

Healing Walks for Hard Times
Quiet Your Body, Strengthen Your Body, & Get Your Life Back
An 8-Week Program

Book Excerpt

From Week Three: A Healthy Mind

Without the dog, Terry Gray might not have walked the healing path on the hill above the cemetery. Without the dog, he might not have felt the solid footing of the old wagon trail down to the church. Without the dog, he might have withdrawn from the world, might have wrapped himself in grief and rage at the loss of his son, Kit.

Josie wouldn't let that happen. Josie was Kit's dog—a Black Mouth Cur found sick and abandoned at a service station. Kit gathered the hunting dog pup up in his arms and carried her home to join other strays he couldn't turn his back on. But Kit couldn't rescue himself. At age twenty-nine, he lost a seventeen-year struggle with drug abuse and died of a heroin overdose. He left behind a bereft family and a pair of forsaken dogs.



“About the second day after his death, it hit me that the dogs had to be walked,” says Terry. Josie and Domino had worked their way indoors as house dogs, making regular walks an obvious necessity. Domino, a ten-year-old Canaan dog with a big personality and an easy manner, let the younger Josie initiate the walks.

Three or four times a day, Josie prodded Terry from the numbness of his grief and guided him down the rural road beyond their East Tennessee home. Sometimes she led him up the hill to the cemetery. Sometimes she took him into the ten-acre hollow that lay beyond the house. Past the graveled parking lot where the trucks of Kit's tree-pruning business sat idle.

“Within the first week, it hit me that this was good for me,” says Terry. “I've seen people with depression get totally immobilized and unable to get out of bed. I didn't want that, and this was at least getting me moving. I held on to that thought—‘It's getting me moving, getting me moving.’”

Soon, the walks established a pattern. The dogs took Terry out for strolls that didn't last long—less than a mile most of the time. But they imposed a structure on days that had lost reason and routine. “I suppose I was depressed,” he says. “I had trouble focusing on a lot of things.

“For a whole year I was doing these walks for the dogs' exercise, and for a chance to be alone with my thoughts,” he says. “I thought and thought and thought. My brain was working overtime. I thought about the war on drugs and about the judicial system. I thought about everything under the sun.”

Then, after a year or so of replaying the same thoughts, the same disappointments, the same anger, Terry tired of prowling the mental maze. He decided to pay attention to the environment and the world around him, rather than focus on the raging commentaries in his head. Domino had wearied of the outings, leaving Josie to guide Terry's walks. He decided to watch her body language and focus on the way she used her senses as they walked. When she heard a sound, he listened too. When she stopped and observed, he did the same.

“It got me out of my head for a while. I would just sort of take her perspective on the walk and it seemed a lot more interesting.” For the next year, he followed Josie's teachings. Each walk became a time to focus on sight or sound, or smell or touch. Each walk became a meditation.