

## *Tami, Dare, and Rudy's Story*



*Tami and Dare*



*Tami and Rudy*

### **The Sheltie Lady**

Thank you for selecting Dare, Rudy and I as July's Team of the Month! We are extremely honored!



My story starts with a Sheltie (of course). In my neighborhood and most everywhere else, I'm known as the "Sheltie Lady." I have always loved Shelties. When I was in third grade, I sent Santa Claus a Christmas Card. I told him that I wanted a Sheltie for my Christmas present. I didn't get a Sheltie, but I loved our little mutt so very much. When I got out on my own, I got my first Sheltie (by the way, my mom kept that Christmas card to Santa

and I put it on my tree every year!). When my first Sheltie passed away, I adopted my next Sheltie. After adopting him, I got very involved in Sheltie Rescue and started fostering many Shelties. I was always able to let them go to their new forever home, but when I started fostering a little two-legged Sheltie named Dare and a scarred-up Sheltie named Rudy, they stole my heart. I couldn't let them go. Both have special needs and both are a big part of my life.



If you love your dog, of course you think he or she is special. My sweet Dare is very special though. He has a message to tell and a life to live. He's a normal, sassy Sheltie who loves to run around the backyard chasing his brothers and wrestling with them in the house. He fetches the tennis ball and brings it back to me (most of the time). You would never know it until you looked closer at him that he is different in any way. But he is. He only has two legs – front and back on the right side. Don't tell him he's disabled. Don't feel sorry for him. He doesn't want it. He's as sassy as they come. He runs and plays like any other dog. He loves people and other dogs, and he has no idea that he has a disability.



Dare was born with all four legs. Unfortunately, he was born in a puppy mill. His back left leg was bitten off, most likely by his mother, when he was just a few days old. Dogs become cage-crazy in puppy mills after being kept in a cage their whole life without feeling grass under their paws, being held by a human, or loved unconditionally like they should be. His front left leg was caught in the cage wiring and twisted, then broken in several places and dislocated at the elbow. He was not taken to the vet to fix the leg or ease the pain. He lived with

the pain until the puppy mill decided to give him to the Colorado Sheltie Rescue nine weeks later because they couldn't sell a "damaged" puppy. He was given to the Rescue when he was 10 weeks old.

The Colorado Sheltie Rescue spent the next four months trying to repair the front leg. Nine pins were put in the bone to hold it together. However, Dare got so adept at walking and running on his two legs that he never put the front leg down. This caused the bone to die and when the pins were removed; his leg broke again, so it had to be amputated.

Dare came to live with me a month later in August 2006 as a foster dog. I knew that he would be more than just a foster dog for me. He was my little man from the moment he stepped his two feet in my house. He needed some special care and also needed to be treated like any other dog. He got both from me. He was a little spoiled when I got him. He would bark at me to pick him up to take him wherever I went. I looked at him and told him, "You've got two legs and know how to use them. You can walk yourself." So, he moved right along. He got used to my house very quickly and I made some modifications in the house for him as well. I put a bowl of water up next to the wall, so he stands leaning on the wall to drink the water and I put rugs all over the kitchen floor so he can get around.

Dare has been through a lot in his short lifetime. He was a candidate for an experimental procedure to implant a prosthetic leg in his front stump. While preparing for the permanent prosthesis, I would take Dare swimming three times a week. This was preparing the muscles in his left stump to get strong for the prosthesis. Many people asked me if he swam in circles. No way! He swam straight as an arrow! Being a Sheltie, he was not a natural born swimmer, but he took to it very quickly.



Dare received the implant in July 2007. The surgery went well but Dare needed some extra special care after the surgery. His bandage needed changing several times. He struggled with running. Amazingly enough, he uses his little stump for balance. So, having his stump bandaged up next to his body prevented him from using his stump for balance. His implant did not heal very well and there were many complications while we waited for the leg. The skin did not adhere to the implant device, which caused several infections. Through all the cleanings, bandage changes, and vet visits, he took everything in stride. Nothing fazed him. He is a champ, and he has the patience of a saint.



After a year of cleaning his implant four times a day (it was always infected) and having to wear an e-collar all the time, I made the determination that the implant needed to be removed. His quality of life had suffered and he needed to be a dog again. He took to life without the implant and has enjoyed every minute of it. He has gone back to swimming twice a week for exercise (he couldn't swim with the implant in his body).

Dare encounters setbacks every day. In September 2008, he had a stress fracture in his femur where the femur meets the hip joint. He had the stress fracture for a year. We were treating it by managing his pain. A year later, it finally broke all the way through. Dare needed surgery again. He needed a femoral head ostectomy (FHO) right away. True to his nature, Dare picked the worst time for surgery. Denver had just received two feet of snow! I think he picks the most inopportune times to see me trudge through the snow after him to help him potty. It's the little devil in him. Dare made it through surgery like a champ – he always does. He came home the next day and I had to take extra special care of him – after all, he was a one-legged dog until he recovered. He stretches every night and every morning and he continues to swim for exercise and strengthening. He gets massages, laser treatments, and ultrasound care. He is one spoiled little dude.

I know that Dare is a special little guy. There is a reason why he was saved from that puppy mill. He has a message to send to those who will listen. So, I thought he needed to start

sending that message. That's when we became an animal therapy team with the Denver Pet Partners. I knew that I wanted him to visit other amputees, but we also visit children with severe disabilities and adults with multiple sclerosis. Dare and I visit the Amputee Support Services Group, Fletcher Miller School, and the King Adult Day Enrichment Program. He is loved by all who meet him. He puts a smile on everyone's face. He accepts those with disabilities as they are and they accept him. No questions asked. No weird looks. Just acceptance. Period. He provides inspiration to everyone he meets. He loves the attention (who doesn't like being the center of attention?) and has really bonded with the groups we visit. When people meet Dare for the first time or when I talk about him for the first time, people ask me, "How does he walk?" I tell them that he just goes because no one has told him he can't. Good advice!



Dare loves his job as a therapy dog. He was definitely made for the work. He has a calming effect on the children we visit and is an inspiration to the amputees we meet. I have learned a lot during these visits and I appreciate what I have, more so now than ever before. When people learn everything that Dare has been through in his life, they are encouraged and motivated to get on with their life. Dare could whine, cry, be negative and miserable, but he's not. He is the most positive creature that I have ever encountered.

Dare has had a remarkable life in his short time on earth. He has been through so much and yet, he shows no adverse effects from all the things he has been through in his short life. He is a special little dog with amazing abilities. No "disabilities here"! Nothing slows him down. He falls down and gets right back up like nothing happened. He has adapted to life with two legs. He leans on the wall, or me, or one of his brothers when he gets tired. I hold him upright every time he needs to potty. He rides in a stroller when we go for walks. He has added so much to my life. I learn from him every day. He reminds me that nothing should get you down



and that you can beat anything that life throws at you. You just have to stay positive. People tell me all the time that he is lucky to have me. I disagree - I am the lucky one!



Rudy was found as a stray in Ohio. He had to be trapped at the BBQ restaurant he was named after. He was stuck in the Precious Secrets Sheltie Rescue for two years. Unfortunately, no one wanted to adopt him. He wasn't "pretty" - he had scars all over his face, legs, and the last three inches of his tail were naked. I saw him in the kennel and immediately knew that he needed to come home with me. I love the underdog. I was the kid that brought home the stray dog or cat; I was the one that picked up the bird with a broken wing. So, I was definitely the one to

take this sweet dog home and he has been my sidekick ever since.

Rudy is a very loving dog. He sleeps next to me every night and I mean right next to me. We spoon. He loves his mommy. He is also my guard dog. He protects everyone in the house, especially Dare. He provides comfort. He's the caregiver of any foster dog that comes into my house. A couple of years ago, I was fostering a very large, beautiful Sheltie. He was scared of everything and everyone. He hid in the corner of my kitchen all day and all night long. When I couldn't find Rudy, I would look in the kitchen to find him lying right next to the foster dog.



Since Rudy has the special ability to make other dogs feel at ease, I thought he would also make a fabulous therapy dog. He is a fantastic reading-therapy dog. Children bond with him. He just puts his head right on their lap and the kids could read to him for hours. Rudy and I visit the Bridge Project at Columbine and the Englewood Library. One day at the Englewood Library, a woman came in with her two kids. She asked me what was wrong with Rudy's face. I explained that he has an autoimmune disease that causes a blister to form, then it turns into a scab, and when the scab falls away, so does the fur and a scar is left behind. She told me that she understood. She removed the baseball cap from her son and told me that her son also had an autoimmune disease that caused his hair to fall out. Her son was completely bald and was only seven years old. He immediately hugged Rudy and the

two were cuddled together while his sister read to me. Amazing!

Rudy is also my running buddy. He loves it when I grab the special leash out of the closet and put on the running shoes. He gets so excited! He helped me train for the 2008 Denver Marathon. He would run up to 13 miles with me. He would carry his water and I would carry mine. He had way more stamina than me!



When I visit the dog shows and see those “pretty” Shelties, I make the comment that they would never make it in my house. They are too pretty! A dog needs to be missing a couple of legs or have scars on their faces to live in my house. The rescued underdogs are the ones that grab my heart.

They make the best family members, partners, and cuddle buddies on the planet!

