

Casey and Patch's Story



How I Got My Angel with Fur ...

My husband and I were enjoying life in our new downtown condo, but something was missing – a dog! We bantered back and forth about the kind of dog we wanted. My husband wanted something manly, but I pointed out that we couldn't get a big dog since we didn't have a yard. My mother gave me a stuffed English Bulldog during law school, and I loved his wrinkles. A bulldog was manly enough for my husband. So, it was

decided. We would get an English Bulldog.

Unfortunately, English Bulldogs were hard to come by at the rescues and expensive if purchased from a breeder. We searched for months. Finally, we stumbled onto a website with a little English Bulldog puppy at just the right price! (It turns out that Patch had a genetic defect that prevented him from breeding, and he was the runt of the litter). A stubborn looking little fawn and white face stared at us on the screen. Could this be the one?

The next day, my husband called and told me that the puppy was on hold for another family. I was so upset. He said that we were on the waiting list if something fell through, but my heart knew that the deal had been too good to be true. As I moped at dinner that night, my husband couldn't take it anymore.

"Well, I was going to surprise you," he laughed. "You are so gullible. The puppy is on hold for us."

"Really?!!!!!" I gasped!

I was so excited I couldn't think straight! At the same time, I knew our lives were about to change and that I had a lot of work ahead of me.

Because the breeder was in Florida, they shipped little Patch to Denver International Airport. On a cold night in November, we went to the cargo hold, where I claim the stork delivered him. My poor little ball of fur was shaking and confused. He leapt out of the kennel and into my arms. It was going to be love at first sight.

I wish I could say that the next several months were flawless. From the minute we brought him into our city condo, with its white carpet, we realized that this cute little puppy was not only stubborn, but at four months old, he had a lot of potty training to learn. Nobody slept that first night. Patch (who was almost renamed the Tasmanian Devil) had an upset stomach that wreaked havoc across the house. As exhausted new parents, we didn't know what to do.

During the next several months, the baseboards were chewed up, shoes went to shoe heaven, baby gates were shredded into splinters, and nothing seemed to be working. I'm embarrassed to admit that we actually took Patch to the vet because we were convinced he was deaf.

"No," said the vet. "He's just stubborn!"

We were at our wit's end. We both worked, and the puppy training was going nowhere. It was time to reconsider whether we could handle the little guy. So, we had a serious conversation about it. Patch was listening, and apparently, he didn't want to move out. From that day forward, he did a complete 180. Puppy training classes were a success, and Patch wormed his way into our family and into our hearts.

In 2008, my sister came to visit. When she stepped off the plane, she handed me an article in the USA Today featuring a young woman named Shannon and her English Bulldog, Biscuit. They were members of Denver Pet Partners (now part of American Humane Association).

"You should try this." said my sister.

"What a great idea!" I thought.

A few phone calls later, I found myself in a training workshop so that Patch and I could someday become a therapy team. On the second day of the workshop, however, I was nervous about whether Patch and I were up for the challenge. The evaluation looked tough.

Since I had a bulldog, I got in touch with Shannon. She was so friendly! I couldn't believe it. I was talking to the famous therapy team from the USA Today. Shannon and Biscuit met Patch and I at a park to work on skills, and before we knew it . . . we passed the evaluation! We were on cloud nine, and I felt as happy as the day I found out I passed my state bar exam!

Patch immediately found his groove working with children. We started at Night Owls, a parents' night out program for children with special needs. Patch amazed me. He played with the older kids who wanted to play, and stayed perfectly still when a baby was placed on the floor next to him. No one had to explain the situation to Patch. He knew what he was there to do, and he did it well.

Soon, we became regulars at Denver Children's Home where we were assigned to a fourteen year-old boy. At first, the young man seemed shy, but after a couple of weeks, the three of us became acquainted. As Patch and the young boy gained each other's trust, it was amazing to watch him beam with pride in front of his peers when Patch responded to his commands.

“Sit Patch!” he instructed. “See?” he bragged to the other children, “Patch likes me.”

We decided to try and teach Patch a new trick together. Roll over seemed to be a natural choice, but Patch would not have it. The next week, I came in with extra treats hoping that my incredibly food-motivated bulldog would come through. When we arrived, however, the young man had news for me.

“I did some research. I read that book on bulldogs you gave me. They don’t like to roll over. It’s a dominance thing. So, Patch won’t like it.”

I was amazed. He had certainly done his homework and was looking out for Patch. They had become friends. He looked forward to Patch’s visits, and so did Patch. I simply needed to hold up Patch’s therapy vest, and he knew where he was going. As his little nub wagged, he couldn’t wait to get into the car. Once inside, he knew exactly where to find the young man -up an exhausting set of stairs and down the hall.

Since visiting at Denver Children’s Home, Patch has worked at the Samaritan House and moonlighted at Night Owls. Soon, he hopes to be matched with a family at Denver’s Savio House to help out during therapy sessions with children.

Each time we visit a facility, people thank us profusely. In truth, however, our visits are a blessing for me. Watching Patch at work is more rewarding than I ever imagined. Without speaking the English language, Patch seems to know exactly what’s going on. He adjusts his demeanor and body language according to each child’s needs and seems to have an expression on his face to suggest that everything will be okay no matter what. They talk. He listens. They want to play, he responds. Patch gives from the bottom of his heart and with a level of sincerity that renders me speechless.

Despite our rough start, I know that Patch was sent to be my angel with fur. I am lucky enough to get daily doses of therapy, and he has taught me many things. He’s shown me unconditional love. He’s shown me not to judge. He’s shown me how to relax and how to be silly when I am stressed out. In our home, he’s the constant comedy.

Like a shadow, Patch is with me most days. Recently, he inspired me to start my own law firm specializing in pet trusts and pet-related estate planning. Patch knows he is the boss of the Cassinis Pet Trust Firm. With a warm muzzle at my feet, I know I’m the luckiest lawyer in town.

Make no mistake. Patch might have four legs and fur, but he is not just a dog. He is my gift from heaven, and he was meant to be shared with others. We are so thankful to be part of American Humane Association so Patch can continue to touch the lives of children and families who need a dose of what I get every day – unconditional love and the assurance that everything will be okay.

