

By the grace of dog

**Pet Therapy
Poems**



Joan Ray

By the grace of dog

Pet Therapy poems
by Joan Ray

This book is a tribute to the Pet Therapy work of:

Guide Dogs Victoria

who sponsored the VISPAT Program from its inception in 1987 until 2004, and

Lort Smith Animal Hospital

who have run with it since then as
Lort Smith Pet Therapy.

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Disclaimer: please note that to comply with privacy requirements, with the exception of Jenny Royston, **names of patients or residents mentioned in these poems are fictitious.**

A few dogs also have their names changed, but Pippa, Satchmo, and my own dogs: Boz, Dylan and Maddie retain their rightful names.



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Joan Ray with Boz, visiting Wyuna Nursing Home, Westgarth

What's the use?

Like every other day
he sits
people come and go
he sits
staring into space
no face, no action prompts
the least response
he's heard nor said a word
in all of two long years

Boz walks into the room
he smiles and comments
"Dog"

Julie Patching was the NUM (Nurse Unit Manager) of the Orthopaedic Ward at the Royal Children's Hospital, Parkville, who (in partnership with Guide Dogs Victoria) pioneered the dog visiting program at that hospital. The program is now serviced by the Lort Smith Animal Hospital. With Sylvia Anderson, Julie was also responsible for introducing Pet Therapy to the Alfred Hospital.

It was Julie and Sylvia, with Maree Binaise (Roytal), who helped to train our hospital volunteers.

Mary, Mary...

"Get that dog outside!"

Dylan and I would dodge the thrusting voice,
the imperious wave and eyes that glared.

Now, as I guide a novice dog and handler
round the home, there she is,
poised by the passage rail,
right in our path.

"This way,"

I mutter, hustling them aside,
my added *"She hates dogs"*
cut short by

"Bring the dog to me!"

"Supervised first visits" took place initially at Wyuna Nursing Home, and subsequently at the Manningham Centre and the Kingston Centre. These tests were the second level of assessing the dogs and their handlers.

Dog-lover

in memory of Jenny Royston

Poised on eternity's edge, eyes
closed, and scarcely breathing.
"Jenny!" Her gaze is far away
elsewhere or nowhere?
"Jenny!" I call again.
She's searching now, no
recognition as she finds
my face. "Jenny!" I try again,
lose contact as I stoop,
bring the dog's face next to mine –
one long Labrador stretched tall,
front paws upon my arm.

"Oh," she croons "*oh, you are beautiful!*"
then "*Oh, I do love you...*
I do love you!" her face aglow.
"*How old is she?*" she asks, and
"*What's her name?*"
I answer, but her look
is all for the dog.

Swift as a cloud
across the sun she's gone –
back into the future... past?
or nowhere? Who can say?
I promise "*We'll be back...*"
and steal away.

withheld from
web publication



Marlene Day and her rescue Doberman, Storm, at St Vincent's Dialysis Unit.

Photo courtesy Vie Ponti

Dogs of this size are ideal for reaching the high beds or chairs commonly found in such places.

Some fifty Team Leaders, such as Marlene Day (above) and Gai van Staveren (Kingston Centre), provided liason between the VISPAT coordinator, other team members and the facility contact.

While volunteers could (and did) phone the coordinator directly, it helped to have this more personal contact. Team Leaders also substantially aided administration of the VISPAT program. Without their dedication and willing support the coordinator's job would have been overwhelming.

The job was also aided by a local coordinator for the Geelong volunteers, Elaine Longshaw.

These poems arose from Joan Ray's 25 years both coordinating volunteers in the Pet Therapy Program, and as a "dog-visitor" herself in nursing homes and hospitals.

In *By the grace of dog*, the reader is privileged to witness, again and again, the way the ill, young and old, the forgetful and those "*poised on eternity's edge*" are calmed by the presence of a dog.

... rewarding and emotive reading. When person and dog meet, as they do often in this book, no matter how desolate the situation, "*suddenly the world is free from harm*".

Dr Lyn Hatherly – Poet;
Managing Editor, Five Islands Press

Joan Ray thinks dogs, almost lives dogs. ... She has written about dog handling in hospitals with knowledge and passion, short poems about incidents, with understanding and insight. ... The emotions apparent in this collection are genuine and affecting. ...a testament to one woman's life's work.

Connie Barber – Poet

This book draws with consummate ease, the mark of a skilful poet, our attention to the dogs and to the people they visit. ... There is no sentimentality in these poems though there is great compassion. There is grief, the grief of those who have had to leave their pets behind... There is much laughter... These poems are so immediate you can almost feel the touch of soft warm fur: a cold nose pressed into your hand.

Kathryn Hamann – Poet

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