

Janie, Canine partner of Amy Rideout 1997 - 2013

Some people say, "it's just a dog," well, here are some differences that this very special dog has made in people's lives:

- Our very first therapy visit, as we were walking out the door not knowing if we would come back to the nursing home again, a woman at the door said, "thank you for coming today - you made my day." A corner in my life was turned. A life of service had begun, as the joy of giving back was discovered.

- In NYC after 9/11 - a relief worker at the family assistance center gave Janie a big hug and said, "thank you, I needed that before going back to work." Next to a man sitting alone with his head in his hands - Janie laid on the floor next to him, and we just sat there with him, not saying a word. In a few minutes, he just reached out to pet her - and a bridge connecting him back to someone to talk to was gracefully made.

- At a deployment briefing for Marines and their families - getting a stressed little guy in the kids room who wouldn't talk to anyone to start talking and playing.

- At a disaster recovery center in New Orleans after Katrina, taking two crying young ones from their mom, so she could get the information about the services the family needed. The 2 year old sat in my lap and stopped crying to stare with big eyes at Janie, and her 4 year old brother, acting sad and shy - settled in to 'teach' Janie new tricks. A relieved mom came back to us to, "mommy, mommy, look what I can do!" Her gratitude and relief was clearly evident as she offered her thanks. A security guard who gave us a hard time on arrival to that site witnessed the magic our partners do, and almost everywhere the HOPE AACR teams went after that, we found they had called ahead to their co-workers to let them know to help us get through security and in to the FEMA centers.

- At Virginia Tech - being a source of comfort to the teachers who were especially affected by the tragedy on their campus.

- At Operation Purple camps for military kids with deployed parents - she helped so many kids come out of their shell and join in the activities with others who share a very unique and strong bond. For over 20 minutes, one little guy could not be consoled by two mental health professionals - but Janie had his mind off mom leaving him at summer camp and was introducing her to the other kids within just a few minutes. No more tears, just a puffed up little guy who was now the cool kid and showing the others what he could do with Janie.

Janie helped many, many people in the isolation of crisis connect back to the people who were there to help them, and helped me connect with so many. She was a very special gift. A stray that walked in to a bar in Virginia Beach and ended up with me. I will always be grateful she came in to my life - and for how she changed my life.

- Amy