

Dear MVMA Selection Committee,

12-1-12

I am the companion person to Captain Maxwell III, a purebred sable German shepherd. I am writing to share with you why I think Max is worthy of being inducted into the Minnesota Animal Hall of Fame. As you can see from Max's page on my web site (www.drjanice.net) and Dr. Garlie's letter of nomination, Max has a lot to recommend him for this wonderful honor. I will share with you how as an Emotional Support Dog he has helped my psychotherapy clients and how as my companion he has helped me.

As a professional Emotional Support Dog, Max has "held the hands" of many grieving children, teens and adults for over a decade. He has gone to my psychotherapy office with me ever since he was 9 weeks old. At first I took him for socialization purposes. I tucked his little kennel under my desk, covered it with Grandma's Afghan and taught him to be quiet in the office. He came out of his kennel to see certain people and got a great reception. When his socialization weeks were over, my 6 colleagues urged me to keep bringing him in and even proposed that he have his own schedule book. I took Max through all the routine classes from puppy kindergarten to therapy dog training. He passed with flying colors. I did not set out to raise a therapy dog. It was Captain Maxwell's idea. He had the aptitude and the attitude!

Max's relationship with one particular client, I will call her Betty, illustrates his professional work. Betty has had a pretty rough go of it the past number of years. Betty struggles with significant mental distress, parenting an autistic child, the death of her husband, the loss of several jobs and cancer. The first few years of her psychotherapy there was little interaction between Max and Betty. They did not bond. I kept Max in his kennel during her sessions. Then a number of years ago when Max developed his autoimmune disease and looked like death warmed over, she, being a physician, asked to see him. She opened her arms to him, he stepped in. Next thing I knew he had climbed up on the couch beside her, took one look out the window, turned toward her, looked at her eye to eye and gave her a little face wash which she loved. They have been bonded ever since.

When Betty comes in to see him he gets very excited wagging his tail, offering kisses, cuddling near her on the couch or sitting at her feet. One time Betty was still in pain from major surgery and acting very fragile. Max followed

her to the couch walking as carefully as she was. Rather than his usual exuberance he laid his body across her feet and snuggled up against her legs (see the enclosed photo). She relaxed and kept her feet tucked under him. The session was very productive and Betty left feeling cared for at level way beyond our human understanding.

Sometimes Betty comes in wound up pretty tight. Some might describe it as “bouncing off the walls.” Max has just the fix for that as well. In times like these he lies down in front of her and places his head on one of her feet. The rest of her body may move but that foot stays still. Soon she is calm enough so that we can proceed with our work. She worries when he gets sick, and drawing upon her medical knowledge, shares ideas about his care. We call her Max’s other doctor. She has a chance to give something back in a way that bolster’s her self-esteem.

In addition to being an ace Emotional Support Dog Max has been a wonderful comfort to me through a time of great loss. Both my daughter and my husband died in 2010. Max has been my 24/7 companion and grief support. Max senses when I am about to cry. He brings kisses and snuggling and when I persist in my sadness he tries to distract me by lining his toys up in front of me. I am not sure how I would have made it this past three years without him.

Our bond has been made all the stronger by his need for special care due to his paralyzed esophagus. He cannot swallow liquids. He is dependent upon wet solid foods, fed every 3-4 hours to keep him hydrated. To make use of gravity he has to stand with his feet up on a chair and his head up. He has to be fed even if clients are in the room (see the picture of the boy feeding him).

In short, Max is the best of the best! In spite of his disability he works every day, giving back far more than he receives. He continues to surprise me with his tailor made responses to my clients and his sensitivity to me. He is truly worthy of a spot in the Minnesota Animal Hall of Fame.