

## Celebrating the Human Animal Bond

On Palm Sunday, Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. The donkey was the animal chosen by Army Commanders back then when opposing sides met to sign a peace treaty. In choosing a donkey Jesus was declaring peace for the world on behalf of God.

Domesticated animals have shared the lives of the human race for thousands of years. Dogs were domesticated about 15000 years ago. Since then they have complimented our lives first as hunting partners, livestock herders, protectors and companions. Today the role of dogs has expanded to include guiding the blind and assisting the deaf and disabled, contributing to our safety at airports and assisting police and the armed forces, diagnosing cancer, as therapy dogs for PTSD and probably most importantly as companions.

I am interested in the roles that animals served in WWI & II. and since we are close to Remembrance Day and spend a few minutes sharing some stories with you. Horses, mules and donkeys have served us in agriculture and transportation for centuries. Unfortunately, they have been conscripted for cavalry service in war for hundreds of years. In WWI their role as part of cavalries diminished and they were used more to pull wagons, artillery or ambulances often under hellish conditions. Imagine for a second the trauma experienced by a horse raised on a peaceful farm. On the battlefield they endured the horror of the sounds and smells of war. It is estimated that over 8 million horses mules or donkeys were killed in WWI. Dogs pigeons, cats, camels and elephants were also used by the armies in WWI.

Sergeant Stubby was the most decorated war dog of World War I and the only dog to be promoted to sergeant through combat. The Bull Terrier mix started out as a mascot, but ended up becoming a full-fledged combat dog. On the front lines, he was injured in a gas attack, which gave him a sensitivity to gas that allowed him to warn his soldiers of incoming gas attacks by running and barking. He helped find wounded soldiers, even captured a German spy. Stubby was the first dog ever given rank in the United States Armed Forces, and was highly decorated for his participation in seventeen engagements, and being wounded twice.

Two stories from WWII. During the invasion of Sicily, Chips a German Shepherd Husky mix and his handler were pinned down on the beach by a German machine-gun team. Chips broke free from his handler on the beach and ran toward machine gun fire that was pinning down Allied soldiers. Chips attacked the hidden gun nest, biting German soldiers and pulling a smoking machine gun from its base. Chips grabbed one of the Germans by the neck and dragged him from the pill box. His comrades followed with their hands up. Chips suffered burns and scalp wounds, but was otherwise fine. After the battle, Chips was recommended for the Distinguished Service Cross, the Silver Star and the Purple Heart The awards were later rescinded because army policy didn't allow animals to receive medals.

You would think that dog war heroes would be large breeds of dog. Let me share with you the story of Smoky, a Yorkshire terrier. She weighed only 4 pounds and stood 7 inches tall. In February 1944, Smoky was found by an American soldier in an abandoned foxhole in the New Guinea jungle. Smoky became a partner to Corporal William Wynne of Cleveland, Ohio, For the next two years, Smoky was back-packed through the rest of the war and accompanied Wynne on combat flights in the Pacific. Throughout her service, Smoky slept in Wynne's tent on a blanket made from a green felt card table cover; she shared Wynne's C-rations and an occasional can of Spam. Smoky was credited with twelve combat

missions and awarded eight battle stars. She survived 150 air raids on New Guinea and made it through a typhoon at Okinawa. Wynne credited Smoky with saving his life by warning him of incoming shells while on a transport ship calling her an "angel from a foxhole." Wynne taught Smoky tricks to entertain soldiers . Engineers were building an airbase in Luzon a crucial airfield for Allied war planes. The Signal Corps needed to run a telegraph wire through a 70 ft long 8 inch diameter pipe. The construction area was subject to sniper fire and bombings. Wynne tied a string attached to the telegraph wire to Smoky's collar and was able to get Smoky to pull the wire through and saved the crew from a potentially dangerous 3 day digging task. When Smokey and Wynne arrived home from the war they become celebrities travelling to Hollywood and all over the world to perform demonstrations of her remarkable skills, which included walking a tightrope while blindfolded. Smoky and Wynne were also very popular entertainers at veterans' hospitals. According to Wynne, "after the war Smoky entertained millions during late 1940s and early 1950s." In February 1957 Corporal" Smoky died at the approximate age of 14. Wynne and his family buried Smoky in a World War II .30 caliber ammo box,

Years ago before Calgary had a central veterinary emergency clinic each clinic was supposed to look after emergencies for their own clients. It was Sunday night about 8PM when the answering service called me with a request for help with a dog with an ear infection. After talking with the owners I explained this wasn't an emergency and could safely wait until their own clinic opened in 12 hrs. but they insisted that their dog be seen. When I arrived at the hospital there was a handsome black Lab named Argo there with his owners. They apologized for calling me out but explained their dog had just saved a baby's life and they wanted the very best care. They had been camping at a campground that spring that had a river running through it. The river was a raging torrent and a baby had slipped into the water and was washed away. People tried to rescue the child but because of the severity of the water flow, slippery rocks and murky water the child disappeared. They gave their dog the command to fetch and he located the child and saved a life. I suspect that Argo likely received a lot of steak in his diet after this.

*I am not sure if you heard but last week in the zoo in the wee hours most of the animals escaped their enclosures when a monkey borrowed some keys. Since it is football season and the Grey cup is in Calgary the animals wanted to get into the spirit with their own scrimmage. Captain of the first team was a gorilla and a lion was captain of the other team. The gorilla's team is winning at the end of the first half 34-7 because the rhinoceros is their half back and was very hard to stop. The second half begins and in the huddle the rhinoceros looks at the other team's defensive line and sees centipede. Rhinoceros says give me the ball and I am going to step on and squash the centipede. The centre snaps the ball and the quarterback hands off to the rhinoceros. Centipede rears up grabs rhinoceros by the legs and slams him to the floor. The ball pops loose, centipede grabs the ball weaves in and out and soon has a touchdown. The watching animals go wild . The lion captain rushes over and says Centipede that was amazing – where were you in the first half ?----- Well I was lacing my shoes.*

Touching and being touched is so important to our mental, and physical well being. A child, puppy or kitten won't develop normally if deprived of physical contact. Regardless of our age I believe it is essential to have that experience of touching and being touched. Yet these days we are often constrained or fearful of

touching people or children for fear of being it being inappropriate. If you ever been in a hospital or nursing home when a visiting comfort dog or cat has come in you would see for yourself the immediate joy these folks express when they are able to stroke a cat or a dog. University students stressed during exam time are soothed by being able to stroke a pet. Our pets are associated with a rainbow of memories of their time in our families. In my experience a house never seems to empty when a pet has died or a child has left home.

My mother lived in a senior care facility near my veterinary hospital and I visited her almost daily.

There was a little older lady who sat in a chair adjacent to the reception desk. She was always dressed in

a hat and coat, summer and winter as if waiting for someone but I never saw anyone come for her. I tried to engage her in conversation but she couldn't or wouldn't respond. The staff said she had issues speaking

English and she had almost no family or friends here. One Sunday AM I came to pick up Mom and arrived at the same time as a lady and her daughter who was holding a poodle puppy. The lady in waiting was there and when she saw the puppy she jumped up and reached out to hold the puppy she squealed with delight. I have never forgotten the transformation I saw in her. Animals can have the amazing ability to communicate when humans are unable. Some progressive long term care facilities have companion animals like cats, dogs, caged birds on staff that residents care for. Studies report that those folks have a better quality of life when then they can care for these critters.

I have witnessed dogs and cats who gave people a reason to keep living. I recall an older couple who had a Yorkshire terrier named Sparky . They lived in an apartment and loved this little dog dearly. Unfortunately the wife died leaving her husband lonely and distraught but he loved Sparky and cared for this little dog to the best of his ability. However Sparky was aging and had congestive heart problems, failing kidneys and a horribly infected mouth. With drugs and dialysis, we managed to keep this little guy going for several months but eventually euthanasia was required. The older gentleman died not long after-it seemed that he kept himself going for the sake of his pet and then when Sparky died he just seemed to fade away.

We are one with all that lives. The lilies of the field and the birds of the air have much to teach us. Today we celebrate our unity with our brothers and sisters in the plant and animal world and today we bless some of our animal companions we share our lives with.

Amen