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Readers tell their story ...

Therapy cat SP Blue Lightning's Dionysius

How did Dionysius became a therapy cat?

Some years ago I came in contact on Facebook with the owner of Miss Elle, a Chartreux cat in The USA, and was directly affected by the work that she and her owner did. She visits often a retirement home and the people there like that very much. A long time in advance they are looking forward to this visit. This gave me the idea to do this volunteer work also. I immediately knew that my male (neutered) chartreux Dionysius would be perfect for this job because he had traveled many times to various shows at in The Netherlands and also abroad. He is accustomed that strangers touch and lift him to look at him from all sides. He was very successful at shows en became regularly Best in Show. He was not yet three years old when he already had the title of Supreme Premior . Like most neuters he had a tendency to become too fat and therefore during his show period he was always on a diet because otherwise he would get the remark that "He has a very good kitchen at home". After earning his last title the strict diet fortunately wasn't needed any longer. He is now a happy cat from about 7.5 kilos. Dio is very social and likes to be hugged. In the three years that we do this work together, he never has scratched or blown to anyone. Not in the retirement home and not even with the demented patients in the nursing home who sometimes do clowning tricks with him. They trust him completely and he is big friends with everyone!

How does a visit look like?

When Dio is established and has been removed from his travel basket he first looks around curiously. Then he makes on my shoulder a round in front of all the residents who always enthusiastically look forward to his arrival and give him a warm welcome. Then he's going to give them attention individual. One wants him on the lap, the other one just likes to pet him or only just wants to look at him from a little distance. And they ask repeatedly "What's his name or how old is he and how heavy is he? ". Cuddling with Dio always makes very them happy! It is also a good occasion for me to talk about their pets they once had and to retrieve other reminders of the past. I learn a lot from the history of the environment and how it was here during the Second World War. From every resident I always make a picture together with the cat. So they can show it during family visits and tell about it. There was also an old man (aged 92 years). During the day he was taken care of, but in the evening he went back to his own house and wife. I gave him a nice picture of himself and the cat that he took home. The picture was framed in the most beautiful one they had in their home and put in the windowsill next to his chair. The photo of his father was removed from that frame. He told me: "My father was not a nice man. I prefer to look at the cat!".

BY: JOYCE SMIT

Meanwhile this old man is deceased but Dio is still looking at his regular spot, like "Where is he now?".

What makes this work so special?

In the nursing home also lives a very old lady, she is not able anymore to do many things. If we go to visit her she is usually laying in her bed. First thing I have to do is to put on her glasses and putting in her hearing aid, otherwise she doesn't see and hear anything Than I show Dio to her: "Look who is here to visit you?". Then she starts to smile from ear to ear and carefully I put the big cat in a basket next to the frail woman in bed so that she can view and stroke him. She always immediately starts to talk to him. In the beginning there was a nurse who wanted to watch how things went on. Afterwards she told me that she had never seen such a thing. What has happened?The nurses couldn't have any contact more with this woman, but when Dio was there she could suddenly talk again and even make entire sentences. It's so special to see the impact that animals have on people!

For photos and adventures of Dionysius and my other Chartreux cats you can follow this Facebook page: www.facebook.com/BlueLightningChartreuxCattery

