

## Chester's Story



This is a story of a great spirit in a little body. I have two other cats that are my angels with fur, but there has never been a true soul level connection like there is with Chester. Our life together began in a crowded pet store on a clear Saturday morning in late April 2003. I did not intend to look at kittens (I often lie to myself). Within minutes, I was drawn to the many cages of mewling kittens. There were fluffy kittens that were so endearing. And then there were two of the most unusual looking (we won't say the other "U" word) kittens I had ever seen. They were skinny with gigantic ears that looked like satellite dishes atop pointy little faces. One was shy, hiding behind his water dish, but the other was pushing against the front of the cage and

squawking up a storm. A pet shop employee asked if I'd like to visit with the little guy and I hesitantly agreed. No sooner was the cage door open, he was curled up in my arms, his pointy little nose in the crook of my arm. He closed his eyes and began to purr into dreamland. After a struggle to get him back into the cage, he extended his fragile little arms out of the cage and called "maaamaaa." Well, I was hooked.

Having always adopted (or inherited) cats, I couldn't believe that I was considering paying a small fortune for this exotic creature - a fortune I didn't exactly have at the time. I decided to wait three days and pray about it. I told myself that if it were meant to be, he would be there when I returned and the small fortune would somehow materialize. After three days of prayer and anxious waiting, I got a bonus in my paycheck that was just enough to rescue the tiny Blue Point Siamese from his pet store jail. As I drove to the pet store, it occurred to me that I was going to be heartbroken if he were gone. The Universe gives us exactly what we need, and he was there with a look on his face that seemed to say, "Hey, where have you been? I've had my bags packed for days. Let's go." And so, off we went onto the path together to begin a journey of companionship, giving and amazing love.



I had been a hospice volunteer for about a year when Chester came into my life. During my time with Namaste Comfort Care, I had met the Avery's and their infamous Sheltie, Smitty. I was very intrigued by the Delta Society and the idea of pet therapy, but I never imagined one of my cats doing this kind of work. My two geriatric felines were too cantankerous for the job and the new little Chester was hell on wheels. So, I put the idea in the back of my



mind for a later opportunity. And that opportunity came about a year later when I had surgery and several of my friends were going through rough times. I saw that Chester really had a healing sense about him. As Ernest Hemingway said, "A cat has absolute emotional honesty: human beings, for one reason or another, may hide their feelings, but a cat does not." Chester not only shows his feelings, he brings out emotions in humans like no other cat I've ever met. People talk "to" Chester and it is amazing to watch the transformation it

brings.

In late February of 2004, I decided to look up the Delta Society and research this pet therapy idea. After surfing the Web for a bit and contacting someone in Fort Collins, I was in touch with Denver Pet Partners. Diana McQuarrie responded to my inquiry promptly, and before I knew it, we were signed up for training! There has been no greater lesson for me this life - always go where the Universe leads you. It has great rewards.

Needless to say, we passed the evaluation and we became the first feline Pet Partner team in Denver. Providing companionship or being present for someone's passing is truly a gift, and I never thought there could be a greater feeling from volunteer work. However, working with Chester as my Pet Partner, we have reached a new level of soul-filled satisfaction. One of our hospice visits is to an elderly woman who just lights up when she sees Chester. Even when Chester is frightened by the ride in the elevator or startled by strange noises in the hallway, he



always settles down next to her on the bed. His work is far more important than mine in this situation. We also make regular visits to a nursing facility where I visit hospice patients, but Chester brings joy to everyone. We spend time walking the halls and sitting in the TV room. He's more popular than I am! Everyone knows when we arrive because you hear "It's Chester, Chester... I want to see Chester... bring him here." It warms my heart to see the work he does without judgment, without strings, but always with great patience and unconditional love.

People think that we teach our pets things. Well, that may be true, but I have learned far more from this beautiful, spirited, loving and special feline than what I have taught him. He can be a handful at times, but he knows that his green vest means there is great work to be done. When I get mad that he has broken something in the house, I look at his sweet little face and I am reminded of the many hearts and souls he has mended. I am blessed to be his Partner.



Editor's Note: *He is as he looks; mystical, extravagant and unique - also dominantly present and curious. History has the Sealpoint Siamese originating in far eastern palaces as highly valued occupants of the mansions of the aristocracy. They are said to have played a vital role in the lives of their people. What I distinctly recall when evaluating Chester for doing therapy work is how I felt when I interacted with him. It was an emotional experience which I felt in my soul. It was intense, and an evaluation that I will never forget. He seems to exude the traits of both independence and bravery, yet also faithfulness and loyalty. Chester is a very special and unique gift to the field of animal-assisted therapy. Thank you, Melanie, for sharing him and, in doing so, allowing others to experience the wonderful healing salve of Chester's presence.*