



CHRIS CARSWELL, SUE BRASE AND BRONX

Therapy Dog Unites Kindred Souls

G-O-D | D-O-G

Coincidence?

It could have been only God who gave Bronx, a long-haired German shepherd from a genuinely German line, his sixth sense for finding and fixing human need. Bronx is a therapy dog, trained to alert on his 15-year-old owner, Chris Carswell, when a seizure is imminent. The dog will whine and push him toward a place to sit before the seizure hits.

Learned behavior, you say? Of course. But nobody had to teach Bronx where to find Sue Brase on his first visit to Hospice of the Golden Isles, a weekly sideline for Chris and Bronx to share their love with others in need. Woman and dog had never met before, but Bronx sought Sue's room on his very first tour of hospice. "Bronx picked her," says Chris's mother, Janet Carswell. "We always come here first and we always come here last."

Sue is a widow who retired to St. Simons Island by way of Missouri in 1986. She moved into residence at hospice 11 months ago. Bronx is a doppelganger of Sue's own beloved Nikki, an eclectic mix of chow, basset and doberman who most favored the one breed that didn't contribute to her genetic mix – German shepherd. Nikki died at the age of five, the age that Bronx is now. The two dogs could have come from the same litter, judging

by separate photos of the two on a credenza in Sue's room. Regardless of the resemblance to her own beloved Nikki, Sue says Bronx is his own man. "One falls intensely in love with him," she says. "He's an old soul."

Much like Chris himself.

Chris died one day in the third grade, and his life has not been the same since. Fighting poor health since the womb, Chris's nadir appeared to come in October of 2007, when he went into respiratory/cardiac arrest at school. At some point, he suffered a stroke that robbed him of the right half of his vision field. The area of his brain where the stroke occurred is thought to be the same one causing his seizures, but beyond that, his doctors are at a loss to put a name to Chris's collection of health challenges, which include a connective tissue disease. They've even sent his blood for genetic evaluation outside the country.

Homeschooled by his mother, Chris is also a one-man charity – 1 Boy 4 Change – which focuses upon the needs of law enforcement officers. A favorite project is providing K-9 handlers with heat alarms to protect K-9 officers from suffering heat stroke or death in overheated and unattended patrol cars. If the alarm's visual and auditory warnings fail to summon help as the cabin temperature rises past a certain point, the alarm will lower the car's windows and activate the fan to cool the interior.



This boy is not defined by what he lacks. For example, the deficiency in his vision makes him an expert marksman. Given the opportunity to partake of sniper training with a regional police force that has "adopted" Chris into its ranks, Chris excelled due to the narrow focus of his vision field. "You have to find the positive," he says of life.

Beyond their mutual love of Bronx and his for them, Sue and Chris have riflery in common, although Sue can no longer shoot due to vision impairment of her own, and music. Despite the difference in their ages, they've so much in common almost wonders if Bronx didn't have a sixth sense about their compatibility, as well.

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Coincidence? We think not.

- A.H.C.






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