

## *Bannack's and Monty's Story*



"...Daddy, my brother has ruined my life...", interesting words that started me down a path of owning, training, showing, grooming and loving three poodles that live in the Byers household. My daughter Leslie desperately wanted



a dog and her brother John was allergic to all of them, or so we thought, until a helpful neighbor suggested that we look into poodles. Coming from Montana where hunting dogs are what you want to own, this was a little hard to swallow. Oreo, our now 13 year old mini, set the stage for everything else that followed. I bought Monty next (pictured at right) and finally Bannack (at left) and all were shown in various AKC events including conformation and obedience. But what to do with retired show dogs became the question about four years ago.

About this same time, my mother was diagnosed with cancer and suffered terribly from the pain. I noticed on one trip back to Montana to visit her that she seemed to get a great deal of relief from just having Monty sit by her and being able to stroke his head. That vision will never leave my mind's eye and is probably the seed event that caused me to look into therapy activities with my boys. At that time, there were no classes offered locally and I took the home study course to become a Delta Pet Partner. I got the tapes and the books and then read, studied, and finally located an evaluator in Denver. I sent in my paper work and in a few weeks I was officially a Delta Pet Partner. Getting a place to visit was a whole lot harder back then without the help of Denver Pet Partners, yet to be established. After 16 months of looking, I finally found a facility to visit that fit both my schedule, their needs, and allowed the flexibility that my work demanded. Monty and I have been visiting the Cherry Creek Nursing Center now since May of 2000.



My Delta membership lapsed for a number of reasons but when I met Diana and the Denver Pet Partners, I had to become involved in this terrific group. I decided to recertify by taking the entire class again and this time went through the evaluations with both Monty and Bannack. Bannack and I now visit once a week at Swedish Medical Center and the King Adult Day Enrichment Program (KADEP) and Monty continues to visit Cherry Creek Nursing Center. Monty is perfect for the nursing center. He is very happy to just be with the clients and listen to their every comment as if it is the most

important thing that he has ever heard. Bannack certainly enjoys the attention that he gets during his Swedish visits as seeing a standard poodle come down the hall is still a little unusual. His head seems to be the perfect height to lay on the bed and get more than a few pats on the top of his head. I think that his favorite place to visit however, is KADEP. He has become so comfortable there that I think the description of mascot would be more appropriate. He always amazes me with his understanding of the abilities of the clients. Some he will approach and be very energetic while with others he seems to know that he needs to exercise extra care. His patience is a marvel as he stands up on his hind legs with his front legs on a client platform and waits as they ever so slowly move their hands to try and touch him. Wherever we are, you know the power of the interaction when the clients remember perfectly your partner's name but still struggle with yours!



My mother's reaction was the seed that started us but there are continual reminders of the value of what we do. One night, we stopped at a door of a resident who we had visited for several years, so much so that Monty had already started to enter as he had always been welcomed. I could tell that something was different as this time, there were too many



people in the room. We decided to come back later, but when we returned the door was closed. Only upon leaving the facility, were we stopped by resident's daughter who said, "...oh, Monty was always her favorite, Mother passed away tonight." We spent some time with her family and found that the comfort that we give is also important to the family as well as the residents. When my mother in law passed away a year ago, it was Monty and Bannack that broke the ice in family gatherings where everyone wanted to give support, but now one knew how to begin. This time, my partners were giving support and love to me, my wife and her family just as they have done for so many others.

Now that I am retired, I often find that I wish that I could do even more visits, but my boys get tired and I have to remember that it is not the quantity that counts, it is the act itself. The happiness that I get from this work is a small reflection of the total happiness that they bring to others during our visits.

This is work that is well worth doing.



Bannack



Monty

*Editor's Note: I visited KADEP today for the first time with Bannack as my Pet Partner because I'm registered with him as well as Bob, and Bob was out of town. Clearly, this handsome, impeccably-mannered and proud Standard Poodle has won the hearts of the clients and staff alike. Before I even reached the building, while walking from the parking lot, several people greeted Bannack affectionately. This unabashed demonstration of warm acceptance was repeated multiple times during my visit. While in the group session, I let the clients take the lead and, one after another, they proudly recounted stories of Bob's visits with Bannack (their favorite and most humorous one being when Bannack showed more than mild interest in the therapy horses that were visiting one afternoon) and even explained how to instruct him properly, "just like Bob", to get him to perform his obedience. I was touched to see firsthand the bond that has developed between this special dog and each person with whom he has interacted over the months. I can honestly say that the whole time we were in the group session, everyone in the immediate area was smiling, and people walking by were quick to stop and join in. This degree of rapport isn't developed overnight or after a few visits, it's earned over time as a result of a genuine commitment to look beyond a person's outward circumstances and seek their heart and soul. Bob, you do this so very well. Whether at KADEP or Swedish Medical Center with Bannack, or at Cherry Creek Nursing Center with Monty, your dedication and commitment to the people you visit goes above and beyond!*

*Diana McQuarrie*