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The power of a promise

By Susan Crawford



Susan Crawford hugs Heffy, her little bull/wiener, who provides his special brand of therapy to hospital patients.

"I promise to be the best therapy ever! Every check-up includes 10 free licks!"

For Heffy, the bull wiener, it doesn't matter whether you are eight or 80. He knows what his patients need.

Heffy started his therapy work at the tender age of eight weeks when he went to live with a cancer survivor and her husband. The couple had actually gone to look at another puppy, but upon their arrival, Heffy went right up to say hi to them. He crawled up onto the husband's lap and licked his hand. One wag of his stubby tail was all it took to make them head over heels for him! Did he know somehow that they needed extra love? No doubt! he did.

Heffy was the one to teach them about

chasing, chewing and catching, and above all, the importance of cuddling. He was the one to go to the hospital with them for appointments, the one to stand in the car continuously watching the hospital entrance for a glimpse of them heading back to the car and the one howling with delight that they could go home for more therapy.

For the husband, therapy would involve a rousing game of fetch with one of Heffy's many squeaky soccer balls or just sitting on his lap watching the computer screen as he worked in hopes a cute dog might appear on the screen from time to time.

Therapy for the patient depended on

how she was feeling. Sometimes it would be just cuddling beside her, always touching, but sometimes it would be escaping with a dirty sock from the laundry room for a game of tag. Whatever it entailed, it was to be there for her and to make her smile as much as possible.

She will always remember coming home after one radiation appointment where he crawled up on the bed beside her, bringing his most favourite squeaky soccer ball to put in her hand while she slept. He knew she was not well enough to play with him, but knew she needed the extra comfort. All he had to give was his love and his favourite toy. It was a small gesture but one by a small dog with



a huge heart, and one to say, "I know and I understand."

Heffy's list of patients continues to grow. He is now three years old, and regularly visits an older woman with Parkinson's disease. She saw Heffy coming to visit wearing his Doggles and giggled for the first time in years. Her husband was in tears too, for such a funny little dog, and for the gift of hearing her laugh. Heffy is a source of delight for another older lady with a broken pelvis, who has cheese treats lined up on her dining room table every Sunday, waiting for Heffy to arrive and do his high fives for her.

Heffy also visits a little boy with Crohn's disease who had a stem cell transplant last year, and loves to make Heffy do tricks. The list of presents from his patients is growing too: a case of squeaky soccer balls, a huge bratwurst sausage, a football and a beautiful Valentine's Day bouquet. Perhaps his true gifts though are the smiles he puts on their faces.

Just a simple touch, a high five and a lick is all it takes to lift their spirits and warm their hearts. Heffy promises to remind them that laughter is just a tail wag away. He promises to remind them to always try their hardest during their recuperation. He promises to remind them of the power of loving someone and of being loved, just with the touch of his paw — one little dog, lots of promises and lots of hearts!

It is all worth it. Just for the smile of someone who misses their own dog, for



the smile of someone who has a hard time smiling much anymore and for the peals of laughter from a little boy just discharged from hospital having Heffy come to visit wearing his cowboy hat.

How do I know? I am the cancer survivor who adopted Heffy three years ago. He has left his paw print on my heart, my husband's heart and the hearts of the patients he visits. What matters is what is in your heart, whether it is a paw print, or a smile or both. It is the power of a promise, Heffy's promise — to be the best therapy ever. 🐾



Heffy stars in *The Promise* along with his cousin, Gladys, and a whole host of friends from Calgary including Jessie, Ceasar, Jake, Tiago, Ashby, Saxon, Mikee and Koda, as well as a bunch of other friends from the SPCA in Puerto Vallarta.

The Promise is a photo book developed by Nadia Barnieh and Susan Crawford to support animal charities and to share heart warming moments with a whole host of four-legged buddies. You can check out Heffy and his pals at www.the-promise-book.com.

product picks



Little Wishes are cute little stuffed toys that represent pets who have been lost to cancer. Each Little Wish is \$5. Proceeds are donated to Kali's Wish Cancer Foundation – a non-profit dedicated to finding ways to help eliminate cancer in our animal companions. Little Wishes are available at Pet Planet.

If you've ever opened your heart to a dog, you understand the promise to love and look after each other no matter what. Purchase the 100-page, heart warming photo book, *The Promise*, and support charities at the same time. For details visit www.the-promise-book.com.



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