

## *Dinkie's Story*



Master Dinkie Dog is the ten-year-old Sheltie in one of the Denver Pet Partners® teams. His other half is Maggie Wild, a cytotechnologist in the pathology laboratory at Denver Health Medical Center.

Sheltie is short for Shetland sheep dog, a herding breed that originated in the Shetland Islands near Scotland and which has been bred in the US since the early 1900's.

Shelties are a treasured breed in the Grand Junction / Meeker area of western Colorado, where Maggie grew up and knew as a child that she would have her own Shelties one day. Dinkie was the first and his easy trainability and characteristic willingness to please encouraged Maggie to come up with a way to share this delightful partner with others.

With complete confidence that Maggie would have him do something a bit more sophisticated than pulling a plastic milk gallon around the neighborhood three times a week, Dinkie went through such classes and training with his head held high. A year later, another Sheltie joined the Wild family and teamed up with Dinkie in the training efforts. Her name was Aspen. The plastic milk gallon was replaced by a small, Red Flyer wagon and eventually by a pioneer-style wagon built just for Dinkie and Aspen. With the new equipment came a formal name for these two crowd-pleasing community parade dogs who could haul a stagecoach over rough asphalt through a canyon of spectators - The Wild West Shelties. The parades brought many moments of ecstasy to the two Shelties who thrived on the cheers and applause of the crowds.

In time, the long parades began to take their toll on the now-getting-older Dinkie, and Maggie, looking for any excuse to bring yet another Sheltie into the household, convinced her spouse, Tim, that it was time to let Dinkie retire from the public eye and take it easy. Corky took his place on the team. Tim sensed their first dog was missing the opportunities to make others smile. Maggie wasn't sure if Dinkie would train yet another time for a different kind of human interaction, but enrolled hopefully in the Denver Pet Partners® program classes.



The successful results have been like a dream come true for the two of them.

Maggie can bring the warmth and affection of one her best friends to patients in the hospital - that same setting where she has worked for so long and seen so much sadness, despair and loneliness.



Dinkie can bring the stories in his heart to whichever lap or pillow Maggie directs - the stories of the drudgery of dragging the gallon milk jug behind him...of the little boy with the red felt cowboy hat and plastic chaps who watched the parade in Cheyenne...of the mom with five whining children at the Parker parade who pointed with delight at the Wild West Shelties and all the kids hushed...of the huge Clydesdales pulling the Budwiser wagon who acted like they were better than Dinkie and Aspen.

After every visit, Maggie knows Tim is waiting to hear how well Dinkie interacted. Many of the stories are endearing and tender. Some are about patients who become so cheerful with Dinkie on their laps. Other stories include memories shared by those being visited of the family dogs earlier in their lives. Some stories will never be forgotten.

Not long ago, when Maggie and Dinkie rounded a corner near the ICU waiting area on their way to check in at the Volunteer Office at Swedish Hospital, a family that was huddled in hopelessness gasped when they saw the dog coming toward them. One woman broke down then asked Maggie why she was allowed to have a dog in the hospital and, hearing why, then asked for help. Their family had lost their Sheltie a few weeks earlier and the death of their dog had been a final straw for her son who was being treated for a suicide attempt. Could Maggie bring Dinkie to see the young man? Dinkie looked just like the dog that had died.

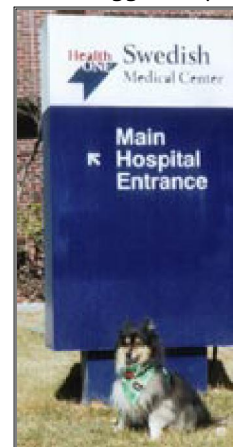
The entire Sunday afternoon was spent with the family and Maggie and Dinkie checked back a few days later, prior to discharge, as promised.

"You have no way of knowing whether you're really going to be able to help someone each time we visit, but that certainly was a gift for my family and for his family," she said.

Tim agreed with a sad smile.

Several weeks later she told him about the blind man who sensed there was a dog close to his bed and asked, in Russian - and with his hands, that Maggie put Dinkie on the bed with him. His blindness had followed a stroke and much of his life was now limited.

"We couldn't communicate at all but the family by his bedside nodded that I should do what he seemed to be asking," she said. In the moments that followed, the patient spread his fingers through Dinkie's coat with great peace and satisfaction. And just kept them there.





"That look on his face was like he was back in his younger days, in a place that was very familiar to him," Maggie said. And she was right. At the nursing station, after the visit was over, she learned that the man whose burden was so lightened by a few moments with Dinkie had been very depressed with his deteriorating condition. Nothing had made him respond to caregivers for days. Only this dog. Then they told her that the stroke patient had been a veterinarian in Russia.

Maggie wiped trickling tears from her eyes all the way home that evening. She thanked Tim for encouraging her to become involved with Denver Pet Partners®...for advocating her enthusiasm and compassion while sharing Dinkie's need and ability to please people.

"That man who loved and cared for animals his entire life and knew that this dog had come to him with love is what our group at Denver Pet Partners® is all about," she said.



Editor's Note: The word "Dinky" denotes small, and our Dinkie, although small in stature, has a defining characteristic which is quite the opposite... a big heart! That, coupled with Maggie's equally big heart plus her desire and enthusiasm to change lives through animal-assisted therapy, equals a team with endless opportunity for making a difference wherever they choose to serve. There are numerous occasions that I can recall Maggie excitedly calling me after a particularly moving visit experience to share what had happened. We both realize that doing therapy work with our animals is a very small, albeit greatly significant part of something much larger - the opportunity to look beyond a person's disability or sickness and connect with their soul. This is something that all therapy teams have within their reach but not all allow themselves to experience for one reason or another. Maggie's open mind and heart, and her willingness to approach each visit as a new adventure with Dinkie creates a powerhouse of opportunity for changing lives. I hope you don't mind me saying, Maggie, that those tears you shed after a special visit is your heart overflowing with joy. I hope, for all our sakes, that they never run dry. Thank you for how you and Dinkie selflessly give.

Diana McQuarrie