

The Blessing

She was taken from a wild pack in Queens. Something indefinable about her kept the ASPCA officers from euthanizing her right away.* And then, realizing she was not vicious and that she was pregnant, they asked my friend Erika (who used to work at the ASPCA) if she would foster this shepherd-chow mix until the pups were born and weaned, warning her not to get attached; a dog with her history almost always has to be put down.

Erika named her Zoë, found homes for all of her puppies, and together, they went to class: obedience, advanced obedience, agility, and all the courses required for Zoë to be certified as a therapy dog.

They could now make regular visits to a retirement home for priests. The priests and the nurses were all happy to see this beautiful dog. Even the old fellow who, when she first started visiting, would dash into his room and slam the door, yelling, "I like cats!" He was won over when Erika told him that Zoë liked cats, too – she lived with four of them.

One of the residents was confined to a wheel chair and, because of Alzheimer's, lost to the world around him. The nurses told Erika that he spent most days screaming. No one could reach him any more – except Zoë.

When he saw her coming toward him down the corridor, he became quiet and recognition would light his eyes. When she rested her muzzle on his knee, he stroked her head and spoke her name. In her presence, he experienced a glimmer of lucidity, a moment of connection and peace.

This is a dog blessing a priest.



* The packs must be culled periodically; if they get too large they become dangerous. Most of the dogs captured must be euthanized because they are diseased or too wild to be adopted out (no facilities to care for feral dogs exist in New York).

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