

## *Denice Norby with Skya and Kismet*



*Denice and Skya*



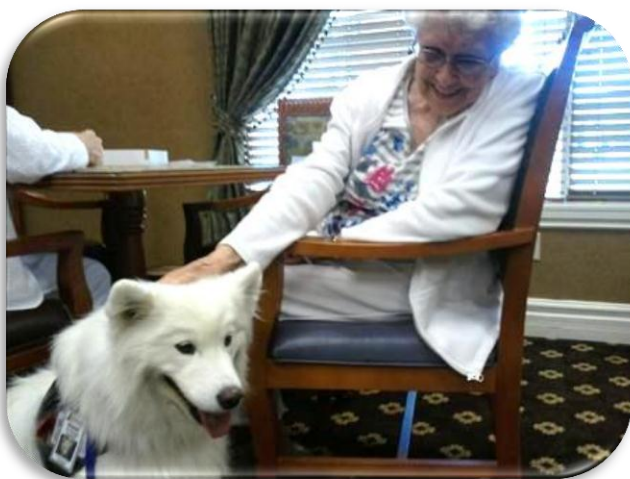
*Denice and Kismet*

Skya and Kismet are the fourth and fifth therapy dogs in the family, all have been Samoyeds. Samoyeds are wonderful therapy dogs as they are very good with all people, especially children and older people. They see a stranger as someone that hasn't petted them yet. The first 3 were rescues, two through Denver Samoyed Rescue and the third was left for me one day at work. I am shy and if it weren't for the therapy dogs, I would have never met so many wonderful people. With all the dogs, I have been a pet partner for 10 years. We visited a handicapped children's group home for about 6 years. We taught the children and staff that dogs are wonderful companions. We saw many kids grow up there. Some kids improved, and some didn't, but they were so excited about each visit. We worked at Aurora South hospital in the ICU ward. My first therapy dog, Tovaresh, woke a lady up from a coma there. Then we started with Namaste Hospice. We have visited in many nursing homes and several homes and apartments. I can't even count the number of people we have visited over the years. Denver Pet Partners has been very supportive through it all. I have so many friends that I wouldn't have if I was doing this on my own.

Then we got Skya. She was my first AKC registered dog. She was 6 years old and in need of a new home. She was very sweet. She has been a pet partner for five years now, and will be 13 years old in July. She started visiting at Denver Children's Home and after a year was also visiting hospice patients for Namaste Hospice. This hospice believes that the clients should stay where it is best for them, so if they are in a nursing home, or their own home, they stay there as long as that is what the family wants. Samoyeds are very pretty dogs and I found it impossible to walk into a nursing home and just say "I'm here to visit one person." so any home we visit we make the rounds. It takes 30 minutes to an hour per nursing home to see all her fans. Staff like the visits as well as the patients. They are very relaxing to

touch with all that thick fur. At one point we were visiting seven nursing homes a week. She is a great trooper and just keeps going as long as there were people to visit, pet her, and tell her how pretty she is.

We were visiting in one nursing home and a patient in a wheelchair wheeled up and starting talking to Skya. She was holding a very coherent conversation telling Skya about her dog, saying how pretty Skya was, and telling her how happy she was that Skya came to visit. Later in the visit, a nurse pulled me aside and said that this patient had not been talkative for a couple months and hadn't held a conversation like that in over 6 months. Another patient we visited was convinced Skya was Bo, his old hunting dog. So for 10 minutes a week, she was Bo the hunting dog and she didn't mind a bit. One other time we were visiting a gentleman in a little apartment. He loved seeing Skya but didn't want to pet her because he was afraid he could give her his skin cancer. I assured him it wasn't contagious to dogs and he made sure he petted and hugged her every visit. His air conditioner went out in the middle of summer and he was worried about her getting too hot visiting him. He managed to find someone to donate a new air conditioner and someone else donated time to install it so his favorite friend could come and visit in comfort. Skya earned the AKC Therapy Dog title and the Working Samoyed Excellent (second level of working dog title) for her therapy work. In 5 years, she has over 2000 hrs. of therapy work and continues to love it.



Then we got Kismet. I held Kismet at 8 hours old and visited several times a week until she was old enough to come home. She was a show dog and I knew I was going to do obedience and rally obedience with her. I also knew she was also going to be a therapy dog like all the others. When she finally passed her therapy evaluation, she started working at Denver Children's Home with junior high boys. They had about the same energy level. When she went through a young dog roughhousing stage, she couldn't visit because she couldn't play appropriately so the boys said she was on red level like they were when they couldn't play

appropriately with each other. She escaped the yard and didn't get to visit because she left without permission. They all had to settle down when they played too wild. The boys decided since she had

rules, tests, and consequences like they did, maybe rules were there for a reason and not just to make them mad. They taught her how to play tag and even taught her base. They also taught her to climb the ladder and slide down the slide. She went with the girls for a walk and pulled excitedly for all the girls until it was one girl's turn that was blind. She walked with just enough tightness to the lead so the girl knew where she was and stayed out of the way of the cane. It was like she knew what to do without being told.

When she started visiting nursing homes, she reminded me I needed to be an advocate for her. Where Skya could visit anyone and visit all day, Kismet became depressed after visiting. She was taking in all the emotions of the nursing home. She wouldn't eat and avoided some people. You could almost see her crying when we got home. So we stopped visiting the nursing homes for a while, and very gradually started back, one home every three to six months, and not more than 3 in a week. She seemed to handle it much better that way, and if she seemed to not like a nursing home, she didn't have to visit there. She visited one patient in her home. After the first visit, the lady said she was hoping for a little dog that would snuggle on the bed with her. I made a bed out of PVC pipe and sprinkler parts. It was even with the hospital bed and Kismet would jump up and the patient petted her until they both fell asleep. Her husband said she talked about the visit the whole week until the next visit.



Kismet also has her AKC Therapy Dog Title and most of the points for her Master Working Samoyed Dog title (highest level working Samoyed dog title) were from her therapy work.

I don't know what I would do without therapy dogs. They have been a part of my life for 10 years and I hope they will be for many more!