

## Healing from Hector by Sioux Strong

It took my best friend's battle with breast cancer to bring me to Reiki – but it took an old, sick retired Guide Dog named Hector to show me just how incredible the power of Reiki can be to all living creatures.

All my life, I've been into animals, and after volunteering to raise puppies for Guide Dogs for the Blind as a child and teenager, I was especially tuned into dogs, eventually raising 18 puppies. I took that love for animals and made it my life's calling – training and caring for all kinds of exotic animals, specializing in elephants – and finally, going full circle when I became an apprentice at Guide Dogs for the Blind (GDB), an amazing non-profit headquartered in San Rafael, California with a training campus located in Boring, Oregon – just west of Portland. After 15 years of training literally hundreds of dogs to become partners and help-mates to the visually impaired, I am now a Master Instructor at GDB.

Hector first came into my life when he returned to the GDB campus in 1999 to begin his formal training after being raised by one of our wonderful volunteer puppy raisers in Washington State. His puppy raisers had reported that Hector had shown some fears early in his life, and was especially leery of new situations, so they made a special effort to give him treats and toys whenever he had to face those kinds of challenges. During the three to four months of intensive training that every dog undergoes before passing the tests that officially make them Guide Dogs, I had to dedicate some extra time with Hector because he was a little on the shy side and lacked confidence.

From the very beginning, it appeared that life wasn't going to be easy for this sweet and sometimes goofy Guide Dog. Even before his training with his new partner began, tragedy wasn't far away. Sadly, Hector's blind partner's wife had been suddenly diagnosed with cancer within a week of his arrival on campus and he immediately returned to his home in Southeastern USA to be with her. Hector and I flew to his home a few weeks later to finish his training – and after over a week of in-home training at their remote rural location, I returned to the GDB campus, not knowing if I'd ever see Hector again.

Years passed – while I continued training at Guide Dogs, I would occasionally hear news about Hector's partner. We learned that his wife had passed away, and that not much afterwards, their house had burned down. I said a silent prayer that Hector was making it through all of these challenges that life was sending his way. Finally, word got to the GDB campus that Hector's partner had also been diagnosed with a terminal disease and that he would no longer be able to care for Hector – and, as with all of our dogs, Guide Dogs requested that Hector be returned to our campus to be assessed for another possible placement.

I am a big believer in fate and in karma – so I credit the forces of the universe for steering me towards the kennels on a spring day in 2006, when I noticed a name tag “Hector” on

the kennel door where the newly incoming dogs were held. “Hector?”, I said, “Is that you?” His tail immediately began to wag—just as I had recognized him, he had recognized me, although I could immediately tell the toll that life had taken on his sensitive soul. “Come on, Hector”, I said, “You’re going home with me.”

While the wonderful veterinarian on the GDB campus was running tests to make certain he was healthy, I took Hector home every night from then on, where he joined me and the wild menagerie who lived with me in my remote cabin in the woods on the way to Mt. Hood – three dogs, two cats, my beloved partner Rodger and a constant flow of animals that I took in for friends and anyone else who might need the help. Hector fit in right away, but it was clear that his worries and his traumas had gotten the best of him. He had severe separation anxiety and could not be left alone, and he shook violently at the sound of thunder or any unexpected noises. He was a far cry from the healthy and sometime clownish guide dog that I remembered from years past.

A few weeks later, the news got even worse when the GDB Vet informed me that they had discovered a mass in Hector’s left flank, which they removed and diagnosed as mast cell sarcoma, a virulent and deadly form of cancer. The news got even worse when they discovered more of the dreaded mast cell sarcoma in his nose, in an area that was inoperable due to it’s location within so many vital organs. It was horrible news – and the vet regretfully informed me that she believed Hector had only 3 or 4 months left to live. All of those of us involved with Hector’s well-being made a group agreement that the last few months of this dear dog’s life should not be spent in painful surgeries or uncomfortable chemotherapy, and instead should be spent in cherishing what was left of his golden years. So, Hector was now officially in hospice care, and his days were numbered.

It was then that I turned to Reiki, hoping that this amazing energy might be of some comfort to this sweet and tender animal. My dearest friend had been fighting her battle with breast cancer for over a half year at this point, and it was because of my desire to be of help to her that I delved further into Reiki, and what I witnessed through her experience made me a true believer. As I sat and looked into the eyes of this trusting dog, I knew I had to try to help this poor animal get relief – some how, some way.

The thing about humans is they can sometimes confound you because their desires and beliefs can be so overpowering because they WANT something to happen so deeply that they can actually talk themselves into believing it has happened. Not so with animals. They have no guile, they have no ability to “fake you out” – their responses and reactions are truly what is happening and comes honestly and without deceit from the animal. With Reiki energy, the animals are more perceptive to it than people – their intuition and innate senses allow them to accept these energies without defenses or barriers.

Hector – or “Hec”, the nickname my partner Rodger gave his new playmate – instantly took to Reiki. My only goal was to make him comfortable because of his short-term diagnosis, and living in a peaceful and serene cabin on the mountain was just the ticket. And not only did Hec become a part of the family, but this sick and traumatized animal



soon became so drawn to Reiki that he would come sit next to me and lean up against my hands, wanting more. Eventually, he would end up sitting next to me on the couch with his head in my lap, laying there quietly, waiting for my healing hands. It was during those times that I would focus Reiki in his very sensitive nose area, where even a small bump would cause it to swell to over twice it's normal size. Afterwards, he would sniff and lick my hands, and gently drift off to sleep.

And in the amazing and wonderful way that Reiki works, we began to see some difference in Hector's behavior. He seemed to have more energy, and his fears were lessened in dramatic ways. His eyes brightened, his walking pace increased and he returned to many of his happy carefree ways. Eventually, I began taking him to

work at GDB with me every morning where he would sit by the desk of Michele, a co-worker in the GDB office, until I would leave at night – and Hec would joyfully jump in the back of my SUV for the ride home back to his mountaintop cabin. Oftentimes, when I'd be giving my partner Rodger a Reiki session to soothe his aching back, Hector would come over and want some, too...after having to wait in line after the kitties, who also wanted their own dose of Reiki!

And during these sessions, I was able to get as much out of giving Reiki as the receiver. When working with animals, especially terminal cases, I found that the peacefulness and serenity that came over the animal would likewise come over me. It not only felt good to be giving comfort to the animal, but the very act of connecting with another living creature gave me a great sense of pleasure, of feeling so good because I was able to give some measure of well-being and contentment to a gentle soul like my boy Hector.

As time went on, I stepped up the treatments – and moved from close up to distance Reiki – and Hector slowly returned to health and strength. Our veterinarian on the GDB campus looked on in happy amazement when the dog who, just months earlier, had received such bad news, was now bounding through the campus, playful and full of zest. Hec became such a favorite of the folks at Guide Dogs that he became the unofficial mascot of the campus, with volunteers asking for him by name. Hector's deskmate, Michele, had started taking him to Kiwanis, Lion and Rotary Clubs presentations, where he was always the hit of the show with his sweet and gregarious nature. Soon, every time there was a Guide Dog booth out in the public, Hector would usually be at the center of it.

Now, I'm not saying that Reiki cured Hector's cancer. All you have to do is look at his bumpy nose and know that he is still fighting that battle. But what Reiki DID do for this sensitive animal was give him a serenity and relief from all the stresses that possessed him—and gave him a chance to heal, a chance to cast off the pressures that were heavy upon him. And I don't know how it happens, but I DO know something for sure – Reiki has made a huge difference in the lives of animals who have been exposed to it. It is not a mysterious black magic – on the contrary, it is a tapping into the forces of nature that surround us everywhere. It doesn't rely on mumbo jumbo or any weird belief – in fact, what it relies on is an open mind, an open heart – and an open path where an energy is allowed to flow unfettered. In a world of great complexities, I have discovered that Reiki is one of the most accessible and simple powers to be found in the universe.

Today, Hector is one of Guide Dogs for the Blind's most illustrious retirees – he is the star attraction at every Guide Dog graduation, welcoming visitors with his happy wagging tail. Over three years after hearing he had only three months to live, this sweet and generous dog still faces every day with spirit and an incredible attitude that inspires everyone in his orbit. After spending months sitting by Michele's desk at the Guide Dog office and accompanying her on public events, she admitted to me that she had fallen head over heels in love with him – and last March, on Hector's 11<sup>th</sup> birthday, she officially adopted him. And still, Reiki is a valued part of his routine – be it with long distance Reiki that I send him regularly or, when his nose flares up and he has a bad day and I'm able to help him with some on-the-spot treatment.

I know someday in the not-too-distant future, Hector will lose his battle and succumb to the ravages of time, as we all will. But I am so grateful that Reiki has given this big-hearted creature an incredible gift of more time – more time to appreciate a long luxurious walk, more time to sleep late at his master's feet, more time to chase butterflies while walking along the river, and more time to be the loyal best friend that Michele has always dreamed of having.

Many lives have been touched by this wonderful dog, and those of us who have witnessed his journey feel privileged to have helped him recover and lead a life filled with joy and dignity—and there is no doubt that we have Reiki and the mysterious and unexplainable forces of the universe to thank for it...and it is one of my life's greatest honors to have been a part of it.