

Education

Abused canine turns to nursing

Innovative, four-legged teaching tools helps TWU nursing students understand the full measure of the word healing.

She has beautiful brown eyes – the kind of eyes that are loving, loyal and intelligent.

Wearing a little white T-shirt she sits sweetly in the classroom taking everything in.

But behind her captivating eyes also lurks a look – one that hints at abuse, neglect and worry. Worry about whether the good days will soon end and she will return once again to a life of abandonment.

But for this Dalmatian, days of distress are now only a faded memory. Rescued from Los Angeles, this dog's four feet are permanently planted in Trinity Western University's soil and in the hearts of its staff, faculty and students.

Faith Richardson, assistant professor of nursing at TWU, rescued the Dalmatian from a life of abuse and neglect and gave her the name Janna – which in Hebrew means "flourishing."

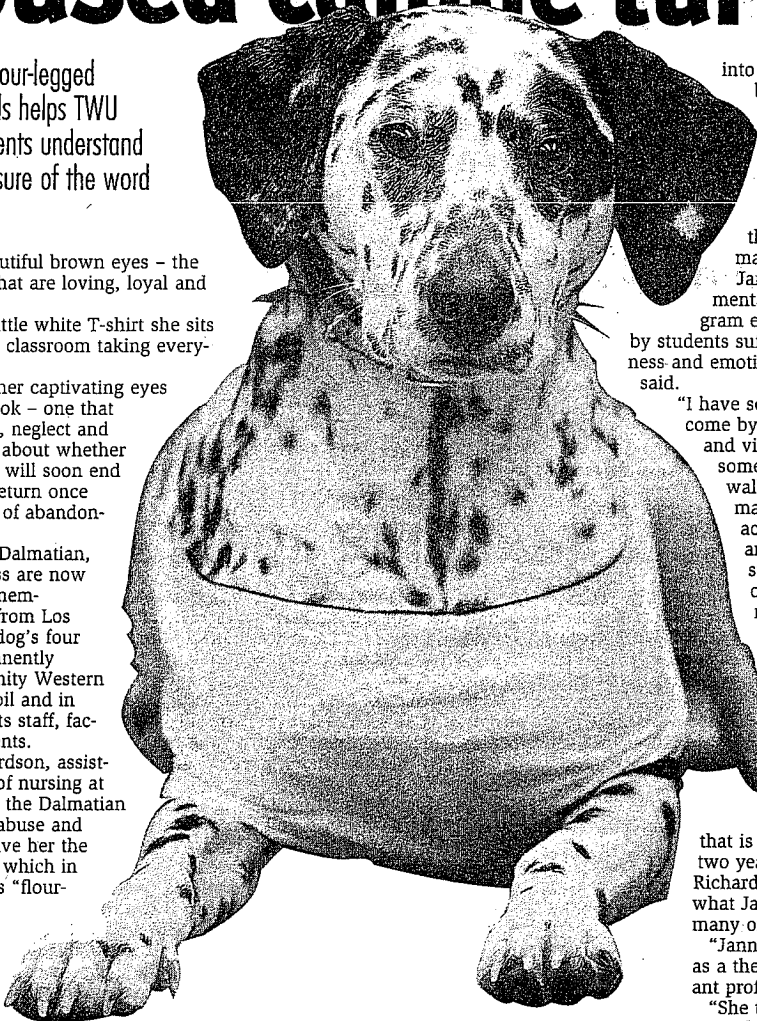
Found in Echo Park in L.A. at only eight months old, Janna was emaciated and suffering from severe pneumonia.

Due to the popularity of the breed in the Los Angeles area following popular Hollywood movies such as 101 Dalmatians, many dogs are purchased and later abandoned or abused.

Save the Dals – a Dalmatian rescue society – adopted Janna from a shelter before she was to be euthanized and contacted Richardson who took her immediately.

That was only one year ago.

Today, Janna is currently being trained to be a therapy dog and will soon be completing her Canine Good Citizen Test becoming TWU's in-house therapy dog.



She is also an innovative teaching tool for Richardson, who shows nursing students first hand what a therapy dog is and the important role they can play in the health care system.

Students working with Janna can see how a dog can contribute to the healing process and observe how a person's physiology can change in the presence of an animal such as Janna.

Richardson also compares the canine body to that of the human body, teaching students about the difference in make-up between species.

"This is the only nursing program I know of that uses a therapy dog in the classroom," Richardson said. "TWU is ideal for incorporating a therapy dog

into nursing education because we embrace an understanding of health that includes spirituality and the need for relationship, even the four-legged, furry, wagging-tail kind that is so important to so many of us."

Janna isn't just instrumental in the nursing program either, she is also used by students suffering from stress, sickness and emotional pain, Richardson said.

"I have several students who come by my office just to chat and visit with Janna and some even take her for a walk. Just having an animal for students to interact with is so important. We care about our students and part of our holistic approach is reuniting people back to creation... something you don't often have when you live in areas without animals and especially in residence," she said.

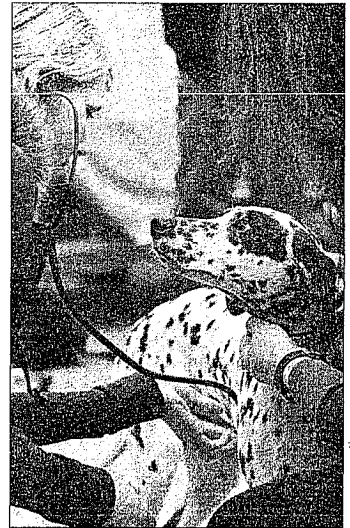
The future is bright for this little spotted Dalmatian that is believed to be about two years old. In fact, Richardson is excited about what Janna can bring to so many once she's certified.

"Janna seems to be a natural as a therapy dog," the assistant prof explained.

"She tends to gravitate towards those individuals who are feeling vulnerable and need a bit of support, and she's a natural clown for those who are stressed and need a good distraction," Richardson said.

"I often wonder if her background of illness and despair, and finding herself brought back to health and given a purpose to life has made her more sensitive to those who need her. It's pretty amazing watching her work."

Trinity Western University is a not-for-profit Christian liberal arts and sciences university. It enrolls approximately 4,000 students, employs about 670 staff and faculty, and provides a safe and loving refuge for a once-abused-dog turned canine nurse.



Mike Rathjen/Trinity Western University
TWU nursing students listen to Janna's heart.



Mike Rathjen/Trinity Western University
TWU students visit Janna while in the nursing lab.

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