to one of the dogs while others would groom or pet the dogs while also listening to the book being read. The volunteers also gently helped the readers as they stumbled on new words in the books. Even the most reluctant readers would appear for this program on a regular basis as they found the dogs to be a nonjudgmental and adoring audience, with the dogs looking into the child's eyes, or resting their heads or paws in their laps as each child read aloud. I have always been extremely impressed by the professionalism as well as compassion of this group who has given countless hours to our library and the children of our community.

However, in May 2009, I got a personal view into some of the other work the association does in our communities. My father had a heart attack and immediate triple bypass surgery, and I watched the man who had always been able to do anything and everything reduced to a quiet, frail man who was deeply depressed, and in shock from the sudden twist his life had taken. He was having such a difficult time recovering from his surgery that it was recommended that he be admitted to the inpatient rehabilitation unit at Springfield Regional Medical Center. He would hardly talk to anyone for the first several days of his stay, and he cried quietly in his room each night when we had to leave him. He could not find a reason to smile.

Then a few days later, when I arrived he was talking and smiling a little. The first thing he wanted to tell me about was "the huge dog that was here today." He was trying hard to remember the dog's name, but was still having some post-surgical memory issues. I immediately knew who the dog had been. I asked him if the dog's name was Blue, and he and my mother immediately said yes. Blue, MVPTA volunteer Karen Loar's amazingly gentle and beautiful Great Dane (now deceased) had been a favorite at our "Paws to Read" program at Xenia, and I knew they visited hospitals, including Springfield's, regularly. My father talked about Blue at least four times that night, and then many times over the weekend with his visitors. Prior to this, my dad was hardly uttering a word, and had even refused visitors. He was more like himself for the first time since his surgery. He and my mom shared how Karen told them about Blue's little sister, Gracie, who was ready to start following in Blue's huge shoes. My parents, who had loved their own small poodle for 17 years, had been so impressed by Blue's gentle nature and calmness with each patient. They were both thrilled when I told them all about the times that Blue and his friends from MVPTA visited my library, and how loved they all are by our staff and the children of our communities as well.

My stories are not unique. The pets and human companions of the Miami Valley Pet Therapy Association have visited scores of patients, and listened to thousands of children read at public libraries all over the Miami Valley, and have impacted so many lives in both direct and indirect ways. They have enriched the lives of the patients and children they've worked with, but they have also impacted the family members of patients who needed some outside force to reach them in a tangible manner, and have also helped encourage a love of books, reading, and libraries that are the basis for a lifetime of learning. I can think of no more appropriate candidate for the Rosie Award than the Miami Valley Pet Therapy Association as they have given our communities so much care and support.

Carol Mitchell, Head Librarian

Greene County Public Library, Cedarville Community Library