

Is Holly Working Today?

For Holly and me, it started with a stray kitten¹⁾. Abandoned in the harsh winter weather, she huddled in a ball on the front steps of our building, an elementary school for emotionally disturbed children where I provided therapy three days a week.

That morning, I kept the kitten in my office while the principal figured out²⁾ where to take it.

It started as the children soberly³⁾ traipsed⁴⁾ into my office that day for their therapy. When they spotted the kitten, their faces suddenly brightened. Their reticence⁵⁾ and tenseness seemed to melt away as they petted the stray, and our sessions were relaxed and open. The kitten's effect was astounding and, by the end of the day, I was hatching a plan. My dog, Holly, was a gentle, gregarious⁶⁾, well-behaved seven-year-old of mixed parentage. Couldn't she have the same relaxing effect on the children I counseled? Enthused, I began paperwork requesting permission to bring Holly to school with me, providing documentation of the benefits of companion animals.

The project was approved, but my supervisor clearly let me know that Holly and I were on trial. The responsibility for any problems with the "dog experiment" would land squarely on my shoulders. Optimistic nonetheless, I smiled at the signs pasted on my office door as I unlocked it on Holly's first morning with me at school. "Holly is happy to be here," the children had carefully stenciled⁷⁾. Already the children were responding positively to the idea of a dog counselor. Holly sniffed out my office, and we settled in for a day of work.

A small boy entered, and he and Holly stared at each other warily. "Does that dog bite?"

"No," I assured him. "Why don't you give her a treat?" I handed him a bag of multicolored doggie treats. "Pick any color you like," I said. The boy chose a red treat and tentatively held it out to Holly. She neatly and gently took the treat, swallowed it quickly and licked the boy's hand. The boy smiled. Holly's critical debut had been a success.

After the bell rang, a succession of little visitors came to our door, vying⁸⁾ to see Holly. As they took turns handing treats to Holly, she wagged her tail and licked their hands, showing her approval. It was no wonder the children were drawn to her: For many of them, it was their first encounter with unconditional acceptance.

During the days that followed, Holly learned not to bark at the children's knocks on my office door. I set up a corner for her in my office on a piece of carpet remnant⁹⁾. The children eagerly came to me for their counseling visits, sitting on the floor by Holly and petting, brushing, playing with and confiding in her. As they relaxed with Holly, they let down their defenses. Our counseling sessions became smooth and productive.

Little by little, Holly's influence reached beyond her little corner of my office. Absences at school began to drop, and the children's disruptive behaviors softened. Even the teachers ducked in for some pet therapy throughout the day, giving Holly a short pat and restoring their spirits in her presence.

I didn't realize how loved Holly was, though, until I missed two days of work with strep throat¹⁰⁾. When I called in sick the first day, expecting a touch of sympathy, I was immediately asked if that meant Holly would have to stay home, too. The second day, I

was seriously asked if I could at least send Holly to work in a cab. Apparently, the teachers were tired of answering the question: "Is Holly working today?"

One morning before school, nine-year-old LeMar, a third-grader who visited Holly regularly, was shot and killed in a domestic dispute. His classmates learned of the tragedy while they were still on the school bus, and by the time they arrived at school, they were terrified and in tears.

I hurried to LeMar's home classroom, Holly trailing behind me. LeMar's teacher stood there with tears streaming down her face. "My degree didn't prepare me to handle something like this," she sobbed. I mustered all my sources and expertise to come up with the right words to soothe them.

"Crying is okay for adults and children," I began, "especially when something like this happens." Still seeing the pain on their faces, I continued to tell them that it was okay to be scared, that fear is a natural response. For a while, we talked about how we would miss LeMar. It was at this point that I realized what Holly was doing.

She was working her way around the room, going from child to child—and the teacher—putting her front paws on their laps and stretching up to lick the tears from their faces. Unconsciously, the children hugged her back, running their fingers through her fur with such intensity that she would have gone bald if they'd done it all day. She called no significant attention to herself, but quietly expressed love and consolation. She diligently kept up her silent comfort throughout that long, difficult day.

As I slid into the front seat of my car that afternoon, I leaned back, exhausted from the emotional trauma¹¹. I just wanted to be home. Glancing briefly into the backseat, I was surprised to see that Holly had already fallen asleep. She was just as drained as I was, if not more so, and, not for the first time, I felt a pang of guilt. Was it fair to ask my dog to take on the emotional responsibilities of troubled children? Shouldn't she be allowed to stay home and enjoy the carefree life of a house pet?

Those doubts may be why, even now, I occasionally stop in my rush to leave for school in the morning and, instead of ordering Holly into the car, look at her, asking, "Do you want to go to school today?" When she leaps up eagerly, all wags and excitement, I figure she's answered that burning question for all of us. Yes, Holly is working today.

□by Barbara J. Wood

霍莉今天上班吗？

对我和霍莉来说，一切是从一只无主的猫开始的。它在严寒中被抛弃，在校舍楼前台阶上，蜷缩在一个球里。这是一所为心理不正常的儿童开设的小学，我在那儿每周提供三天的心理治疗。

那天早上，我把那只猫留在了我的办公室里，而校长则在考虑如何安置它。

那天，事情是从孩子们安静地、悠悠忽忽走进我的办公室接受治疗开始的。他们见到小猫时，个个眼前一亮。他们摸拍这只无主的猫时，素日的缄默和紧张似乎融化了，疗程进行得既轻松，又坦率。小猫的效果令我吃惊，那天工作结束时，我就开始酝酿一项计划。我的混血狗霍莉7岁，它性情温和、合群、有礼貌。它对我治疗的孩子也能产生松弛神经的同样效果吗？我满腔热情地着手写报告，引用文献资料，列举了以动物为伴的好处，请求批准我

带霍莉来学校。

我的计划虽然获准，但是校长交代得很清楚，我和霍莉是先试试。我要对有关“狗试验”出现的任何问题承担全部责任。

即使这样，我还是很乐观。带霍莉来学校的第一天早上，我开锁打开办公室门时，看到贴在门上的告示，我笑了。孩子们认认真真地写着：“霍莉高兴来这儿”。他们对狗充当辅导员的想法已经做出积极的反应。霍莉把办公室嗅闻一遍后，我们一天的工作就开始了。

一个小男孩走进来，他和霍莉警惕地对视着。“那狗咬人吗？”他问道。

“不，”我让他放心。“你为什么不给它吃点什么？”我递给他一袋各种颜色的狗饼干。“挑你喜欢的颜色，”我说道。那男孩挑了块红色的，试探地朝霍莉伸出手。它利索轻巧地叼住饼干，很快地吞下后，舔了舔男孩的手。男孩笑了。霍莉的初次登场获得成功。

铃响后，一伙小参观者陆续来到门前，争着要看霍莉。他们轮流喂它饼干，它晃动着尾巴，还舔他们的手，表示赞赏。它吸引孩子并不奇怪，因为许多孩子是第一次被无条件地接受。

在随后的日子里，霍莉学会不再听到孩子敲我办公室门时就吠叫。我为它在屋角里放了块地毯碎头。孩子们积极地来我这儿进行心理治疗，他们坐在霍莉身旁的地上，抚摸它，梳理它的毛，逗它玩，向它吐露心里话。孩子们轻松地 and 霍莉相处，防备意识也随之松懈。心理障碍疗程进展顺利，卓有成效。

霍莉的影响逐渐地从屋角扩展到办公室外。上课缺勤率开始下降，孩子们的捣乱行为有所缓和。甚至教师们也不时光顾，想接受些宠物治疗，轻拍它一下，在它面前又重新打起精神。

直到我因为脓毒性咽喉炎两天没去学校，我才知道霍莉多么受人们爱戴。第一天我打电话请病假，期望听到一些同情的话语，可对方立刻问我，这是否意味霍莉也得待在家里。第二天，学校来电话问我，能否至少让霍莉搭出租车去上班。很明显，老师们已经厌烦回答同样的问题：“霍莉今天上班吗？”

一天早上上课前，定时来看霍莉的三年级学生、9岁的勒马尔在家庭争吵中被枪击后死去。他的同学们在校车上听到这噩耗，到了学校后，个个惊恐不已，流着眼泪。

霍莉尾随我匆忙赶到勒马尔的教室。勒马尔的老师站在那儿，泪流满面。“我的学位没有教我怎样处理这样的事情，”她抽噎着说道。我使出浑身解数，想说出恰当的话来安慰他们。

“对成年人和孩子来说，哭是应该的，”我开口说道，“尤其是发生了这种事情的时候。”看到他们脸上仍显露着悲痛，我接着告诉他们恐惧也是正常的，那是一种自然反应。我们谈论了一会儿我们对勒马尔的思念。就在这个时候，我才注意到霍莉在干什么。

它绕着教室走，从一个孩子到另一个孩子，也到老师那儿，它把前爪放在他们膝上，挺身舔去他们脸上的眼泪。孩子们下意识地抱住它的背，使劲胡噜它的毛，手指用劲那么大，要是胡噜一天的话，霍莉准会成秃毛狗了。它并不要求给予它自己多大的关注，只是默默地奉献挚爱和安抚。在那漫长而痛苦难熬的一天里，霍莉不知疲倦地给人以无声的慰藉。

那天下午，我钻进汽车前座后，仰身坐下，感情的创伤使我疲惫不堪。我只想回家。往后座一瞥，我惊奇地看到霍莉已经睡着了。它如果不比我更累，至少和我一样筋疲力尽。我再次感到良心的不安。让我的爱犬承担陷入痛苦的孩子们感情上的责任公平吗？它是不是该留在家中，享受家庭宠物无忧无虑的生活呢？

这些疑问，可能说明了我有时早上匆忙准备去学校时为什么要停步，不是叫霍莉上车，而是看着它问道：“今天你想去学校吗？”当它急切地蹦起，摇晃着尾巴，激动不已时，我想它已经回答了我们大家急于要问的问题。是的，霍莉今天上班。

NOTE 注释：

kitten ['kitn] n. 小猫

figure out [美口] 想出

soberly ['səubəli] adv. 严肃地，冷静地

traipse [treips] vi. [口] 闲荡，拖着脚步走

reticence ['retɪsəns] n. 沉默寡言

gregarious [gre'gæəriəs] adj. 社交的，群居的

stencil ['stensl, -sil] vt. 用模板印刷

vie [vai] v. 竞争

remnant ['remnənt] n. 残余，剩余，零料，残迹

strep throat [医] 脓毒性咽喉炎

trauma ['trɔ:mə] n. [医] 外伤，损伤