

Passages

Tribute to Kirby

To cure my puppy Kirby's shyness around people, I took him to stand outside big stores where he could watch them and get petting and treats from those who liked dogs. He quickly decided he liked meeting new people. We passed our Delta Society test when he was three. For the next six years we made regular visits to Spring Park Presbyterian Homes with team leader Carol Brandenbur and her shelties Shelli, Toby, the late Kaci, Kayli and Piper.

The seniors loved the combination of a big collie and a small sheltie – something for everyone! Their lower energy level kept Kirby's high energy in check and he loved moving from person to person in the community room.



The “Loaner Shelties”

When Kirby at age 9 was diagnosed with congestive heart failure, he had to retire from therapy visits immediately and assume a very low-key life at home. That left just Carol to handle a visit that easily could use half a dozen dogs. She generously offered to let me take the Delta test with one of her dogs and we continued our visits.

I brought pictures of Kirby on our visits to Spring Park. He received regular get-well cards from the residents – and there were sympathy cards, including a hand-painted portrait of him, when he passed on. After losing my best friend of 10 years, I wasn't ready for another dog right away.

Bridget: The next generation?

In March, one year after Kirby's death, I brought home Bridget, a two-year-old collie mix. I had sorted through and passed over several dogs from Minnesota-Wisconsin Collie Rescue, looking for the one who had the best chance of making it as a therapy dog.

Bridget is fairly laid-back, gentle and loves to be petted by anyone she meets. She hasn't had any training, though, so her therapy career is a while off yet. However, she had her very first obedience class tonight and caught onto clicker training like a champ. With any luck, she'll be making friends at Spring Park soon!