

Shining Star Award 2020

Every year the Collie Club of America selects the Shining Star Ambassador Collie. The award is open to any Collie that works as a Service Dog, Therapy Dog, Education/Library Assistance Dog, Search and Rescue Dog, or has done any exceptional good deed for his family or the community.

This year the CCA received 13 applications for the Shining Star program. The CCA Shining Star Committee has selected **Marian Leerburger and her Collie Remington (Remy)** as the Shining Star Ambassador Team for 2020. Remy is a tri-colored rough Collie bred by Carlyn Fasnacht of Avalon Collies. Here is Remy's story as told by his human, Marian Leerburger.

“I acquired Remy when he was 10 weeks old. When he walked into my house, he immediately bonded with my 12-year-old Collie, Cole. Cole had been acting strangely for a few weeks. Remy would herd him (again, at 10 weeks old!) out of the woods by his ankles, would pull him by his tail to get him out of the bathroom (where he was seemingly lost) and would not eat unless Cole ate. It turned out that Cole had Alzheimer's. Remy continued to be his guide dog, putting his head underneath Cole's hips to help lift him up the stairs and staying by his side. Our other 12-year-old



Collie, Riley, was deaf. At one point, when I was attempting at 6 a.m. to convince Riley to leave the comfort of the dirt area under the porch and come out into the pouring rain so I could bring him inside before I went to work, Remy went back inside, got a very stinky dried fish skin we had as treats, went under the porch, and coaxed Riley, little by little, to come out from under the porch to get the fish skin (again, at 10 or 11 weeks old). I called the breeder and the vet to let them know of this odd behavior, and they announced that he was showing signs very early of a therapy dog, and I needed to get him into training.

I obtained the details on Animal Assisted Therapy and took the eight-hour handlers course. I followed the directions I was given and trained Remy to sit, lie down, and stay, but there was no real training to have him get used to the remainder of the test, such as not reacting to metal pans falling on the floor, or people being rough with him. During

the test, Remy loved the group of people acting like “zombies” who crowded him. He licked each of their hands. He also had no issues with wheelchairs, walkers, or canes, with toys being squeaked, with the dish being dropped, or with another dog walking by. He paid attention to each of his commands and thought the entire test was a wonderful game. Remy was tested at the first test available to him (May 11, 2017) at his one-year birthday. He passed on his first effort.

Remy has been working 5-15 hours a week at several hospitals, at Baltimore-Washington Airport with Wounded Warriors

and veterans going through the airport, at several nursing homes, and with children in reading/literacy programs. Remy has even participated in therapy dog events at the U.S. Congressional office buildings.

Remy's very first client, Miss E., at Brightview rehabilitation home in Edgewater, Maryland, had severe congestive heart failure and was on very strong medication. When Remy first met her, she was asleep in a chair. He reached under her blanket, took her hand, and licked her. Miss E. woke up and was overjoyed to see Remy. Remy visited Miss E. several times a week, at her family's request. One day, we went for our visit, and Remy acted strangely when we got to the facility, bouncing around and acting frantic. It turned out that Miss E. had died during the night. For weeks, Remy continued to try and find her. The family asked Remy to come to the funeral, where he comforted many of the family members and friends.

At the hospitals Remy visits weekly he has had many successes. He particularly likes visiting the ER, pediatrics, and psychiatry. We often get calls, especially from the mental health units, to see if he can come in and visit. In the pediatric mental health unit, suicidal children will often get on the ground with Remy, put their heads into his fur, and talk to him for upwards of an hour, telling him their life stories. There are unfortunately many children he sees in the unit repeatedly, and they believe he knows they have “come back” and that he has specifically come to talk with them. Remy particularly likes working with pediatric mental health patients (especially cutters and suicide victims), and with cancer patients and very elderly patients.

In the ER, a young girl had been putting her school materials away, slipped on the stairs and fell, and her braces became embedded into her lips. She and her mother asked Remy to stay with her, on the bed. As they worked on the girl to loosen the braces, Remy lay on the bed, in between her legs, with his head on her stomach, not moving for 40 minutes. Neither the mother, the child, nor I realized that the braces had been removed as the little girl was so involved in holding Remy that we hadn’t realized the work was done.

On a different occasion in the ER, late one Friday evening, we were on a visit when a heavyset young man came in breathing heavily and in distress. We stayed for about four hours as the nurses and doctors did CPR on the gentleman. I was concerned that Remy would get upset when he saw a nurse straddling the gentleman’s chest and pummeling him (CPR). Rather, Remy seemed to have an understanding that the gentleman was gone, and concentrated for several hours on the EMTs, doctors, and nurses standing outside the room. For weeks we heard stories of how those who participated in this gentleman’s care so very much appreciated Remy being there. We were asked if we could come in regularly on the Friday and Saturday evening and midnight shifts. ”

Marian Leerburger and Remy plan to continue their therapy work for many years to come. Marian’s hope is that by sharing her story, other Collie owners will be motivated to consider pursuing a therapy career. The character, dedication, and accomplishments of Marian and Remy embody the spirit of the CCA Shining Star program.

Respectfully submitted,

*Shining Star Committee Co-Chairs:
Corinne Boon and Deborah Gates*

*Committee Members: Ann Boles, MaryAnn Campbell,
Susie DeLorenzo, Candace Hunter, Jerry Sulewski, and
Celia Van Voorhis ❖*

