

Animal Angel Healers..!

The Healing Power of Animals

As any person with chronic pain knows, the search for relief is often as unending and discouraging as the pain itself. This article may provide an insight into a very unique and pleasurable pain management resource that I stumbled upon several years ago involving a rare breed of dog. In fact, our story carries such an innovative use of dogs and is so heartwarming, that Animal Planet has filmed a half hour show on "That's My Baby", on Toaster's service dog training, her service to me, and her live whelping. The show continues to air across the country, but unfortunately their website does not post the air dates. You may try contacting them if you want to catch the whole show. Clips from the show are on the website.

Following a car accident in 1992, I became challenged by the chronic pain of Fibromyalgia (FMS). Prior to this event, I had been a Licensed Clinical Social Worker in private practice for 16 years in Oregon. Despite all my efforts,

my condition following the car accident worsened to the point of having to give up my attempts to manage my practice while living with chronic pain and sleep deprivation. In the past, I had been a high achiever, always able to set a goal and achieve it, and often reaching even beyond my goal. This experience of FMS was one of the first times in my life that I had to admit that I no longer could set a goal (return to my previous level of functioning to work) and accomplish it. It took me a process of two years of rearranging my

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work schedule and lifestyle in the most creative and desperate ways, without success, to finally admit I could no longer work and that I had to go on medical disability.

Within nine months after closing my business and moving to a sunny location near family, my life took an unexpected turn in a direction I never would have

by Nancy Gordon,
LCSW

Nancy is

pictured below

with her two

service dogs:

Toaster and

Pink. It was her

healing

relationship with

Toaster that led

to the start of

Animal Angel

Healers..! Inc



and her line of greeting cards written specifically for those who suffer with chronic pain, disability and/or terminal illness. There are also cards to show caregivers and loved ones how much they are appreciated. Nancy's story can be found in the newly published book,

The Healing Power of

imagined. In 1999, I was introduced to a rare breed dog, the Mexican Hairless (breed name Xoloitzcuinti or Xolo). This rare breed dates back to the Ancient Aztec, Columbian, and possibly Egyptian civilizations at least 3500 years. Xoloitzcuinti, pronounced "show-low-eats-

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quintli, is derived from the Aztec Indian god, Xolotl, and itzcuintli, the Aztec word for dog, which combined means the dog has spiritual, god-like powers. To date, there are approximately 4000 Xolos in the world. Prior to 1956, Xolos were considered nearly extinct, and thus removed from the American Kennel Club (A.K.C.). They are now the official dog of Mexico.

In the ancient cultures, Xolos were reputed to be very special dogs, with mystical healing powers to cure illness, and they

were highly respected as animal healers. In fact, they were so revered for this ability, that they were sometimes eaten because of the belief that the dog would consume their illness. Although they have the temperature of a normal dog, their hairlessness or velvet like coat (called powder puff or coated) requires that they generate a lot of heat to keep themselves warm. In fact they are literally HOT DOGS! Throughout their history, it is well documented that they were relied upon as bed warmers and pain relievers for people with "arthritis". They were also sacrificed and buried with their masters because they were believed to have a great spiritual gift to safely transport their master to the other side called "Mictlan" or heaven. Since their existence, Xolos have been dogs with a unique "soul" purpose to heal, but are currently undiscovered by most people.

When I first began learning about this breed, I was amazed to discover their ability to provide enough heat to serve as a heating pad for muscle pain. When I first met a toy Mexican Hairless dog, I

was experiencing acute muscle/
joint pain in my wrists. I placed
my hands under this dog's belly
for about 15 minutes, and when I
took my hands out, my pain was
gone! He was so warm he felt like
a toaster! Although these dogs
don't necessarily cure pain, when
you place your body against theirs
for 15 minutes or more they offer
a unique ability to help mediate
pain. Xolos do not cure the pain,
but they sure help live with it!

Prior to this time, I was using a
microwavable hot neck wrap on
my neck almost 24/7. I used it
when I went to bed, but often had
to reheat it in the middle of the
night, and yet again before I could
get out of bed and get ready for
work. When I would go to the
movies, I would take my heated
neck wrap, and after it began to
cool in about 45 minutes, I would
ask to use the theatre's microwave
to reheat it so I could enjoy the
rest of the movie. This was not
fun, and a little embarrassing.

After my first experience with a
Xolo relieving my wrist pain, it
seemed logical that a toy size dog
of this breed would be small
enough to sit around my neck
and serve as a LIVE heating pad...
one that does not have to be
microwaved! I was so impressed

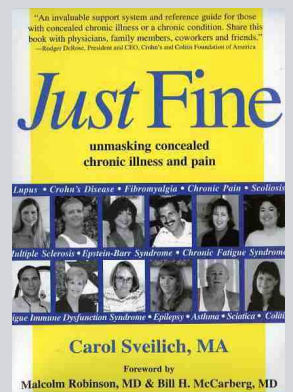
with all I learned about this breed
that I bought one immediately. I
named her Toaster because she is
quite "Toastie"! She soon became,
for me, the best neck wrap and
pain reliever anyone could want.

Toaster began to sit around my
neck at six weeks of age. She took
to providing this healing service as
if she was born to do it. She often
seems to have a big smile, and in
her eagerness to help, she
sometimes scrambles so fast to get
up to my neck that she slips!

Toaster and I soon became
inseparable. With her warmth
easing my pain, I was able to drive
and do more things for myself. She

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Just Fine:
Unmasking
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Carol Sveilich,
MA. An
invaluable
reference guide
for those with a
chronic
condition, it also
contains stories
of many people



helped alleviate my feeling of isolation, an experience shared by many who live with chronic pain. Because of the difference she made in my life, I both wanted and needed to take Toaster everywhere with me. To be permitted in public places where dogs are normally not allowed meant that Toaster had to become certified as a service dog. Most people think of a service dog called a guide dog, which assists the blind or hearing impaired, or wheel chair users. However, these are no longer the definitive ways in which dogs can be of service to those with disabilities and health challenges. The list of abilities and services that dogs can provide in assisting humans has been expanded in many new and even unusual ways. Service dogs are trained to assist those with mobility deficits by helping them balance or stand up. It is becoming more widely known that dogs have even been trained to detect the onset of seizures or even cancer. Dogs are able to open doors, close doors, retrieve certain items from the refrigerator, and help people get dressed or undressed. The assistance dogs provide gives their owners much needed physical help, as well as the hope

of an improved quality of life. It is a well-known fact that animals, in general, can lower one's blood pressure, relieve stress, and improve mood.

I eventually discovered a program in Poway, California called "Leashes 4 Living", which trains and certifies disabled people to train their own dogs. Toaster and I enrolled in 2000 and embarked on a tremendously bonding, albeit challenging, adventure together. Toaster was the only small dog in that particular class, but she is extremely intelligent and seemed to know how to become accepted in a group of golden retrievers and labs. Soon she impressed all the other dogs in the classroom by lining up and practicing commands along with the rest of them. Toaster and I graduated in February 2002!

Toaster has helped me in so many more ways than just being a hot neck wrap. Many people with chronic pain suffer from secondary conditions, such as depression. I was not an exception. Xolos are extremely intelligent and sensitive to their owner's needs and moods. One of the things I taught Toaster was to sing with me. When I am having a bad

day, we sing together and I am quickly cheered up. She even has her own theme song, Tostada, sung to the tune of Volari.

I believe that animals are angels for us, healing us in more ways than we can imagine. They provide us with compassion and unconditional love. They help us remember universal love and the pure pleasure of play, which can be forgotten by those tired and beaten down from a pain filled day. Anyone who has owned a pet knows how much joy and love animals bring to our lives. It is a well-established fact that pets often extend the longevity of their owners.

Animals offer those who may be isolated in their pain an easy way to interact with people in public. Animals enable us to feel connected to life, despite our challenges, and our care of them offers us an important sense of purpose and practice of unconditional love.

One of the most devastating side effects of FMS for me was the loss of my identity and self-esteem, which I experienced through helping others as a Licensed Clinical Social Worker. One of the most amazing things that happened for me shortly after I got Toaster was the birthing of a

creative outlet making greeting cards of her for people with illness and disabilities. I named this business Animal Angel Healers..!Inc (AAH..!Inc)

AAH..!'s purpose is to share the healing power of animals and their natural ability and desire to bring healing to and alleviation of human suffering. Those with Fibromyalgia form a large, and unfortunately, growing population of people who are disabled by it, but for whom there is no designated type of service dog. AAH..!Inc is dedicated to increasing public awareness of the possibility of this particular breed to serve as a service dog that can assist them with the type of pain and disability they may face.

To that end, I bred Toaster in order to place the first Xolos with others with chronic pain. On May 25, 2002, Toaster bravely delivered her first litter of puppies. She had two hairless and two coated. All were placed with individuals with Fibromyalgia except the female hairless who was promised to the breeder as final payment for Toaster, but returned to me because of a bad knee cap, which resulted in an

amputation. But, not to worry, we made more lemonade out of lemons: Pink was so inspiring in how she coped with her new disability that I am writing a children's story about her which I hope will inspire other children who have lost a limb. She runs as fast as a greyhound!

Toaster's and my story and her whelping was documented by



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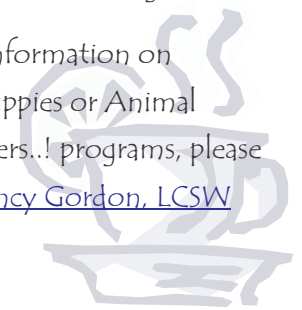
Animal Planet for their show "That's My Baby!" which continues to air across the country at various times. I can always tell when it has aired because I get at least a few emails begging for a little "Toaster".

The response to announcing the availability of these puppies was so overwhelmingly positive that yet another program for AAH..! was birthed! The Xolo puppy placement program is proudly named Xolo Chronic Pain Relief

(X-CPR!) and we are expecting to obtain sponsors to underwrite this program. My hope is that some of the proceeds can be allocated to a future fund within X-CPR to provide financial aid for alternative medical treatment to assist those with FMS who cannot afford it as well as sponsoring puppies for placement.

I am immeasurably grateful to Toaster because she has provided me with a renewed sense of purpose and a way I could be of service to others once again.

For more information on Toaster's puppies or Animal Angel Healers..! programs, please contact [Nancy Gordon, LCSW](#)



who, just like Nancy,
struggle with pain and
illness, but on the
outside may look Just
Fine ...