



Meme Martin and Buddy



I first became aware of therapy dogs years ago through news articles. The more I thought about pet therapy the more articles seemed to come my way. Volunteering as a therapy dog team appeared to be a worthwhile activity that my dog and I could do together, something I might want to do when I retired in a few years.

I have had dogs (of many breeds) all of my life. My first standard poodle was a surprise birthday present from my husband in 2005. She was six months old when we got her, and came from a breeder who had two litters of 12 puppies each - at the same time! Needless to say, my puppy did not receive the socialization she should have, and it was clear that she was far too shy to be comfortable as a therapy dog. I was still working and didn't have the time to actively pursue my interest in pet therapy; however, in the

meantime I researched pet therapy and looked at the various organizations that evaluate and register therapy animals. It quickly became clear that Pet Partners was the most organized and professional of the groups and I followed Denver Pet Partners on their website for several years.

In 2008, God brought Buddy into my life when my 90 year old parents decided they wanted a puppy. My husband and I thought it would be prudent to help them select the puppy, expecting that at some point he would become ours to care for. Since we already had a standard poodle and loved the breed, we guided my parents towards a litter of poodle puppies. Buddy was laying off in a corner, sound asleep. My husband picked him up and we all agreed - he was the one!

We suggested all sorts of fancy names for the new puppy, but my elderly mother insisted on Buddy because, she said "it's the only name I can remember!" So Buddy it was, and that has been the perfect name for him because he turned out to be everyone's "best buddy".



It soon became apparent that my father was unable to care for, and train, a young puppy while caring for my ailing mother. I was helping my father with Buddy's

training and when Buddy was 6 months old my father asked if I would find a home for him. Of course, I volunteered our home!

As with most standard poodles, Buddy is a very quick learner. After two or three tries he understands what he needs to do, and he's willing to do it. Buddy and I took several levels of obedience training classes, and he passed his AKC Canine Good Citizen test. To further prepare for work as a therapy dog team Buddy and I would visit my father who by then was living in our local nursing home. Dad was quick to point out to the staff that Buddy was "his dog". He was so proud that Buddy had the good manners to go visiting.



Once Buddy and I were on the path to evaluate with Denver Pet Partners I started thinking about where we would volunteer. I turned to Castle Rock Adventist Hospital (my local hospital) since I had just started volunteering with their Foundation. Being a very new hospital, CRAH did not have a therapy dog program but the Foundation Director knew there was a hospital volunteer who was also an experienced therapy dog volunteer - Linda Tieman. Linda and I worked with the Foundation Director to establish policies and procedures for the hospital's new therapy dog program, which was named "Angel Paws". Buddy and I, along with Linda and her two dogs, Dillon and Darby, were the first volunteers for Angel Paws, which kicked off with a Blessing of the Paws in April of 2016. We quickly expanded to seven dog/handler teams. Linda and I continue to coordinate the Angel Paws program for the hospital.

Our first Pet Partners evaluation was in November of 2015. We got as far as the neutral dog test and, well, that was that. Buddy wanted to visit. We worked on training over the next few months. There were several bad training sessions just before the March, 2016 evaluations and I was convinced that we wouldn't pass. Even though both of us were nervous, we passed with flying colors. Just in time for the Blessing of the Paws in April and the kick-off of the Castle Rock Adventist Hospital Angel Paws program!

Buddy and I started visiting patients and staff at the hospital in April of 2016, and continued until April of 2019 when Buddy "semi-retired". Sore joints began to bother him, and he let me know that visits were much more tiring than they used to be. Now we do occasional "lobby visits" and special events at the hospital.

Throughout our years of volunteering it was interesting to observe Buddy's engagement with the activity. As soon as Buddy and I would walk into the hospital



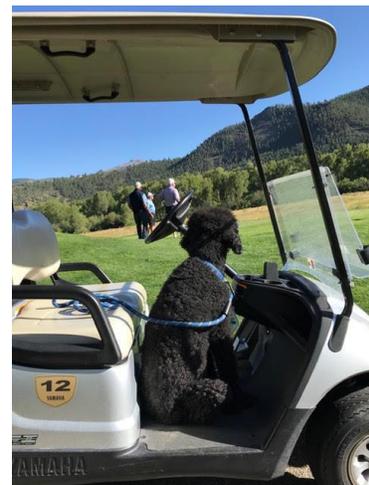
his demeanor changed. He became more alert and engaged, very much like someone walking onstage for a performance or presentation. Buddy's favorite part of therapy dog work has been building a relationship with the staff members at the hospital. Walking down the hall, staff members will see him and call him by name, and he always shows a little extra spark when he recognizes them. Of course, the treats that they offer just add to the joy of visiting! Bringing a therapy dog into a patient's room provides a real distraction from ailments. The first thing most patients would say when we entered their room was "Let me show you a picture of my dog". They missed their animals at home and talking about them while petting Buddy offered a diversion from their pain and concerns.

Buddy has also volunteered for stress relief sessions with the students and staff at Rocky Vista University, and enjoys DPP special projects, such as one-time school visits and stress relief visits at schools and businesses.



When he's not volunteering, Buddy loves to go for rides and travel in his motorhome. He's been known to sit in "his" pickup truck, parked in the driveway all day long, doors open, waiting for someone to take him for a drive. He also likes to mingle with the other critters at home, including the horses and cattle. Buddy is quite the party animal. In any social gathering he plops himself right in the middle of the group, as if he thinks we're all there just to admire him!

Buddy is now "semi-retired" (here he is on the golf course with "the boys"). We still do special events and one-time activities but, at eleven years old, weekly visits to the hospital are just too much for him. With Buddy I have been able to realize my desire to volunteer with my dog as part of a therapy dog team. He has been so easy to train, and so happy to visit people who need a lift (all the while he was making sure he was the center of attention). What a blessing it has been to shine the light of Christ in our community in this unique way!



DPP Team of the Month (December 2019)

