



Norm Lazarus and Luke



I got my first taste of volunteer therapy work as an aide at a regional center for mentally challenged adults while I was attending college in Connecticut. I didn't own a dog then. The military called and put an end to this but the experience left quite an impression on me as a nineteen-year-old.

Shortly after I retired in 2004 and while my wife and her girlfriend Carol were both working, Carol's mom got sick and had to be placed in a nursing home. I took Doris, our first Bearded Collie, to visit. I was unaffiliated with therapy organizations at the time so we let Doris jump on her bed and, along with Doris' trademark slobbering kisses, there was lots of

laughter and many interesting stories about life in New Jersey during the Depression. My late parents experienced a lot of hardship during those years and didn't talk about it much so the conversations were very interesting for me. Doris and I visited Shirley regularly during the last two years of her life.

In 2012 I attended a Bearded Collie Club meeting where the guest speaker was a therapy dog professional. I joined her organization and volunteered for them for a year. In the spring of 2013 I joined Denver Pet Partners and started to visit at Swedish Medical Center on Tuesday mornings.

The overstimulated Doris wouldn't have made the cut at DPP. Her daughter Panda is skittish (the cat still intimidates her) so we enlisted Luke to be the designated family therapy dog. Luke achieved status as Bronze Grand Champion in 2012 and has titles in Conformation, Obedience, Agility, Therapy Dog, Herding Instinct and Nosework. The Nosework training technique is similar to the one used by police in sniffing out missing people, criminals, weapons and drugs. The trend now is to create new titles for fun events like barn hunt and trick dog (both of which my wife and Luke are involved in) as well as water sports. The nine years (so far) of training have really paid off and my wife and I think he has the attitude and desire to accomplish a lot. The crowds, noise, odors, long drives and bad weather associated with most dog shows don't bother him at this point. He turned ten last December. He's free-spirited, though, and doesn't care much for cages. He does not like being alone so we stay close for support.





Luke, Doris (Luke's mom) and Panda (his sister) are Bearded Collies. They are frequently misidentified as Old English Sheepdogs. The breed co-starred in the two Disney "Shaggy Dog" movies. Appropriately enough, they appeared in a Swiffer newspaper ad recently. They are high maintenance, requiring constant grooming.

What we think of as the standard version of the Bearded Collie originated in the rugged countryside of Scotland in the 1500's and migrated to other parts of Europe in the 1700's. The first litter didn't make its' first appearance in the U.S. until the 1960's. They originally were used to guard and move large herds of livestock over great distances, often out of sight of their handlers, which meant they had to be physically and mentally tough - independent-minded, alert and well-disciplined.

Today's version of the Beardie is sweet-natured and has a great sense of humor. Some time ago my sister visited us. She has a friend in the Denver area whose husband is blind. Luke will normally act up when friends come over in order to gain attention. During this particular visit, though, he assumed a position at the side of the chair where this disabled person was sitting and sat perfectly still. We were so proud. No vest, lead, verbal command, hand signals or clicker needed.



During my second evaluation with Denver Pet Partners, the test course was nearly completed and I thought he was doing quite well. Then the evaluator went into a kneeling position to praise Luke on a job well done, at which point he got so excited he propped his paws on the evaluator's shoulders and kissed her. So much for perfection.

Beardies socialize well with other breeds but go nuts when they see one of their own. As I arrived at a show site in Greeley I heard one of our club members off in the distance yelling at me to please leave right away. Her dog was about to enter the ring, caught sight of Luke and was bouncing up and down non-stop. We call it the Beardie bounce. I apologized, left quickly and the other dog eventually settled down and completed her run. My wife has to arrive early for training classes so Luke can socialize with his four-legged classmates before class begins.

During a trial at the Boulder County Fairgrounds, a horse appeared in a nearby field as he was running his course. They locked eyes and Luke became too focused on the horse to complete the run. After a day with Luke, either my wife or I will come home and greet each other in the following manner:

1. Wow, look at those ribbons! Good job! There must not have been any distractions! **OR:**
2. How'd it go? Well...let's just say he had fun!

It's not unusual for Luke to be surrounded by children and handicapped people in wheelchairs. He takes it all in stride and stays aware of his surroundings.

DPP Team of the Month (May 2018)

DENVER PET PARTNERS



During a Beardie National Specialty in Los Angeles, Luke figured out how to open the door latch to the room where my wife and her girlfriend were staying. He promptly walked down to the cafeteria and briefly joined them for breakfast. He's quite the social butterfly. I have no idea how the other diners felt about it.

When my wife and I are on our daily walks, Luke will stop to let his sister and mom catch up if they fall behind. He's got the tail wagging even when he's getting groomed and bathed. He routinely runs up to us while we're relaxing in the house, gives us a quick kiss and runs off. Pretty happy guy. One day I absent-mindedly left the backyard gate open. I found him sitting by the front door. I think he was trying to tell us something.

Luke and I have received a fair share of compliments during our time together on smile patrol. Today a Rehab nurse told me she got a dog because of Luke. I thought that was an incredibly nice thing to say and probably won't forget it for a while.

