

Katie's Story



Katie came into my life in April 2003 when she was about five to eight months old. I met her while I was walking in my neighborhood park, grieving the loss of my dog, Kachina, who had been ill with kidney failure and had been put down just three days before. I happened to meet up with my friend and neighbor, Jane, who had not only her two dogs, but a third that she had on a very long rope. It was Katie, who was running and playing with other neighborhood dogs and looked like she couldn't be happier.

"Quite a change from an hour before," said Jane who had just rescued Katie, and now concerned with what she would do with her. This is the story told by Jane. She was working one of her feral cat colonies in Denver when she saw Katie running down the street (sidewalk) without a collar or tags. Jane has a magical touch with animals, but she said when she called Katie to come to her, Katie seemed afraid and ran the other way,

leading Jane to a house occupied by two men. Katie acted frightened by one of them. (Jane, I'm sure, gave those men a piece of her mind for allowing Katie to run loose). "She knows where she lives," one of the men said. What Jane learned was that Katie's name was Peoples and that she had previously belonged to a sister of one of the men, and for whatever reason, gave Katie to her brother. When Jane turned to leave, one of the men called out, "Do you want her?" Without a second thought, Jane took her.

And that's how Katie and I came together. I fell in love with her on the spot and somehow knew that she would come to live with me. "I don't know if you believe in such things," Jane said, "but I think this was meant to be." I agreed.

I walked with them back to Jane's house and visited awhile in their back yard. Katie playfully nipped at my arms and legs, but when I said "no," she immediately stopped. Good dog, I thought. I wanted to take her home then, but knew I wasn't yet emotionally ready for a new dog. Jane suggested I might want to pick her up after work & keep her overnight, which I did. Then I brought her home for a weekend. This went on for several weeks, until I finally felt ready to have Katie permanently.

However, during the time that Katie was at Jane's house, she became a part of their family (husband, preschooler Cassidy, the two dogs and several cats). Often times when we walked to the park, we ran into Jane and family. Katie deluged her beloved rescuer with hugs and kisses, and when they were ready to leave, Katie would cry and want to go with them. It broke my heart, but I wasn't about to give her up at that point.

Even though we played and hiked together and participated in some dog training classes, it took about six months to a year before Katie really bonded with me. She was a challenge.

In October of our first year together we went to a doggie affair at Bible Park in Denver. Among the many vendors was Joyce Leake, an animal communicator. I introduced myself and told her about the bonding issue with Katie, and about Katie's separation anxiety. (Yes, Katie had separation anxiety then, and still does today. She rides from Denver to Brighton with me and while I'm at work, she spends the day at the home of a wonderful couple with three dogs of their own; Judy & Leo love Katie and Katie loves them). So when the animal communicator said that Katie would make a good therapy dog, I was

flabbergasted. "Katie, energetic little Katie?" I asked. She said "yes." She also suggested that Katie would be good at agility, and that it would be a good way for us to strengthen our bond. Agility we eventually did until I could no longer keep up with my lively little girl - and Denver Pet Partners became my priority.



At the time I met Joyce, I was not familiar with the Delta Society nor the Denver Pet Partners. But ironically, when I went to work at Platte Valley Medical Center (PVMC) in Brighton on Mon., I happened to see a flyer in our Care Coordination office announcing an upcoming Pet Partner workshop that was to be taught at PVMC by Diana McQuarrie. This was too weird. I called Diana, only to learn that the animal should be at least one year old and that it would be best if Katie and I were together at least a year. She said I was more than welcome to take the workshop, but because we wouldn't be able to be Pet Partners for a while, I decided against it. But I did start going to the Pet Partner meetings as a non-member. I finally took the workshop in March 2004, where I realized that becoming a Pet Partner was a serious endeavor. With some trepidation, I signed up for the evaluation for two weeks later. The more I thought about it, though, the more I realized that Katie wasn't ready and that we weren't ready as a team. We had already taken the Canine Good Citizen test and failed; I was devastated. I couldn't bear for us to fail again, so I gave up our spot to someone who was on the waiting list. I continued to go to the monthly meetings and finally joined DPP as a Pet Partner without an animal, always envying the Pet Partners who came to the meetings with their dogs; I wanted so badly to be a Pet Partner team with my dog.

At one of the meetings, I met Lisa Knowles, dog trainer and DPP member. Could she help us meet our goal of becoming Pet Partners? She couldn't guarantee it, she said, but we would certainly work at it. Katie and I trained with Lisa for almost a year. We took Katie to big box stores, to the dog-friendly stores at Aspen Grove, to city parks, and wherever. Every time we met a roadblock and I became discouraged, I would think back to what Joyce Leake said about Katie making a good therapy dog. We had started down a path and I wasn't about to veer off it. And Lisa, always encouraging, never gave up on us. I became aware that I needed the training even more than Katie, and that in the process, Katie who had been wary of strangers, especially men, finally started becoming more trustful of them. We finally got to a point where I felt we were ready to go through the Pet Partner evaluation. We had taken the Canine Good Citizen test a second time -- and passed. If we didn't pass the Pet Partner evaluation, I was at least more prepared to accept that it wouldn't be the worst thing in the world. We went through our evaluation in February of 2006 - and passed. I was ecstatic. We were finally a team. I think Katie knew how proud I was of her and that we had accomplished something special.



As a Pet Partner team, Katie and I have been visiting at Platte Valley Medical Center in Brighton, at the Denver Children's Home (a residential treatment center for children and adolescents), and frequently participate in Shots for Tots.

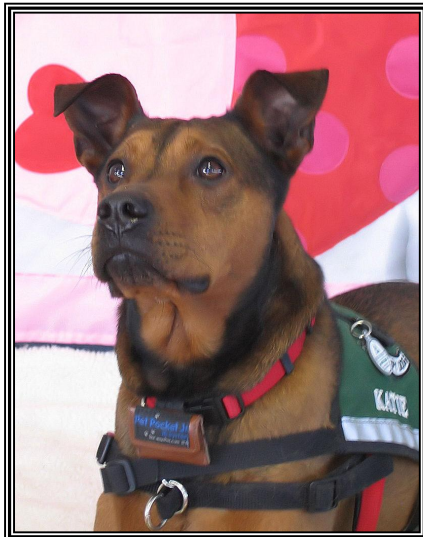
One of our most rewarding experiences occurred at DCH. We started visiting there in September 2006 and our first assigned resident was 12-year-old Monica (not her real name) for a thirty-minute pet therapy session once a week. Her therapy goal was "to be able to attach to and trust a living being." She

and Katie seemed to click right from the beginning, and because we had ten months to work with her, the attachment and trust had a chance to grow. One of the dorm counselors said she was never sure if Monica knew the day of the week, but always on Thursday Monica asked about and eagerly awaited a visit from Katie. At a staff meeting that Katie and I attended, where Diana McQuarrie talked about the Pet Partner program, one of the staff members came up to us and said, "So this is Katie. I hear that she and Monica are a perfect match." I couldn't have felt more proud.

On our last visit in July 2007, before Monica was discharged back to home, she kept saying that Katie looked very sad, that Katie knew this was our last visit together. At one point, Katie crawled under a small table beside us. "See," Monica said, "she went under there because she's so sad it's our last visit." Monica lay down by Katie, hugging her and whispering to her in a comforting manner (This is a girl who in the past may have hurt animals). She had written a good-bye note in Katie's journal, saying, "Good-bye Katie. I'll miss [you] very much. I'll love you forever. Moni, your friend." In a previous entry, she wrote, "I've been such good friend off your Katie I know you trust me I trust you to I love you little puppy."

A couple of younger adolescent boys became very fond of Katie as well. Katie and I sit in the hall after our visits to write up our sessions in the Pet Partner book. These two boys would find every excuse to be out in the hall so that they could interact with Katie, sometimes for up to thirty minutes at a time. Several residents that were assigned to us stayed only a short period of time, but we are currently visiting with two adolescent girls with time to develop some attachments.

At PVMC, I have to keep Katie focused on her job, going from room to room to visit patients. When we arrive on the medical - surgical unit, Katie heads straight for the treat drawer. The ward clerk and nurses spoil her. When she comes out of a room near the nurses' station with the treats, she tries to head right back there, but I tell her she has to wait until she's done working. Many of the patients tell us that our visit made their day and helped them forget their illness or pain for awhile. They often talk about their own dogs and how much they miss them, or they talk about dogs they have had in the past.



Katie and I, along with our other PVMC Pet Partner teams, participated in an open house in June of this year when PVMC moved into their new hospital building. The dogs were a big hit, and an important part of the event.

Katie has come a long way since 2003. I can't even imagine what her life would be like if Jane hadn't rescued her.