

# Fluffy Ball of Cuteness: My Therapy Dog, Francesca



**“That’s not a dog, that’s a fluffy ball of cuteness!”**

This perfect description of our champion bloodline Norwich terrier, Francesca, was uttered by a neighborhood boy as he and his family bicycled past my wife, Lesa, walking Francesca one day. Other descriptions by friends, neighbors, and strangers have included “the cutest puppy on the planet,” “the friendliest puppy in the world,” “gorgeous and effusive,” and “beautiful looks and personality,” to highlight a few. Then there’s the classic reaction: “Oh my, what a beautiful dog!”

Francesca attracts her fair share of attention, but she is more than just a pretty face.

To back up, Lesa and I previously had a sweet little Yorkie, Buddy, who died in 2013. After Buddy passed, we travelled frequently—often for extended periods. We were not ready for the challenges of getting another dog.

But in October of 2019, we stopped traveling as much, as I was dealing with progressively more serious health issues related to multiple sclerosis (MS), which I was diagnosed with in 1998. We decided to look for a condo in Boise, Idaho as a convenient place to stay for all my doctor appointments, medical tests and procedures, and numerous prescription refills. After looking at several properties, we made an offer on a beautiful condo with a view of downtown Boise and the nearby foothills.

Our wonderful real estate agent, Marta, invited us over to her home to write up the offer. When we knocked on her door, she and her Norwich, Teddy, greeted us. Teddy made an immediate impression, showering us with gentle affection, and we instantly fell in love with him. We had never heard of the Norwich breed, so we asked Marta where she got Teddy. She told us about Doris, a local groomer and breeder of champion Norwich terriers. We quickly went to visit Doris.

Smitten, we explained to Doris how much we wanted a Norwich of our own. She replied that she did not have any pregnant females and did not know when she would. Litters were usually one or two puppies, most often delivered by cesarean section, and the puppies were very fragile for the first six weeks. As a result, she could not guarantee when she would have puppies, or how many. In addition, these factors made them an expensive breed. Not to be discouraged, I told her we were nevertheless interested in a puppy when one became available.

I checked back in with Doris from time to time over the next year to see if any of her females were pregnant. At long last, she told us the great news: she had a pregnant female. This Norwich, named Red Devil, gave birth to two puppies, a male and a female. On the exact day the puppies turned six weeks old, I called Doris to check on them. She said, "Why don't you come down and see the puppies?" We immediately jumped in the car and raced down to see them.

We knew there were several others in the mix who wanted one of the newborn puppies, so we were worried about getting our hopes up. That changed quickly when Doris told me to pick one. Ecstatic, I carefully picked up and examined each puppy. Both were adorable and engaging. I asked Doris for her opinion; she noted that the male seemed to have a slight edge on disposition, and the female on beauty. Something in my head said, "Take the female," and I happily announced that her name would be Francesca.

We filled out the AKC paperwork, paid Doris, and headed out the door with our new 2-lb. 10-oz. puppy. Francesca never looked back, settling into my lap as if she had been a member of our family forever.

I'd forgotten certain joys of puppyhood, such as the sharp little baby teeth eager to chew on every wire, book, magazine, and finger. With my being on two blood thinners, it made for a bloody playtime. I was not sure I would make it through the baby teeth stage of Francesca's first year, but I did, and it was worth it. From the first night we brought her home, she slept quietly in her crate by our bedside, and she has since blossomed into the most beautiful dog in both appearance and personality. When God handed out good looks and effusiveness, Francesca was first in line and received an extra dose. She is sweet tempered, loving both people and other dogs.



Francesca is also just a hoot to be around. She habitually rolls over on her back with her feet in the air and remains motionless, hoping someone will take the bait and rub her tummy and play with her. (I also think that, because of her intelligence, she enjoys viewing the world upside down.) Another trick for attention is a right front foot paw across the rug, sometimes accompanied by a snort. If none of these tactics work, she will resort to putting her front paws against a chair and barking (though her bark is more of chirp). Because of her short, stout legs, she can't jump on the furniture, but she can run like a rabbit. She purrs, murmurs, snores, snorts, belches, woofs, grunts like a pig when eating, and growls—not in an aggressive way, but more like an annoyed way—when she does not appreciate being disturbed from a nice nap.

Francesca loves spending time at our log cabin in the mountains of central Idaho, sniffing to see what has been running around her territory, looking out over the forest from our second-floor deck, or sitting with us together on our leather loveseat. When at our condo in Boise, she loves to go with us for rides on our e-bikes and walks around the neighborhood, sniffing along the way and greeting every person or dog she meets with a wagging tail and tug on the leash.

The primary reason we got Francesca was to be my therapy dog. When I am having a rough time, she somehow senses it. She will come up to me and lie down by my feet, ask to sit on my lap, or give me kisses on the neck. When I return her affection, she purrs with satisfaction. When she is up to her hat full of antics, my physical and mental burdens are relieved more effectively than from any medicine my doctors have prescribed. She brings nothing but positive side effects.

Because of my physical limitations, I am unable to walk very far with Francesca, so Lesa does most of the exercise. When the two of them encounter people on their walks, Francesca strains on her leash to go up to them for some affection. No one can resist her. Like us, once upon a time, most have never seen a Norwich and think she is a puppy, even though she is fully grown. They almost always want to know her name and breed. She makes people smile. Life is good for Francesca.

I believe God had a hand in bringing Francesca into my life; there are too many moving parts to the path that brought us together for it to be a coincidence. She is one in a million and provides me with love and affection anytime I need it. I cannot imagine how much more difficult it would be coping with my health challenges if I did not have my “fluffy ball of cuteness” by my side.