

HEALING COMPANIONS

Ordinary Dogs and Their Extraordinary Power to Transform Lives

By Jane Miller. New Page Books. \$16.99.

Add another abbreviation to your doggy dictionary: PSD (Psychiatric Service Dog).

The versatility of the species has long been recognized from its service accomplishments, but little has been documented about its psychiatric prowess before Miller's stirring work.

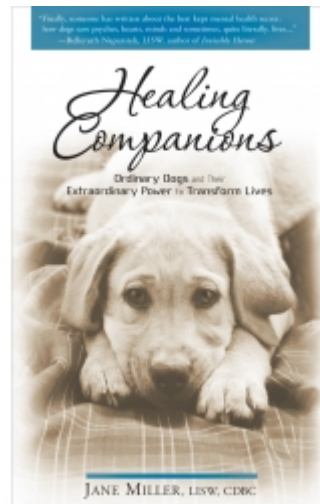
A Northeast Ohio professional, Miller practices as a psychotherapist/clinical social worker with her animal-assisted therapy dogs, citing many cases where her troubled patients have found help and relief after first interacting with her therapy dog and later purchasing a dog of their own.

"Healing Companions" is designed as both a guidebook for families and friends of individuals suffering from chronic mental illness, but is a passion-filled read for any dog owner.

Miller's been-there, done-that approach began with Umayya (means stability), a golden retriever, which opened her eyes to the value of an assistance dog, as it became a steadying influence with patients in her office.

For a dozen years, Umayya was her Velcro partner, through thick and thin physically and psychologically. "Umayya always knew what I needed and she never failed to bring a smile to my face," Miller says.

From an incest survivor to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder veterans, this insightful volume details how Psychiatric Service Dogs make life manageable for patients, families and friends.



But it's much more than simply warm, fuzzy case vignettes. Part self-help, part motivational she establishes criteria for selecting the right dog, recognizing its needs, strengths and weaknesses, training it, helping it cope with stress, and finally, knowing when to eventually let go during its golden years.

"Healing Companions" offers a detailed array of resources in 100-plus pages of appendixes, the best of which is designed to assist in the selection process of a breed (mixed breeds are fine, too). Here she lists a compatibility profile of five components: level of sociability, trainability, cooperation, activity and reactivity while focusing on six of the American Kennel Club's seven groups – terriers, sporting, hound, working, herding and toy.

Miller places a strong emphasis on teamwork in the selection process, noting that "service dogs are not rehabilitation projects," urging that the potential owner and his/her family find a trainer with experience in training service dogs to assist in the selection process.

"Healing Companions," while enlightening and engrossing" for the typical dog owner, boasts an empowering – and even life-altering - influence if placed in the hands of those in need – and their families.