

# Dog as Translator

By Maureen Ross and Tate

**A short story about a Spanish speaking cancer patient, an English speaking woman and a dog who helps to break the communication barrier creating a meaningful connection.**



(L to R) Famous Tate, Author Maureen Ross, Journey (pet-assisted therapist in training), and author's husband and avid pet-assisted therapy supporter Gary

**M**any precious moments leave us feeling grateful to have the opportunity to share the gift of our pets. Tate (Border Terrier) and I are regular visitors at the cancer center and kidney dialysis units at Saints Medical Center in Lowell, Massachusetts. On a snowy day, and at first glance out the window, I thought about rescheduling which would have been fine with the Director at Saints. I wondered how many people would show up. To our surprise, many! What was I thinking? We live in New England. New Englanders are tough. People with challenges like cancer, even tougher!

We ended up parking on the 6th floor of the parking garage. Deciding to take the stairs to release some energy and a little stress, Tate and I made our way to check-in at the main lobby. Without fail, we meet and greet at least a dozen people before signing in. The smell of Dunkin Donuts

(located in the lobby – not kidding) is an aphrodisiac. A dog is a double-aphrodisiac.

After politely declining several offers of donuts, (for Tate not me) and meeting up with our volunteer guide, we headed to the cancer building. It was busy because people wanted to get their treatments before the holiday. We made our way down the aisle to anyone interested in seeing or touching Tate. Upon reaching the last curtained cubicle, we met Anna.

Anna was busy playing with a camera borrowed from a staff member. She was looking at pictures of dogs – perfect timing. When Anna spotted Tate, little needed to be said. The smile and hand gesture welcomed us into Anna's healing space.

Carefully placing Tate on Anna's lap, I noticed that we had a little language barrier. Anna spoke a lot of Spanish. I speak a lot of English and some dog. Tate was our interpreter. Delightfully, we learned some new Spanish words like "hola-hello" and "me llamo – my name is Moe and this is Tate." Anna asked us in "sign-language" to take pictures of Tate and her, not me, but that's okay. I'm use to being addressed as Tate's chauffeur, secretary, groomer, massage therapist and owner. When it was time to say "adios" to our new "amiga" we hoped to see Anna again. We never know.

This is just one of many opportunities in which dogs help us break barriers of communication, put a smile on someone's face, bring a bit of joy and make a precious connection to be stored in a lifetime of memories.

As we left that day, we decided to climb back up the six flights of stairs to the parking garage, much to Tate's chagrin. We've both been informed we need to lose a few pounds. It was snowing. Tate and I pleasantly collapsed in the car and sat, watching the snow, grateful to be living in the present moment, enjoying the journey.

