

Gypsy's Story



From the first day I had you, you never left my side. I remember being in awe and deeply touched at how we seemed so perfect for one another right from the start. I quickly realized that I was privileged to have entered into a human-animal bond that was extraordinary and, because you were in it, my life would never quite be the same again. This is the story of a very special Chocolate Lab, my Lab, Gypsy.

The breeders, Chuck and Mary Anne Roland of [Coulee Creek Labradors](#), described you as being very bright, non-aggressive, with mild manners and a quiet demeanor. They also thought that you'd make a very good therapy dog.

It was raining the evening that I picked you up, raining hard, but it didn't dampen my spirits. I had just driven 3 days from Denver to a small rural area in mid-eastern Texas to see you for the first time and, hopefully, take you back home with me. From the pictures I received of you and the description of your temperament and qualities, my mind was set on having you but I knew that you had to want to go home with me just as much as I wanted you.

When it was finally time to meet you, I recall thinking that, in a few moments, my life was about to change forever...and it did! In bounded the most loving and sweet chocolate lab that I had ever seen! You were all wagging tail and excitement that, in Lab language, says, "I love life!" You made



me smile immediately. I noticed many things about you during that initial meeting, but a few stand out. You had beautiful conformation, tremendous coat and a great tail. Most unique, however, was your ability to make a person feel calm and happy at the same time. You were not over-confident, but respectful and thoughtful. You were the sweetest dog I had ever seen and had the most appealing sense of love and enthusiasm for life. It was also very apparent that you came from exceptional breeding, were intelligent, and had a tremendous willingness to please. But the question remained, did you want to go home with me? At this point, I had to go out to my car to get something and, upon returning, Chuck told me, smiling, that "she picked you alright; she wanted to follow you when you left!" I knew then that this was the beginning of a great bond and that you would be my next partner in therapy work!

Right from the start, you were always exceptionally calm. You followed me everywhere and your sweet, peaceful disposition was like salve. You were like a feather on the end of the leash, never walking ahead of me and never pulling. When I walked with you, it was as if we had been together for years. You slept well through that first night. I, on the other hand, slept lightly, often waking up and glancing at you lying by the side of the bed, barely believing that I had such an amazing dog.

"Gypsy" is actually a very appropriate name for you. Not only because you traveled from Texas to settle with me in Colorado, but you've had a variety of life experiences. Your lineage is exemplary. You're out of a Senior Hunter, OFA Excellent sire, Coulee Creek's In the Mood SH (Moody) and Coulee Creek's Ramblin'Rose (Rosie). Your great grandfather was the World, International, plus 6

other nation title holder, and #1 all systems Lab for 3 straight years. Your paternal grandmother was a Master Hunter and your paternal grandfather was a National Field Trial Champion. Before I had you, Chuck trained you to be a Hunt Test competitor and, more than anything, you love to retrieve. At age 4, you gave birth to 8 healthy and beautiful chocolate lab puppies, one of which grew up to be a fine Delta Pet Partner with my good friend in Oregon. You were an excellent mother my sweet Gypsy girl.



If I had to recall my most memorable moments with you, there are so many that I have to categorize them. The category of Pet Partner is perhaps most touching because it is in this role that we must work together seamlessly, as a ballet dance, with complete trust in one another as a therapy team. We must be able to be in communication with one another, almost silently, so as not to detract from the attention we owe the people we are visiting. You speak volumes with your eyes and body language, and I have never betrayed your trust in me to listen to what you are saying and act upon it. I am so proud of you and your resolve to do an outstanding job, especially as soon as I put your vest on and you know that it's time to go to work. For a lab that has so much field dog blood running through your veins that you tremble with excitement as you wait for the "Back" command to take off like a shot and execute a perfect retrieve, it is astounding to observe your transformation once your therapy dog vest is on. Your demeanor becomes incredibly gentle and passive so that even the frailest person feels completely safe around you, even to the point of purposely seeking interaction with you.



I'm proud to have you accompany me on all my appointments with prospective clients at all kinds of facilities, at in-service presentations, and at speaking engagements. I know beyond the shadow of a doubt that you will display quiet patience and perfect manners.

Several experiences stand out in my mind as particularly notable. On one occasion, I had an audience with the Vice President of a multi-million dollar foundation that was reviewing a grant proposal for Denver Pet Partners. It was one of those situations where you only have one shot to make a great impression and there's no margin for error. Needless to say, I was a bit nervous. I chose to take you with me, I think more than anything, to calm my nerves. As we entered into this very fancy office in a downtown Denver hi-rise, we were very graciously greeted by the Vice President herself. Her attention, thankfully, was immediately focused on you. In fact, she was so drawn to you that, as soon as we entered into her private office, she immediately called for her assistant to provide you with a fresh bowl of cool bottled water. She also asked me to let you roam about her office as you wished, so off came the leash. At this point, I didn't know what to expect, but I had complete trust in you and you didn't disappoint me. On only two occasions did you leave my side, and that was to go around to the back of her desk and politely and ever so gently nose the lady, a sign of friendliness and affection from a lab. She was so enamored with you that, despite her expensive suit, she willingly got down on her knees to play with you! Gypsy, you closed the deal in the meeting that day. Needless to say, we got the very generous grant we had hoped for.

Another occasion was an evening Delta Society education demonstration to a Girl Scouts troop. This

wasn't just any troop - the leader was one of my clients, a medical doctor who headed up the Gero-Psych unit where we had a Pet Partners program, and we were there at the troop meeting at her invitation. Her daughter was also one of the girl scouts. We arrived with assorted hospital equipment and, together with another Pet Partner, we proceeded to explain to the girls the difference between service and therapy dogs and demonstrate the skills required by both. You role-played perfectly, patiently allowing each girl to repeatedly interact with you as they pretended to be patients with all sorts of disorders, utilizing several different kinds of hospital equipment. We must have done really well. Each girl sent you a self-made thank you card with their own depictions of you at work as a therapy dog. I treasure each one.



Our regular visits to a local assisted living center might become passé after a couple of years for some, but I look forward to each one. Gypsy, you are even more important to me because you took the place of my long-time Pet Partner, Shana, who is due for retirement. I wasn't sure how you would be accepted by the residents. You aren't the overly friendly, very confident Shana with years of visitation experience who knows all the residents. But a very special thing happened when I started taking you instead of Shana. Once the questions stopped as to where Shana was, people began to focus on you. You were a change for them. Change is good amid what can be for some, a dull routine in a tightly scheduled assisted living center.

People were curious to know more about you and, because of your quiet and calm demeanor, they had to work at approaching you in order to interact with you. Every visit now draws otherwise withdrawn residents out and, without them even realizing it, they end up working on social and motor skills, building self esteem and sharpening their memories when they tell you stories of dogs they used to have. I know that you've made an impact there because they ask us to come back soon regardless of the visit schedule.

Gypsy, you are to be commended for your adaptability to meet new challenges, to start a new career as a therapy dog and be successful at it, for your intelligence and willingness to please which has allowed me to train you to be my partner in therapy work, and for your sensitivity and gentle spirit which makes you a pleasure to be around.

You have enriched my life beyond measure, and I am so fortunate and grateful to have such a loyal and devoted companion. I want you to live forever, just as you are, and I know that you will in my heart. The sun shines brighter because of you, my sweet girl, Gypsy.

