

MIRACLE WORKER



Meet Moritz: therapy dog, yoga assistant, book promoter, world traveller and one man's best friend.

Convalescing in Switzerland after cancer surgery, a chance conversation with some old friends led Barry Schieber to look at a litter of Bernese Mountain Dog puppies. Barry wasn't sure that he wanted a dog, and he certainly didn't know which of the seven cute puppies to choose. But on his second visit, a quietly self-confident pup whom he'd noticed the first time came up and chewed his shoelaces. Barry had been chosen. One month after their first meeting the pair flew to Barry's home in Montana.

friends everywhere he went. Barry noted this, saying: "He was so fearless, so friendly and naive, that people would stop whatever they were doing to enjoy him. He seemed to lift people's spirits."

Feeling that something should be made of this, Barry made enquiries and on Moritz's first birthday, enrolled him on the Delta Society's Pet Partners Program.

Moritz and Barry sailed through all the preliminaries to becoming a therapy dog team, and then waited impatiently for their hospital visits to be set up. However, at last it was all done, and the pair embarked on a weekly routine of an hour's drive into the city of Missoula, breakfast for Barry and a walk for Moritz, and then hospital visits at the Community Medical Centre.

Barry's book *Nose to Nose – A Memoir of Healing* is an engaging and unsentimental account of the transforming effect on both himself and the patients of their encounters with Moritz. He says: "For a few moments the patient seems relieved of the burden of being ill. I cannot evaluate the meeting from the patient's perspective. From my side, I feel humble."



Perfect place for a pup

It would be hard to beat rural Montana as a place for a Swiss dog to grow up. There were mountains to hike in, lakes for paddling, peace and space a-plenty but still lots of chances to socialise with Barry and his friends in the cafes of the local city. And after a month, there was also an Obedience class to take part in.

Moritz's good looks and sunny personality drew plenty of admiring attention from everyone he met and, being a gregarious chap, he made



1. Moritz exudes calm and tranquillity while doing nothing much at all
2. Home from home: Moritz poses in front of the Matterhorn in his native land
3. Mutual support system; team Schieber relax during a mountain hike
4. The three Moritz books; another illustrated book is in the pipeline



The Moritz effect

So what do Barry and Moritz “do” exactly on their visits? Well, Moritz usually goes up and greets the patient, sometimes nose to nose, sometimes just to accept strokes and the odd compliment. And Barry listens as patients, drawn out by the dog’s calm presence, talk. He says: “We treat each visit as a new beginning ... we just go in and see what happens. Although I thought I was just the hand at the other end of the leash, the visits have affected me, bringing me face-to-face with illness, disappointment, sadness and humility. They have made me feel more connected to humanity.”

Barry has told Moritz’s stories in two illustrated books (see p17 & 18), which has led to a busy alternative life for the man-and-dog team. School visits are now a regular feature as the pair go to spread the word about pet therapy in primary schools. The children love the big friendly dog and find the books enchanting – kids from non-reading families clamour for copies, entering competitions to win them and have their books personally pawprinted. One appreciative letter from a teacher to Barry began: “What’s black and white and read all over? Moritz the Bernese Mountain Dog.”

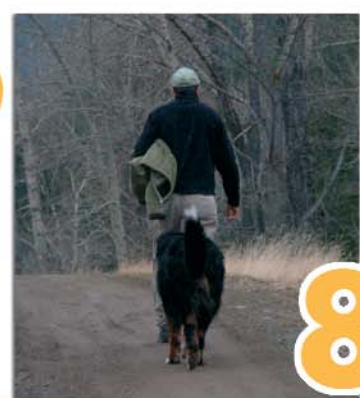
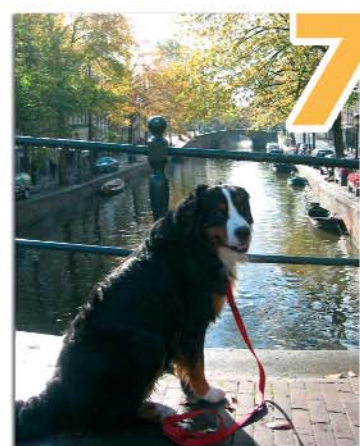
But Moritz isn’t just a star in schools and hospitals, he’s part of Barry’s life as a yoga teacher, too. Barry practises a gentle healing system from Tibet called Kum Nye, holding weekly classes in White Fish, Montana. Moritz of course attends and participates. On one occasion he went and stood quietly beside a woman in great pain with a damaged arm, moving her to tears. She told Barry: “I’ll never forget the depth of his eyes.”

Seasoned traveller

Books and yoga have taken Barry and Moritz all over. Canada, of course, is next door, but a nine-month trip to Holland to teach yoga and another journey to Switzerland and France for the translation of *Nose to Nose* mean that Moritz is a frequent flyer. The pair are off again this winter for a three-week trip to Holland and France. It might seem bizarre to take such a big dog on long flights but, says Barry, “I couldn’t manage three weeks without him; wonderful things happen to me when he’s around.”

Moritz’s happiness is catching. Barry calls it “an anti-disease that helped me heal. He doesn’t really ‘do’ anything. But he has this extraordinary effect on me and others, too.”

- 5. & 6. At work with young children— Moritz spreads a bit of love and harmony in schools
- 7. Moritz in Amsterdam
- 8. Barry and his best mate hiking at home in Montana
- 9. The mountain dog very much at home amid snowy Alpine scenery



Warmest thanks to Barry Schieber for talking to us at great length – and distance! – about Moritz and their lives together. He also kindly supplied us with photographs and copies of his books. From his home in Montana he put us in contact with Coral Denis in Canada, who in turn led us to Bernese expert Steve Green in England (who gave us our Gallery stories), so it’s been an international issue. For more about Barry and Moritz and their work go their website www.nose-to-nose.com