

Therapy Beardies

Licking Loneliness



“Cheyenne” and “Doc”

Perfect Partners

Khiantah Cheyenne Bandit

“**Cheyenne**”, my rescue boy, was born to be a therapy dog! He’s gentle, and loves nothing more than visiting his friends and giving each of them his special attention.

Cheyenne was certified as a therapy dog in 2003 and we immediately began visiting the nursing home floor at the hospital where I worked. We’d go for weekly visits and he attended all their holiday parties.

In 2004, we began visiting at the Alverno Nursing Home’s Alzheimer’s floor exclusively. Cheyenne seemed to have a special affinity with these patients and many of them who couldn’t remember their family or friends week to week always remembered Cheyenne.

The staff would save special treats for him and if a specific patient was not in the social room, he’d go looking for them. He seemed to know which ones wanted him to come in and which ones weren’t quite sure about having a dog visit.

Although Cheyenne loved all his friends, he had one special friend that he’d always check on first. “Doc” had been a veterinarian in our town for 50 years. Now, he was in a catatonic state showing little interest in anything the staff tried to do for him. However, when Cheyenne began visiting Doc, his eyes would light up and he smiled for the first time in years. The staff was amazed!

Every week we’d visit the facility and Cheyenne’s first stop would be to see Doc. Sometimes he’d be in his room instead of in the social area and Cheyenne would immediately notice his buddy wasn’t there and would trot down the hall to Doc’s room. The nurses would help Cheyenne into the bed and then ask “Are his ears okay?” Doc would lift up each of Cheyenne’s ears, smile and nod his head, “yes”. It was amazing to see this man who’d shown no interest in anything for years with his special buddy — his eyes lit up and smiling!

I brought a picture of Cheyenne for Doc to keep on his night stand in his room. After several years of visiting this facility, there came a time when Doc never left his room. While Cheyenne would visit his other friends in the social room, show off his tricks, and clean up any food they’d dropped on the floor, he’s spend most of his time in Doc’s room.

The saddest part about doing therapy work is that our “friends” eventually leave us. One day, Cheyenne trotted down the hall to Doc’s room. The staff was waiting for us. Doc had passed away that morning in his sleep. He was found in his bed clutching the picture of Cheyenne to his chest. In his last moments, he’d been thinking about “his buddy”.

We’ll never forget Doc and I’m so glad, that in those final years, Cheyenne was able to make him smile and bring at least an hour of happiness and good memories to him each week.

To me, that’s what makes therapy dogs so very special and my Cheyenne is definitely one of those special ones!

— Marilyn Snook