

Eric's & Nicky's Ministry

Every six weeks, when I post my playbills on the ward bulletin boards throughout EMP, I find I'm vying for space with Nicky the Animal Therapy Dog. It's a "ministry" like mine, undertaken by an ex-patient, like me, putting back into the system where he saw a need and found an ability to fulfill that need.

I met Eric Jacobsen when I was just beginning my career in gardening, 17 years ago. He introduced me to power-raking, working a big day one Easter Monday - *Ironman Power-raking* - actually finishing up mowing the last lawn by the light of the moon! Very professional, very hardworking guy. We kept in touch over the intervening years, both of us struggling some with depression. My crises came first. . . .now I'm the 'Movie Monday Mogul'.

I was pleased to see Eric attending a Movie Monday event 2 years ago. When he showed me his wrist band I realized he was a patient, in his own battle with depression. It took a few months and some difficult adjustments but he's out and doing well.

Now he's back as a care provider. With his doctor's advice he gave up his gardening business and focused more on pursuing volunteer interests. He began as a "BusBuddy" with the Resource Centre for Independent Living.

Six months after "graduating" from the hospital he and Nicky returned to offer Animal Therapy to patients in the psychiatric wards. Five years earlier Eric and Nicky took training with Pacific Animal Pet Therapy Society (PATS) to do animal therapy at GVHS, visiting medical wards. After the

PACIFIC ANIMAL THERAPY SOCIETY P.A.T.S.



NICKY

*"We have come to
brighten your day!"*

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recommended six months of time away from the psych ward, Nicky and Erik began weekly morning rounds of EMP.

They start on the 5th floor, where the older folks are accommodated, then to each of the regular wards and even the "step down" and "PIC" wards where often the most disturbed patients are residing. Eric's gentle style, the focus on the dog and its unquestioning acceptance of anyone who responds adds a "normal" dimension to what can be a tedious and surreal institutional atmosphere. Eric is always open to empathize with someone looking for support, glad to encourage them with his recovery story if they express interest. It can be hugely heartening to talk with someone who's been right down in the depths of despair as you are and who is now doing ok.

And if people wish to talk with someone who's coping well with the being labelled "mentally ill", he's there. For a new patient it is so important to meet someone who's experienced that trauma and has recovered and whom you can admire. Role models are life savers.

Eric and Nicky also stop by and brighten up the day for patients in the dialysis, cancer, hospice wards. For staff, residents, and patients, visiting with a smart, happy, and well behaved dog can be a highlight of the day.

Eric says, "We all have a ministry. We have difficulties as we go through life so we can help others find their way." He has great faith in God and His guidance has supported Eric in his own recovery. He learned from a fellow patient the adage that "Life is not a straight highway, there are lots of obstacles, it's a matter of finding our way around those obstacles." To heal we need more than just the right meds, "we need the right people to come along side us."

You'll have a chance to meet Eric and Nicky at MM's presentation of FAIRY TALE Aug. 17

Bruce Saunders July 20/ /98