

## Winston's Story



As I write this story, Winston, my one hundred fifty pound Newfoundland watches my every move, his soulful eyes focused and loving. Winston knows I'm telling our story.

Winston was born in Loveland, CO in December 1999. My daughter picked him from a litter of nine. His father was Riverside Jedi Knight, a large regal Newfie and show dog of one hundred sixty pounds. His mother's name was Goofy Newfie, a trim one hundred ten pound female athlete. Winston takes after his Mom. He loves to swim, go for long walks, and chase his beloved tennis balls in the back yard. He's also quite a squirrel hunter but lacks the speed to ever catch his prey.

Winston came to live with us three years ago when my daughter moved into a smaller condo in downtown Denver. My wife and I welcomed his arrival. Grandma and Grandpa were thrilled with our new Granddog.

I pampered Winston constantly. My daughter, Rachel, who trained Winston very well, told me that I was spoiling him. But in my adoration for this splendid pet I didn't listen.

Winston and I walk together daily. We started going on hikes in the mountains regularly on the weekends. On a bright spring morning in May 2003, we set out together on a hike on the Colorado Trail near the South Platte River. Winston loved to hike. The wild odors of the outdoors fueled his exuberance for the mountains. We hiked up a gentle slope for about an hour and stopped for lunch near a small brook. Winston drank his fill from the brook and we both enjoyed resting before the walk back to the car.



We started down the trail and Winston stopped to rest after about fifteen minutes. I thought this unusual but nothing serious. We walked on after a brief rest. Winston stopped again and refused to budge. I was now concerned. We sat there, Winston panting heavily while a felt a growing panic inside. In desperation I lifted Winston to his feet, wrapped my day pack around his body and began a series of back breaking moves to get him back to the car. After 10 minutes or so I realized that I could not make it. I had a decision to make and in my state of despair and panic I left Winston and ran for help.

I literally plunged down the trail. By the grace of God I spotted a group of high school kids with a rubber raft near the trail head. They had been rafting on the river and were heading home. In my panic I pleaded for their help. Without hesitation those great kids bounded back up the

trail with carrying the rubber raft which would be Winston's ticket to survival. Were it not for those kid's help, I would not be writing this story. Winston was in heat stroke.

As I sat in the lobby of the veterinary hospital the next day, I read an article in one of the magazines in the lobby about Pet Partners. Something inside said this is something we should do. A few moments later I sat next to Winston, his head resting in my lap. I told him we were going to be Pet Partners. His large brown eyes looked into mine and said "yes".



I was so nervous on our first evaluation and it cost us. We failed, receiving a score of "not ready". Diana wrote on the assessment form about us, "lovely teamwork and great potential". There was hope for us!

Six months later after passing the CGC (Canine Good Citizen), we tested again and we passed. We are now

regular visitors to the Life Care Center and the Gardens of Columbine in Littleton. As a team we also volunteer for the Denver Dumb Friends League visiting various schools in the area. The kids love Winston. Many times he's been encircled by enchanted kids just wanting to touch him. He loves the attention.

Winston is a star at the Life Care Center and Gardens of Columbine. Winston comes alive when he puts on his green therapy dog vest. He's always ready to go to work and it's a joy to see him in action. His size always attracts attention and our friends we visit just enjoy having this huge black Newfie lay down near their beds.

John (name changed to protect privacy) is a resident at the Life Care Center. We visit John each week. John cannot converse and our visits are done with gestures and nods. During one of our early visits John stood and took Winston's lead. He wanted to walk Winston. So, off we went down the hallway. John was beaming from ear to ear with pride. I didn't realize what a special moment this was for John.



During our last visit, the Recreational Therapist at Life Care Center, Dorti, told me that John had grown despondent and didn't participate any longer. We made John our first visit that day. He lay on his bed staring vacantly. He looked up when I knocked and a warm glow came over his face as Winston ambled up next to him, giving John a big sniff and Newfie kiss. We did our walk and said our farewells until next time.

Later we passed John's room. He was asleep on his bed. As we paused for a moment at John's doorway I thought to myself, "John is dreaming". He is dreaming the dream I have often. John,

like me, is walking through a beautiful mountain meadow. Winston is at his side.

On the drive home I think back to that spring day in May as Winston lay exhausted and helpless. I think about those wonderful kids who saved Winston's life. I'm not a religious person but I do believe there is a purpose and a time for all things in this life. It's great to be part of this wonderful team of Denver Pet Partners.



Editor's Note: *To know Jim Saunders and Winston is to know a team with deep sincerity and incredible dedication and commitment to their work as Pet Partners. Winston is a beautiful soul, one can see this in his eyes. Jim, you are so caring and sensitive and the way in which you approach each person you interact with leaves them feeling incredibly special, clients and team-members alike. On behalf of all of us at Denver Pet Partners, we are deeply grateful for the exemplary service which you so selflessly provide to enhancing people's lives through animal-assisted activities and the outstanding progress in promoting the human-animal bond which you enable through your teamwork.*

Diana McQuarrie