

Animals make us human

— *Straja Linder King*

Tangus dreams of
gratitude stars
deep in our hearts
embers of grace

Tangus keeper of
our forgotten song
our source
our heartbeat

Tangus reminds us
the earth is not a resource

Tangus gathers
hearth of stars
constellating
peace forgiveness and love

Tangus curls
close to the fire
warmth of reconciliation

all our relations
all our worlds
all are one

now we gather
lest we forget
lay our head gently on his side
remembering lost rhythms
of our ancestor's ancestors

Death of Tangus
sound the drums
earth echoes
chanting
our forgotten song

plant people star people
singing through
stillness of heart
entrainment of being

deep secrets
innate knowing
the world is not a resource
but our source
our fire within

Tangus guardian of
loving kindness and compassion
Wisdom Elder source of beauty
made Gaia smile
our mother our earth
our one precious heart

Travel well my beloved.

Therapy dog had a special gift

By Leila Meyer

One Saturday afternoon in May, a Calgary church was packed with people for a very unusual memorial service. It was for Tangus, a therapy dog, and for more than two hours, one person after another shared stories about how Tangus had helped them and touched their lives. Tangus was a 10-year-old Shiloh Shepherd. He died on April 12 of neurological complications that had suddenly and unexpectedly robbed him of his ability to walk or function normally.

Straja Linder King, a clinical art therapist and educator, adopted Tangus when he was a puppy. He grew up to be a huge, 115 lb. dog with soft, thick fur and loving eyes. Tangus accompanied Linder King everywhere and became her co-therapist. Together, they visited hospitals, schools, palliative care centres, seniors' residences and other facilities to help people of all ages who were coping with physical, cognitive or emotional difficulties.

Over the years, Tangus accumulated numerous certifications and awards. He held his Canine Good Citizen papers. He won an Animal Hero Award from the Pet Therapy Society of Northern Alberta for protecting Dr. Madeline Rugh from two black bears. And he was nominated twice for a Volunteer Calgary Leadership Award.

Tangus' gift for helping people was something that came to him naturally. "You can't train him to engage people," says Linder King. "I could train him in basic obedience, but I just trusted his wisdom because he knew what to do."

When accompanying Linder King to one of her therapy sessions or classes, Tangus would often approach people on his own, gently nudge them with his nose and wait to see if they responded. If they did, he would stay with them, allowing them to pet him or cuddle him. "It just gives them comfort to have something warm and soft and completely nonjudgmental," says

Marian Mehew, one of Linder King's graduate students who became a close friend over the years. Tangus seemed to have a sixth sense about who to approach. "They almost always say that they needed him there, that his being there was calming and comforting for them," says Mehew.

Tangus helped people of all ages who felt that they couldn't talk to anybody else. People who have been through traumatic experiences often feel that they cannot talk to anybody about their experiences because of the judgements that people make, but talking to Tangus enabled them to unburden themselves. "The animals, they hold the secret and they don't tell anybody, so people feel very safe talking to an animal," says Nancy Lindquist, another one of Linder King's students.

He was also a source of comfort for the elderly. "They've had so many losses. Where do they get their hugs?" says Linder King. For people who had nobody else, Tangus was somebody they could hug, so they could feel a connection with another living being. And he worked with troubled teens. Linder King had the kids teach Tangus tricks and it was very effective therapy for them. "They learn how to give positive reinforcement and be assertive without being aggressive," says Mehew. "They develop self esteem from being able to handle a big animal like that and they learn responsibility because they have to ration out the treats so they don't overfeed him." These are all important life skills that these kids might not learn otherwise, but they have fun learning them because they're playing with a dog, adds Mehew.

Now that Tangus is gone, Linder King's two-year-old Shiloh Shepherd, Tumbra, is taking over his work. Linder King adopted Tumbra after spending an afternoon with Tangus and 22 puppies from two litters. Of all the puppies, Tumbra was the one who connected with Tangus, so he became

Animal Assisted Therapy

Animal Assisted Therapy has been in existence since WWII. In 1976 a training program was developed for working dogs and in 1982 the concept was broadened into Animal Assisted Therapy. Today this form of therapy is practiced world wide.

So what is animal assisted therapy?

Animal Assisted Therapy is a partnership between a therapist and a working animal who provides a loving presence through non-verbal communication. Working animals assist people, individually or in groups, to heal by enabling them to feel safe, comfortable and present to the power of unconditional love. Research has shown that the bonds between species expedite healing and foster well-being. Our beloved animal companions help create a sacred balance.

Benefits of Animal Assisted Therapy

- Increases self-esteem
- Opens non-verbal communication
- Improves attention skills
- Increases responsibility
- Provides opportunities for safe touch and interaction
- Lowers blood pressure and heart rate
- Teaches about living in the moment rather than focusing on feelings about the past or worrying about the future
- Improves physical, social, emotional and/or cognitive functioning of the individual

Trained therapy dogs seem to know who needs a companion during therapy while being respectful of the client's need for space as well. For more information about Animal Assisted Therapy call (403) 210-2802 or visit Spiritual Directions at www.spiritualdirections.com.

—Source: *Spiritual Directions, operating under the auspices of the Community Opportunity Foundation of Alberta.*



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Tangus' apprentice, Tumbra has matured noticeably, as though he realizes that he must now take over for Tangus.

Tumbra is particularly gifted at interacting with children and he is even helping kids learn to read. He's a source of inspiration for them because Tumbra himself can read seven words, which Linder King taught him through operant conditioning and months of training.

Tumbra has some big paws to fill. Tangus touched so many people, as evidenced by the outpouring of love at his memorial service. Linder King says,



Tangus and Tumbra palling around.

"It was very humbling for me to just be on the other end of the leash and to make sure that I could give him the best life that I possibly could and that's what makes me emotional because he gave so much more than I could ever possibly give back." 🐾