

RUDY, THE THERAPY DOG *(Originally Published in Dogs in Canada)*

Ordinary people doing decent things are often not as newsworthy as not-so-nice people doing not-so-nice things, and this is as true in the dog world as anywhere else. It therefore gives me pleasure to relate the events of one special morning at a dog show the week before last Christmas when our dog community showed its finest colours..

I have previously written in this Column about Rudy, my German Shorthaired Pointer, who is a therapy dog and who visits the residents of an intermediate care facility on a weekly basis. The loving response to Rudy over the months has grown and intensified, and this prompted me to suggest that a few of the more able residents may wish to attend the Auld Lang Syne dog show. The activities' director of the Home predicted that perhaps five or six people might be willing to venture out on a cold December morning. Imagine our surprise and delight when we had sixteen elderly dog lovers (the most that the little bus would hold) all bundled up and ready to go led of course by their inimitable Shorthair pal.

A bit panicked by the response, I had earlier contacted the show chairperson, Monika Pinsker, for help. Monika was a real brick from beginning to end. She advised me where in the bleachers to seat the visitors so that they would have a good view of the rings which would be the busiest. She forewarned the judges of what would be happening, and not one of those judges missed a beat as twenty of us (well, twenty-one including Rudy) made it up the stairs and along the noisy wooden bleachers, with an assortment of canes, walkers and wheelchairs. Rudy was in her element, being back in the show world, and she pranced and danced at the head of the group, showing off just a little! Once everyone was in place, Monika's daughter Michelle raided the judges' room (earlier stocked by Monika) and served tea, hot chocolate and cookies. Monika had even taken the time to make sixteen little gift packets of oranges, candy and candy canes in the spirit of the season.

Then came the most amazing thing. None of the exhibitors had given more than a casual glance towards our section of the bleachers, and there was none of the staring or grouchy comments that the care workers had feared. Instead, many of the exhibitors came up into the bleachers and filed past the old dears, giving them the chance to meet a variety of show dogs and to say a few words to the people on the end of the leashes. There were smiles and hugs and "kisses" abounding, and it's hard to say who enjoyed the visit more. This was an unplanned and spontaneous act of kindness towards a special group of our citizens who sometimes are not given the warmest of welcomes.

The spirit continued and when the time came for us to leave, other spectators helped the visitors out of the bleachers and towards the waiting bus, lending hands and arms on the stairs and even carefully lifting wheelchairs.

The morning was an unqualified success, thanks to many, many dog show people who overlooked a little commotion and who put themselves out to make that day a little brighter for people whose days are not always that bright. Maybe it was just the Season. But I don't think so.

What I do think is that we, as dog fanciers, have so many opportunities to make a difference in the community and as Shorthair owners, we have the most wonderfully versatile breed with which to do so. Our dogs are handsome, social and athletic. Choose seniors' activities, school demonstrations of obedience, flyball or agility. It is our responsibility not only to practise canine good citizenship, but to teach it as well, so that our beloved dogs and breed stay in good public standing, and perhaps make a difference in someone's life.