

Natural Dog Success Story: The Calming Touch

Chiropractic healing technique allows Nina to release anxiety.

Denise Flaim

The problem: Rescued from a shelter, Nina likely spent much of her life in a crate. She craved dark places and light mesmerized her.

“Christmas is her most exciting time of year,” says Linné Girouard, who fostered Nina and eventually became her permanent owner. “She touches the tree and the little spots move, and she’s there all day.”

But Nina’s yuletide fixations were the least of her problems. She dug compulsively, leaving the backyard looking lunar, the carpets shredded, and couches and beds denuded of pillows and blankets.

“When I first got her, she didn’t want to be with you or be held. She would bolt and go back to her digging,” Girouard remembers. “I thought with more attention and love, she’d be fine. But that didn’t happen.”

Several veterinarians diagnosed obsessive-compulsive disorder. One even suggested autism.

The conventional approach: Behavioral abnormalities such as Nina’s are often treated with clomipramine hydrochloride, a canine drug that has been dubbed “doggie Prozac.” But the drug “is just covering over the symptoms and not addressing the root of the problem,” likely linked to the traumas of Nina’s past, says Marcia DuBois, DVM, a certified veterinary acupuncturist with the Well Being Center for Animal Healing in Houston.

The holistic approach: DuBois is trained in network chiropractic, also called network spinal analysis. Developed by chiropractor Donald Epstein of Colorado, for his human patients, this body-mind healing technique uses gentle touches in key contact points to increase body awareness and unblock neural pathways.

“With animals, we don’t even scratch the surface of their emotions,” DuBois says. Like humans, “they store them in their nervous system, and this series of non-specific touches cues the brain to release that tension. It allows them to move past their bad experiences and let them go.”

Girouard watched as DuBois sat on the floor with the endlessly busy Dachshund. “She would hold a finger in a particular spot” — behind Nina’s ear, in the hollow of her foot, on either side of her tailbone — “for up to a minute and then release it,” Girouard remembers. As she did, Nina sighed. “I don’t know if it was pent-up energy or frustration,” Girouard says. “But whatever it was, I could hear it.”

After the hour-long session, Nina went over to Girouard, crawled in her lap, and fell into a deep sleep. “I had had Nina for six months, and she’d never done that,” Girouard says. “She never sought me out.”

The result: Almost immediately, Nina was more tuned in and receptive to affection. “Before, you couldn’t get her attention until you touched her. Now I just need to call her name,” says Girouard, who took Nina to DuBois for several follow-up sessions. “It seems like a small thing, but it’s monumental for a dog like Nina.”

As for the digging, Nina does relapse occasionally, especially when she’s stressed. But unlike the old Nina, the new one is easily distracted from her anxiety-induced excavations. And it’s a far cry from the oblivious little creature whose response to life was to retreat to a corner and dig frantically.

“She’s back to being a dog,” DuBois concludes.

Caveats: Because only a handful of veterinarians are trained in network chiropractic, finding a practitioner can be difficult. For more information on the human variety, visit www.associationfornetworkcare.com

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