

Canine comfort enhances sessions with Dr. Janice

BY JACKIE BUSSJAEGER
EDITOR

STILLWATER — First-time visitors to Dr. Janice Nadeau's new private therapy practice in Stillwater's Compass Center for Healing might not notice her assistant at first.

He sits quietly in his kennel until he senses his skills are needed. He is a German shepherd, and his name is Luther.

Many dog owners can attest that their animals seem to understand human emotions, and know when to be present to provide comfort. This phenomenon has been supported scientifically—in 2016, a study from the University of Lincoln, U.K., and the University of Sao Paulo, Brazil, demonstrated that dogs can match tone of voice to the corresponding emotional facial expressions. Through a mixture of training and natural sensitivity, Luther is adept at this skill.

"He senses even before I do that (people are) sad, and gets where they are," Nadeau said. "He just snuggles up close, and does some behavior that sort of absorbs whatever emotion is in the room."

Luther's more formal nickname is "Luther von Maxwell," in honor of Nadeau's first therapeutic dog, Captain Maxwell.

Training Captain Maxwell as a therapy dog was never in the plans, but Nadeau was reading a book about raising puppies that suggested new owners should keep their new puppies with them as much as possible. Naturally, Captain Maxwell accompanied Nadeau to her office in Minneapolis. He stayed in a kennel under the desk, and Nadeau trained him to be quiet and calm.

"He was so well received by my clients and my colleagues, they said 'Why wouldn't you just keep bringing him?'" Nadeau said.

She put Captain Maxwell through a few series of obedience and therapy training. (By the time she started working on Luther, she was able to do much of the training herself, with assistance from All-Breed Obedience North in Pine City).

After years of working with Captain Maxwell, he received a Professional Dog of the Year award in 2013 from the Minnesota Veterinary Medical Association at a ceremony at the Hilton Hotel.

Luther is his spiritual successor, who Nadeau described as more of a "country dog" with a bit of impish spunk.

"What's fascinating to me is he's different with each client,"

Nadeau said. "If we got into a sad story and you started feeling sad, he gets still. He gets up against people and just stays still. He just communicates way, way beyond words."

The comfort of a dog is especially useful for Nadeau's clients who are experiencing grief.

"There's so much that has no words. So much of grief is the feeling and the need for comfort, and he just seems to sense it and know what to do," Nadeau said. "I wouldn't practice without a dog now. Even Freud had a dog in his office."

Nadeau's PhD is in family and social science, and she is licensed as a psychologist, marriage and family therapist, and a nurse. Nadeau has a practice in Minneapolis, but is excited to bring her services to Stillwater, where she has been a resident for years.

She grew up on a farm in Vermont, to which she credits her great love of animals. She followed in



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Dr. Janice Nadeau in her Stillwater practice with her co-therapist, Luther.

the footsteps of her mother and grandmother and became a nurse, which is how she realized she wanted to engage with people on a more therapeutic level.

"I realized that hospice nursing was where it was at, because you get the whole family. People that are dying are so real. There's a lot of peripheral stuff that gets shed. So you get that heart-to-heart work, which I knew I liked, even as a nurse," Nadeau said.

When her husband Leonard decided he wanted to pursue a ministry education in the Twin Cities, it was the perfect opportunity for Nadeau to start her own master's degree in nursing at the University of Minnesota. She did a clinical specialty in loss and grief and began seeing patients privately. Together, she and her husband also began a grief support group called Growing Through Loss at their church in Shoreview. Many other churches in the north suburban area have since adopted the model.

However, Nadeau realized in her private practice that she was underprepared to handle the large scope of issues related to grief.

"People don't just come through the door with grief," she said. "They come through depressed. They come through with huge marital problems or relationship problems. They come through with all kinds of mental illnesses, and I wasn't prepared for all of that."

She received a Bush Leadership Fellowship to go back to school for her PhD, as well as a National Institute of Health grant. The funding allowed her

to conduct an innovative study that examined the relationship between grief theory and family theory and how families make sense of loss.

The results of the study were accepted by a major academic publication, and later printed as a book. She began getting international recognition and has spoken at conferences and gatherings around the world. She spent six weeks in Australia on a speaking tour as the 2005 Scholar of the Year.

Nadeau has firsthand experience with loss: her daughter and her husband both died in the same year, and then Captain Maxwell got sick.

"One of the things that grieving people seem to like to know is that you have a bit of an idea what it is that they're going through," Nadeau said. "And it helps me, because if I can make it a little easier for somebody, that makes what happened to me a little bit less painful. I can't do anything about the way it all came down for us, but I sure can make a difference for somebody else."

In addition to grief counseling, Nadeau helps clients with job loss, job change, divorce, couple's therapy and more. She hopes to start a dementia care support group in Stillwater in the near future.

Learn more about Nadeau's practice at www.drjanice.net, or by calling 612-870-1242. Her office is located in the Compass Center for Healing building, located at 116 Chestnut St. E., Stillwater.

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