

Teddy's Story



It's raining tonight, pouring actually. Loud thunder just shook the house and an electric show is illuminating the sky. Something tells me it's going to be a long night. It's summer in Kansas after all. Neither of us can sleep, Teddy and me, so it's downstairs into my office: a good time to write Teddy's story. He's curled up under my desk, fast asleep dreaming his doggie dreams as I am writing his story.

First Honey

Teddy was born on April 18th, 2004 in Castle Rock, Colorado. I got him just 6 weeks after the death of our 14

½ year old Golden Retriever, Honey. Honey "grew up" with our three children and was an integral part of our family. She attended soccer games, accompanied us on family trips and especially enjoyed her walks and "helping" me in the garden. She managed to help raise and see our first two children off to college. She missed my daughter and son very much after they left. Every phone call home inquired about Honey. When the kids did come home for holidays she was ecstatic to see them, dancing, turning in circles and hugging and kissing them all over. She died the summer before our youngest was leaving for college. I believe she truly tried to hold on to finish her job. Though her gentle soul was willing her body was not. Her loss left a giant hole in the hearts of our entire family. Tears still well in my eyes as I remember her loss. It was also during this time when I learned of the possibility we would be leaving Colorado.

I turned to Marilyn and Jim Schmiesing, Honey's breeders. They had been very supportive during the time we were losing Honey. I knew I would be getting another golden but was unsure when the right time would be. How would I know? How long should I wait? Could I love another dog as much as Honey?

Teddy

I remember when I first saw him. A romping, sweet, golden ball of energy racing across the yard with his brother, the last two left in the litter. I told his breeders, Marilyn and Jim, I would only consider a female. The more I watched him, the more I fell in love with his gentle, sweet nature. He was friendly,



playful and confident. I told them I would “sleep on it”. Before I even drove home the decision was already made. I named him Teddy because my first impression when I saw him was that he looked like a big, stuffed polar bear. I was to learn later that he had been the pick of the litter and they had big plans for him. As it turns out, so did I.

I had forgotten how much energy puppies have. After all, the last puppy I had was 14 ½ years ago! This of course meant I was that much older! I had to learn to pick up the pace. The first person to help train Teddy was Barbara Weiss. After a few private lessons, we enrolled him in puppy kindergarten. I told her of my interest in pet therapy and my goal to eventually become a Pet Partner team. She felt Teddy had the right temperament for therapy work. We continued his training and socialization. I was impressed from the beginning at how calm and attentive Teddy was. On occasion, he would even fall asleep in puppy class! He continued his obedience classes and passed his Canine Good Citizen test. I decided I felt ready to take the Denver Pet Partners



Workshop in April 2005. This turned out to be a life-changing event for me. In June 2005 when he was one year old, Teddy and I became a registered Denver Pet Partner Team. It was a proud day for us and the beginning of our journey together as a team.

The facility we visited in Denver was Aurora South Medical Center. I enjoyed visiting there very much. When I learned my husband’s job required that we relocate to Kansas, I wasn’t sure what our future would hold as a therapy team.

Relocating at the age of 56 is not for sissies. It has been a difficult adjustment with more than a few bumps along the way but Teddy has been by my side every step of it. We wasted no time in getting started volunteering in the community.

Teddy is five now. He has matured into a handsome boy with a beautiful golden coat and personality to match. It is hard to believe we have been a therapy team for 4 years now. We have found interesting and rewarding work in Kansas. Since moving here, I became a Delta instructor and evaluator. I enjoy meeting new prospective teams and sharing my love and enthusiasm for animal-assisted therapy work. Most of all, I am proud of the team that Teddy and I have become. It has been quite a journey. We look forward to our trips to Denver to visit friends and attend some of the monthly DPP meetings when we can. It has also been wonderful to have the opportunity to evaluate and participate in DPP Workshops. The continuing education materials at American Humane are wonderful and very helpful resources to have.

On to Kansas: Follow the Yellow Brick Road

The first facility we started visiting in Kansas was Overland Park Nursing and Rehabilitation Center. Teddy loves the seniors and has known some of the residents for over 3 years. The staff love and welcome him at each visit. I have held many Pet Partner Workshops in the multi-purpose room at Overland Park Manor. Rick Bronaugh, the Activities Director, encourages having the Workshops there. He uses the opportunity to explain to the students how much the therapy team visits mean to the residents. The residents enjoy having the Workshops there as well. They often come by to tell the students what a good job Teddy does there and to be sure that I bring him by for a visit after the Workshop.



Teddy is an excellent motivator and works especially well with children in a variety of settings. We volunteer in Physical therapy at Children’s Mercy Hospital in Kansas City. His devotion, patience and rock solid stamina even when children are crying or just having a difficult day is heart-warming. He stands patiently as children re-learn motor skills while brushing him or putting letters, numbers and shapes on his vest. He is very intuitive in this setting and it is not unusual after working with a child that he goes over to a parent and puts his head in their lap. He also provides great stress relief for the nurses, therapists and staff. I am never without my lint brush to offer people after his “golden lean”.

Teddy and I are also a R.E.A.D. team and have worked in elementary schools and libraries to promote literacy. Teddy loves school! He loves the activity and the attention he receives from the children and staff. His perpetual “golden smile” is a delight to the children he works with. This past year we worked with first graders at Leawood Elementary School. We are looking forward to resuming that role this year.

I have found our work at Rose Brook’s Center, a domestic violence shelter for women and children, to be especially rewarding. Teddy and I visit there with 4 other Delta teams. The Family Services Coordinator and I set up 4 programs to serve the children at Rose Brooks: **Outreach:** The teams visit with the children of Moms who come to meet with counselors when they are considering leaving an abusive situation. The children are many times distracted, frightened and unsure. Many of the children are dog fearful. Activities include



appropriate petting, brushing and reading to the dogs. **Group:** These children are residents at Rose Brooks. Many of them have either been abused or have witnessed abuse of their mothers. The teams in this setting work with the counselor on different activities, games and literacy. **Transitional Housing:** This group is made up of former residents of Rose Brook who are now living on their own in the community. The teams meet with the children while their mothers receive counseling and support. In all the groups we incorporate dog safety/bite prevention and how to pet a dog. **R.E.A.D.** This program meets one Saturday a month for children in shelter. It is very popular and the children seem to really appreciate the opportunity to read one- on- one with the therapy teams. Each of the programs is profound. It has truly been an eye-opening experience for me to see how many children lack the basics in life that are often taken for granted: food, shelter and education.

Teddy does an outstanding job at Rose Brooks. His calm nature is very reassuring to children who have suffered trauma and experiences that are difficult to comprehend. He offers unconditional love and acceptance. This helps the children in establishing trust and feeling more comfortable in their new environment.

It is heartwarming to see all the talented and committed members of the community that volunteer at Rose Brooks Center. The staff's commitment to the families at Rose Brooks is incredible. All the teams enjoy working with them. Our teams were especially proud this year to be honored with the Rose Brooks "Children's Program Award" at the annual volunteer reception.



It has been a most rewarding experience being a therapy team. Most of all, I am grateful every day for my golden boy Teddy. I want to take this opportunity to thank him for all he is willing to do during each visit. I know I can count on him to do his job every time. He always tries his best. In turn, he knows he can count on me to look out for him, a role in our partnership that I take very seriously.

I have to admit that I have learned far more from Teddy than anything I may "think" I taught him. He has taught me to be a better observer in life (Teddy's own philosophy is that it is better to observe than to retrieve). I try to observe and listen more. His happy-go-lucky nature is even inspiring me to try to worry less and play more. His unconditional love and devotion humble me. He makes me strive to be the person he "thinks" I am. He has helped me realize that at the end of the day, it is the simple things in life that matter most like a walk in the park or a good belly rub or that a simple hug can make the difference between a good day and a not-so-good day. Teddy is my best friend and I am sure glad that we are on the same team.

Teddy my boy, you are truly a gift. Thank you for all you have added to my life and for all you do each day to enrich the lives of others.

