

## *Emma's Story*



Emma and I have just returned from a beautiful and peaceful hike in the mountains. The autumn colors are beginning. It gives me such joy to watch her and her sister walk side by side on the trail in front of me, tails wagging and smiling their golden smiles. Emma is such a significant and special part of my life. I'm so happy to share her story and honored to be selected as pet partner team of the month. Thank you so much.

My story with Emma began before there was an Emma. My mom had moved into an assisted living facility in Florida. Though the transition was difficult at first, over time she adjusted quite well. The highlight of her week was always when the pet therapy teams would come to visit. The happiness in her eyes and the exuberance in her voice impacted me tremendously as my mom told stories of these precious beings. I knew when the time came for a dog in my life this would be a path I'd like to follow.

Emma was born March 11, 2000. We met eight weeks later and my heart melted. As Emma, my husband Allen and I adjusted to our lives together I realized what a precious jewel she was. Inspired by my mom, I began my pursuit of becoming a pet therapy team. I was thrilled to find Diana and the Denver Pet Partners organization. Emma and I completed the evaluation process in 2005, receiving a complex rating. We were on our way!



Our first year as a therapy team was spent at The Medical Center of Aurora visiting the patients, families and staff from the Oncology floor. As Emma and I would exit from the elevator our arrival was enthusiastically announced, "Emma's here!" Patients, families and friends would wonder who this "person" Emma was that arrived on their floor. How pleasantly surprised they were to see this gentle creature walk into

their rooms or stop to be petted in the hallway. I know Emma gave them respite for a moment and I know I left there each time getting back more than I gave.



We took a three month hiatus our first year in DPP as Emma underwent a right hip replacement. Unfortunately, she was born with severe right sided hip dysplasia and was becoming more and more incapacitated. Her stoicism in light of her pain was amazing to witness. She taught me much during that time and continues to do so. Thankfully the left side was not nearly as severe. Emma did well and was able to get back to her normal level of activity (hiking in the mountains, chasing tennis balls, going for long walks, swimming and playing with her sister Lexi).

The past three years we have been affiliated with The Denver Children's Home. We visit with children that are in the School/Day Treatment Program. We focus on two children individually throughout the semester. Our one on one session incorporates many different activities such as play therapy as well as learning about dog behavior and care. The children respond so well to Emma and she loves the interactions. We have many meetings in the hallways from previous students we have had. It's heartwarming to watch them gently touch Emma and reminisce about their time spent with her. That special connection communicated between the child and Emma is an amazing moment in time and always brings a warmth and smile to my being.

Emma will be retiring at the end of this year. As I look into her now white golden face and watch her get up a little slower, I thank her for this incredible pet therapy partnership and beyond that a friendship and love that will be unending.



