

Marjorie and Holland's Story



Holland and I are thrilled to have been named "Team of the Month" for American Humane Association Animal Assisted Therapy! We have been a team since passing our Delta evaluation in July 2006. Our first assignment was at University of Colorado Hospital, both the original 9th Avenue location and later the new Fitzsimons campus. We spent almost 4 years visiting a variety of units from Ante-Partum to Orthopedics, but our most constant (and favorite) was the Intensive Care Unit. The nurses there kept a secret stash of doggie treats just for their little buddy – and, of course, Holland knew in exactly which drawer they were to be found!

We were always greeted on arrival with cries of "Holland's here!" and it seemed the hard working nurses, doctors, and therapists got as much good from our visits as their patients.

People who have only known Holland at home find it hard to believe he could work around the critically ill clients we saw there. Even I was amazed how calm and still he could be when cuddling up next to someone whose body seemed overwhelmed by tubes and monitoring equipment. Time and again, those very ill people would tell me that Holland had made their day, or was the best thing to happen to them that day.

One of the usual conversation starters on our visits is "How did he come by that name?" (I mean, really – who names their dog after a country?) The story of his name is part of the story of how he came to my family. My son, Brian, and a friend found a bedraggled, muddy mess of a dog at their high school one day in December, 13 years ago. They talked the school custodian into allowing them to keep the puppy in the janitor's closet until the end of the school day, when they could take it home. Since it was close to Christmas break, they called "her" Holly. But once "she" was in the tub at home getting the knots and mats combed out, it turned out Holly wasn't going to be an appropriate name after all, and they transmuted it into the closest equivalent they could come up with: Holland.

I got home from work that day to be told "It's just for a little while, Mom. I'll find him a home." At the time, our dog Brandy was becoming ill, and I didn't expect it to be much longer before she crossed the Rainbow Bridge. I most emphatically did NOT want another just then! Well, as I said – it's been thirteen years. Somehow, I don't think Brian is ever going to find a home for him. As if I'd give Holland up now, even if he did!

Holland is the only member of the family who made the journey with me from Florida to Denver, back in 2005. I'd never heard of animal assisted therapy then, although when my step-dad was in a skilled nursing facility in St Petersburg, they allowed us to bring Holland and other family dogs in to visit. But in Denver, my new next door neighbor, Diane Heasley,

was a member of then-Denver Pet Partners with her dog, Rusty. Almost from the first time she met us, she told me Holland would make a good therapy dog.

When my job finally calmed down enough, I began looking for ways to become involved in my new community, yet worried about leaving Holland alone more than I already did during the work week. So, of course, therapy work together was the perfect prescription. We began with basic obedience training at PetSmart, and even though he was eight years old before his first class, he picked it up right away. Less than six months later, we were a certified therapy team. It isn't true that you can't teach an old dog new tricks!

Holland and I passed our second certification renewal this past September. At age 13, he's slowing down a tiny bit, and we have semi-retired, no longer doing weekly visits to acute care. We're part of the Paws to Read program at the Englewood Public Library, and like to do fill-in or substitute work whenever we can – the Autism Walk, Shots for Tots, or information booths at public events. Holland's never happier than when meeting new people, especially children.

