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Jofi, a purebred Chow, was a dog owned by Sigmund Freud and she used to sit in her master's office when therapy sessions were going on. Sigmund Freud noted how patients would respond differently, usually much more openly and candidly when Jofi was in the room. It is often considered that Jofi was the first therapy dog, not only for what she did for patients but because of her therapeutic affect on Sigmund Freud himself.

The US Army has recognised the great work that Therapy Dogs can bring to soldiers who're coming to terms with physical and emotional wounds in Iraq. Several trained therapy dogs have been deployed to the US Army's Medical Detachment's in Iraq. The reasons may seem obvious to dedicated pet lovers; that these dogs will bring a sense of normalcy, break the ice and build communication.

I sometimes wonder whether having a dog, cat or pet in our lives saves us from ourselves. I look back at a few years ago. I was having a soul-stirring massage in the Queensland hinterland and my masseuse asked me about my home life. I started talking about my dogs in my life at that time: Lilly and Jerri. Talking about Jerri brought a flood of emotion and I started sobbing and babbling about what a great dog she was and how kind and gentle she was and I would never have another like her—she was my 'heart-dog'. With huge sobs I spluttered out that I felt this was going to be her last year on earth and I didn't know just how I was going to say goodbye.

What I didn't know was that Jerri was going to be my guide and rod through the coming months. Not two weeks later, my mother passed away unexpectedly.

Jerri was my constant companion through some very dark hours. At times, when getting out of bed felt like scaling Everest, Jerri was the driving force for me to get dressed and take her to the park. The park improved my day by meeting new dogs and new owners and catching up with old friends. The park made me look at trees, inhale fresh air and do important grounding tasks like picking up dog poop. Jerri was my Sherpa; she was my guide. My work and close friends also got me through tough times. But at the end of a tough day there was a dog curled up next to me. At the beginning of a day when I didn't know what to expect, I awoke to a dog snuggled into me. Life wasn't awful or unbearable but it was made that much better with her at my side.

A friend of a friend called Mark also told me of how he believes his dog saved him from himself. Mark is a recovering pokie-addict. Through his addiction he lost his wife, a long-term girlfriend and more money than I can possibly think of wagering from my piggy-bank.

As Mark says, "Monte has been in my life for six years now. I got him as a young rescue dog and he's been the best dog for me. I was spiralling into pokie addiction. I would call into different pubs on the way from work to home. Monte was the reason I would pull myself away from a machine and head home. He was there and would never



judge. But in the end I felt I was letting him down by coming home late. I got some help through counselling but Monte was my support; my canine cheerleader. The earlier I got home, the happier he seemed and that made me happier."

Cats too can bring comfort at times of stress and loss. There is the tale of Oscar, a hospice cat with an uncanny ability to predict when hospice patients are going to die. Reports from hospice staff all told about how Oscar would seek out a patient and snuggle against them in their final hours. Oscar is always insistent on being with a patient, to the point of scratching and pawing at a ward door if he was shut out.

Steere House, the hospice where Oscar lives and 'works', treats patients with severe dementia. It's usually the last stop for people so ill they cannot speak or recognize their spouses and family, spending their days lost in fragments of memory. But rather than being a furry grim-reaper, Oscar's talents are appreciated by families of these dying patients. They take comfort in the idea that an animal is there and might be there when their loved ones eventually pass on.

Oscar is now the subject of a book by Steer House's geriatrician and professor, Dr David Dosa— *Making Rounds with Oscar; The Extraordinary Gift of an Ordinary Cat*. Dosa theorises the cat imitates the nurses who raised him. Or there's another trigger that Oscar senses—smells and odours given off by dying cells like some dogs who scientists say can detect cancer using their sense of scent.

You know that term 'No Good Deed Goes Unpunished?' Well I'm still alive and walking on Earth to tell you that Scooter's good deed ended up being punishing for me. In my haste to get that huge molten cauldron of lava-fied, boozy beef out of the kitchen, I shuttled it straight outside. I left it on the backyard table where it bubbled and finally cooled. Through the night Scooter consumed most of what he could scrape from the pot. It must have tasted disgusting but you've got to give that dog points for perseverance and living up to his garbage guts moniker.

I came downstairs to find giant mounds of black and brown vomit and a very queasy dog. I thanked him profusely for being my knight and rescuing me and after all the praise, ear rubs and tummy tickles I promptly got to work trying to de-soil my cream carpet from the sort of stuff that looks like it came from the pits of Mordor. It's probably two to three hours of my life that I'll never get back. But at least I have a life and that's due to a dog who raised the alarm and saved me.



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*"When we think of dogs who've served through various wars, we often think of breeds such as the German Shepherd or Labrador. But some have made their mark in history because they've been an unlikely size of breed."*