

First Responder

I wasn't a dog person. So why wouldn't my friend's Maltipoo leave me alone?

By MARY PHILLIPS, ST. CHARLES, MISSOURI

I AM NOT A take-your-dog-to-work person. Dogs can take your focus off whatever you have to do. So I wasn't exactly overjoyed when my friend Pat, who worked for me as a triage nurse—I am a patient-care supervisor for a St. Louis hospice—dropped by my office that Monday morning in October two years ago with Jacques Pierre, her little pet Maltipoo, in tow.

Lord, I thought, this is all I need to-day, a dog in the office.

This wasn't the first time Pat had brought Jacques Pierre to work. Most people rushed to pet him and give him treats, and he cuddled up to them and lapped up the attention. With me, though, he kept his distance, never really warming to me.

I grumbled to Pat, "Is this really a good place for a dog?"

She just smiled and said, "Jacques Pierre has a special way with people when they're sick."

That morning had been a tough enough one for me without having Jacques Pierre underfoot. One of the patients for whom I coordinate care was in the end stages of heart failure, with perhaps a few more days to live. Another was succumbing to a brain tumor. I'd been with the hospice for 15 years, and I knew what it meant to work with the dying. Still, every so often, when things get intense, you need to take a moment and gather yourself, ask the Lord to grant you the wisdom and the strength to help the people in your care.

Pat took the dog back to her office. I



DILIP VISHWANATH



PAWS & EFFECT Mary (left) and Pat with Jacques Pierre, who came to Mary's aid

decided to take a break. I went outside to a table on the grounds where I could smoke. My habit wasn't something I was proud of. Believe me, as a caregiver, I know how bad cigarettes are for you. But sometimes I needed a smoke to relax.

I lit a cigarette and took a long drag. I thought that maybe talking to my

daughter, Missy, would take my mind off some of the pressures I was feeling. I flipped open my cell phone and called her at work.

We had been chatting for just a little while when all of a sudden I felt a tremendous pain in my right temple. It felt as if a bomb had gone off inside my skull. The pain was so fierce that I

dropped the cigarette and clutched my head with my hands.

I must have groaned, loudly, because I heard Missy say, "Mom, what's the matter? Mom!" But I was in too much agony to answer.

I lay on the floor and the little dog licked my temple. Did he know something I didn't?

I staggered inside and down the corridor to my office. That's where my manager, Pam, found me. Lying on the floor of my office, with the door closed, praying for relief from the terrible headache.

Pam is a registered nurse. She alerted my coworkers, and they crowded into my office. All of them looked worried. "I'm calling an ambulance," one said.

"Absolutely not," I replied. "It's just a bad headache, maybe a migraine. Give me a minute. Maybe it will go away." But it didn't.

Oh, my, I thought, I've never felt anything like this before.

Then the pain began to shift, radiating from my temple down to an achy stiffness in my shoulders. I tried to massage it away, but I could barely manipulate my hands. Several people reached to help me, but I brushed them away. "I'll be fine," I insisted. "Please, just go."

Shooing them out of my office, I

closed the door, lay back down and waited for the pain to subside. Instead, impossibly, it got worse.

The door flew open. It was Pat, with Jacques Pierre at her heels. "What's going on with you?" Pat asked.

Before I could answer, the little dog came right to me. Like I said, Jacques Pierre and I usually kept our distance. But this time he ran right up to me and barked. Then he started licking me like crazy in one spot—my right temple, where the pain was worst. Dog slobber ran down my face.

I was weakly lifting my arm to push him away when something hit me. Over the years I had seen several of my patients interacting with their pets while they were in the last days of their illnesses. The animals brought them comfort and oddly seemed able to sense death approaching. I'd seen dogs lie protectively on their owners as they took their final breaths and refuse to let anyone else come near.

Does Jacques Pierre know something I don't? I wondered. Lord, are you trying to warn me?

I struggled back to my feet. "I've changed my mind," I told Pat. "Take me to the emergency room."

She scooped up Jacques Pierre and rushed me to the hospital while Pam called Missy.

"We are taking your mom to the hospital. You need to meet us there," she said.

The E.R. physician ordered a CT

For more inspiring stories about animals, go to guideposts.org/pets

scan. Then things got foggy. I remember coming to on a gurney in a hospital examination room. The doctor was saying, "Mary, you have a brain aneurysm near your right temple, and it's leaking. We have to operate. Right now."

The operation took 10 hours. When I woke up, my skull was swathed in bandages. I had nine metal clamps in my head and my mouth felt as if it were full of sand. But I was alive. I could feel someone holding my hand. Carefully I shifted my gaze. It was Missy. She was fast asleep, her head against my bed rail, but she hadn't let go of my hand.

Recovery took time. I stayed with Missy for a few weeks, until I was well enough to go home. The doctor told me I had to quit smoking. As hard as it was to break a decades-long habit, I did it. I couldn't waste the second chance God had given me by not taking care of myself.

Two months after the operation, I went back to work. When I walked through the office door, everyone rushed to greet me. Pat was there. So was Jacques Pierre. This time I was ready for him. I pulled a dog biscuit out of my pocket and held it out to him. He took it from my hand and let me pat him on the head, then padded a few feet away to nibble his treat.

At first I was disappointed that he didn't stay to lick my hand or nuzzle me the way he always did with others. Then it occurred to me: If Jacques Pierre was back to being himself and keeping his usual distance from me, it must mean my crisis was over. I could get back to being me. With one important difference. I'm still not much of a dog person, but I can understand why people like my friend Pat are. And if they want to bring their dogs in to work, I've got biscuits in my desk drawer. **G**

GUIDEPOSTS

Statement of ownership, management and circulation (Required by form 3526)

1. Publication Title: Guideposts. 2. Publication Number: 231-460. 3. Filing Date: August 4, 2010. 4. Issue Frequency: Monthly. 5. Number of Issues Published Annually: 12. 6. Annual Subscription Price: \$16.94. 7. Office of publication: Guideposts, 39 Seminary Hill Road, Carmel, NY 10512. 8. Location of headquarters: Guideposts, 39 Seminary Hill Road, Carmel, NY 10512. 9. The names and addresses of the publisher and the editor-in-chief are: Publisher, Amy Molinero, Guideposts a Church Corporation, 39 Seminary Hill Road, Carmel, NY 10512. Editor-in-Chief, Edward Grinnan, Guideposts a Church Corporation, 16 East 34th Street, 21st floor, New York, NY 10016. 10. Owner: Guideposts a Church Corporation, 39 Seminary Hill Road, Carmel, NY 10512, a non-profit organization. Names and addresses of individual owners: None. 11. The known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding one percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages or other securities: None. 12. The exempt status has not changed during preceding 12 months. 13. Publication Name: Guideposts. 14. Issue Date for Circulation Data: August 2, 2010. 15. Average number of copies each issue during preceding twelve months: a. total number of copies printed: 2,236,804; b. (1) paid and/or requested circulation through outside-county mail subscriptions: 2,036,842; (2) paid and/or requested circulation through in-county subscriptions: None; (3) paid and/or requested circulation through dealer sales: 2,789; (4) paid and/or requested circulation through other classes: None; c. total paid and/or requested circulation: 2,039,631. d. (1) free distribution by mail through outside-county: 152,823; (2) free distribution by mail through in-county: None; (3) free distribution by mail through other classes: None; (4) free distribution outside the mail: 7,115; e. total free distribution: 159,938; f. total distribution: 2,199,569; g. copies not distributed: 38,235; h. total: 2,237,804. Percent Paid and/or requested circulation: 92.73%. Actual number of copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 15. a. total number of copies printed: 2,175,600; b. (1) paid and/or requested circulation through outside-county mail subscriptions: 1,988,883; (2) paid and/or requested circulation through in-county subscriptions: None; (3) paid and/or requested circulation through dealer sales: 2,020; (4) paid and/or requested circulation through other classes: None; c. total paid and/or requested circulation: 1,990,903; d. (1) free distribution by mail through outside-county: 161,101; (2) free distribution by mail through in-county: None; (3) free distribution by mail through other classes: None; (4) free distribution outside the mail: None; e. total free distribution: 161,101; f. total distribution: 2,152,004; g. copies not distributed: 23,596; h. total: 2,175,600. Percent Paid and/or requested circulation: 92.5%. 16. This Statement of Ownership will be printed in the December '10 issue of this publication. 17. I certify that the statements made to me above are correct and complete.

Signed Richard V. Hopple, President