

Karen and Chewy's Story



The loss of a member of the family or a good friend is always extremely difficult, be they of the two or four-legged variety. In late July 2008, Rosie, our five-year old shepherd mix, unexpectedly crossed over the rainbow bridge.

After being diagnosed with breast cancer in October of 2007, having numerous tests, two surgeries and spending six months with an undiagnosed infection, her loss was like adding insult to injury. I was moping around when Pat, my partner, said we had to get another dog...now! So, on a rainy Sunday in August off we went to the animal shelter to begin our search. Now, I don't know about you, but I can spend only about 30 minutes in the shelters before I am over whelmed by all the animals needing homes.

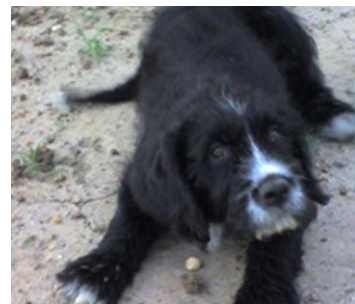
We transferred our search to the internet and newspapers, contacted the Denver Dumb Friends, the Max Fund, the Colorado Corrections Industries and several breeders. We wanted a small, older female but we could not find just the right match or when we thought we had, that dog was no longer available. We began to believe that this might not be the right time to add a new family member.

I was going to give it one last try on the internet when I received an e-mail from my daughter saying "MOM, CHECK THIS OUT". By the next evening this 60 pound, six month old male puppy was living in our home. No, he did not meet the criteria we had set, but he was the only dog that got the "AW" response! He is a rescue from Kansas who had a very rough beginning, mistreated and sick with parvovirus. Fortunately, for us, someone saw something in his eyes that made him worth saving.

He came with the name Chewy (Chu Baca??) and worked really hard to prove he deserved it: five or six dog beds, newspapers and magazines, eyeglasses, slippers, throw pillows and a remote control all met their demise at his hand/mouth. Still he was showing that there was something special in his character.

People ask about his breed and we say he is a WONDER Dog. We really do wonder what he is and believe he could be a mix of Portuguese Water Dog and Giant Schnauzer.

As he matured and WE went through obedience training he continued to make us laugh and began to show a special empathy for children and the elderly. We met a family with a small baby at a soccer mach. They asked to meet Chewy so I gave him the sit command and, with no prompting from me, he immediately dropped to his belly and crept over to the baby licking her toes and making her giggle. It was then that I began to think he was meant to be more that a companion for us and our other pets.



Diana Golden had told me about Denver Pet Partners so we enrolled in the October 2009 Handler Training Workshop and soon after passed our Team Evaluation. In the spring of 2010, we began visiting at Devereux Cleo Wallace, a residential treatment facility in Broomfield for children and adolescents ages 8 to 21.

We are an Animal Assisted Therapy team that meets on a weekly basis with a child and their therapist. Because Chewy had been abused as a puppy, probably by a large man with a stick or cane, I wanted our first interaction to be a short meet and greet to insure that this environment would be suitable for him.



As we waited in the lobby I saw a man and a very large teenager coming down the hall. My mental response was “how is Chewy going to react to the boy?” As I shook hands and introduced Chewy it became obvious that we were in the right place and I need not have been concerned. Chewy sat in front of “C” and put his paw on the boy’s leg as if to say “Hi, I’m glad to be here and hope we can be friends”. I knew then that I had made the right choice and we were in the right place.

Sometimes we would just talk and “C” would brush Chewy. Other times he took great pride in walking Chewy around the grounds and introducing him to any staff that we met. “C” also loved playing fetch and keep-away with Chewy. We met with “C” for almost three months before he was able to move on to a group home. His therapist indicated that the time spent with Chewy really helped to facilitate the move and showed the staff a side of the boy that they had not seen in his time at DCW.

We have also met with “D”, a 15 year old boy, since our first visit. He has a picture of Chewy in his room that helps him down when he is stressed. A major lesson for us was when he came to a session very angry.

For most of our meetings Chewy would lay down with “D” and enjoy being petted while he talked about the events of the week with the therapist. On one particular day “D” sat on the floor and Chewy chose to come and lie down next to me. After “D” had a few moments of conversation with his therapist I asked him if he was angry. When he said yes I asked if he saw where Chewy was. Again, he said yes. I asked, why do you think he is over here instead of next to you. He said “because I’m angry?”

As we talked about how to make Chewy feel comfortable and safe with him “D” began to breathe and relax. When he called him, Chewy crawled across to floor on his belly and put his head in “D’s” lap. This was a wonderful moment for everyone in the room, a lesson that transferred to “D’s” interaction with other staff and his peers. Since the beginning of the year “D” has matured in many ways and may soon be able to move on. Chewy and I will miss him but we are extremely proud of all he has accomplished in our time together.

The other client we see on Tuesdays is a 13 year old girl. She looks forward to seeing us so much that she will often phone her therapist a couple of times during the week to make sure we are coming.

One of her activities with Chewy is to have him do tricks and she loves to bring him to her classroom to show her peers. She is very artistic and likes to bring us the things she makes. She helped staff create a

bulletin board in the hallway with pictures and information about the therapy dog teams that visit at DCW. Interacting with Chewy has increased her trust level because she knows that we will keep our word and visit when we say we will.

We've certainly enjoyed our time at DCW and hope that we can continue to work with the children. We recently adopted another dog as a companion for Chewy. Maizee is a small, two year old, spayed female. Hopefully she too will make a great therapy dog.