

Fran Henry and Abby



I grew up on a ranch on the Western Slope, and my family always had one German Shepherd as well as an assortment of other breeds. When I became an adult, the one dog I wanted was a German Shepherd. In 1971, married with two small children and living in Littleton, I picked out my first GSD, Henry's Drummer Boy, and the two of us earned AKC titles of Companion Dog Excellent and a Tracking Degree. Drummer and I were also among founding members of Colorado Rescue Dogs, participating in many searches, including the search after the Big Thompson Flood. We were also flown by helicopter, along with other members of the team, to the Continental Divide in the Weminuche Wilderness to search for a man whose car had been found abandoned.

Fast forward to 2000. We had GSDs in the intervening years, but after a divorce, working as a high school English teacher and raising two kids as a single mom left me no time for training or competing. Having lost my beloved Kane to cancer in April, in September I drove to LaBadie, Missouri to see and fall in love with 5-month old Luke, AKA DeRousse's Cool Hand Luke. I never intended to have more than one dog, but the following April, my friend Lois Thornton, who gave me Drummer, bred a litter of puppies that were related to every single GSD I'd ever had through her kennel, Quadrill German Shepherds, and the Caralon kennel in Missouri. How could I say no?

And so 8-week-old Cinder, AKA Quadrill's Cinderella, joined Luke and me. I began showing Luke in AKC Conformation shows, and by 2004, he had 11 championship points and both majors (15 points are required). But it was not to be because for me, 2004 brought a diagnosis of breast cancer and subsequent bilateral mastectomy, two major back surgeries, one of which was a spinal fusion, six weeks in the hospital, and when the fusion was complete, a hip replacement. Then Luke developed medical



problems of his own, and suddenly it was 2008. A friend, who had just bought a puppy from a DPP member, invited me to a meeting, and I suddenly realized that this was something that, with my limited mobility, I could do with my dogs.



We attended a handler-training weekend in April, and in June, Cinder passed her evaluation, getting a complex rating! We began volunteering at Swedish, and Cinder was a natural. She was convinced that every single person we met —valet parking staff, medical staff, patients, families — had come to see HER! Nothing fazed her — she was made for the job. By that summer, Luke had also qualified.

Mt. View Youth Services was a new DPP facility seeking teams, and I found the prospect very attractive, so Cinder and I began working at Mt. View, and Luke and I began working at Swedish.



The boy they chose for us at Mt. View was 12 years old and serving a three-year sentence. Mt. View is a locked-down facility, and security is tight. Our boy, DS, was one of the youngest in a facility that houses young men up to 18 years old. A separate facility on the grounds houses females, but the two groups do not interact. At Mt. View, we participated in AAT, working with a counselor or therapist. Neither of DS's parents had access to a car, and they lived far from Mt. View. Consequently, they visited him rarely. DS and Cinder hit it off, and although he was desperately homesick, our weekly visits became increasingly important to him.

Luke's work at Swedish taught me the meaning of "You are your animal's advocate FIRST." Luke didn't enjoy the work. If the patient was very sick, he'd pull back or lie down, and he resisted contact with the patient. If we were dealing with staff, family or children, he was fine. And so, we moved to Mt. View too and began working with a second boy. Later, Luke and I worked with a homeless veteran through St. Joseph's Veterans' Home in Denver. We both enjoyed working at both facilities.

In July 2009, Cinder died of hemangiosarcoma at the age of 8. I got up one morning and found her collapsed by the back door. A visit to VCI and an ultrasound showed a large tumor on her heart that had hemorrhaged and was bleeding into her chest cavity. The doctors drained the chest cavity, but two hours later, she collapsed again. Surgery only promised a three-month extension of her life at best, and sadly, I made the decision to put her to sleep.

Telling DS was one of the hardest things I've ever done. Mt. View rallied behind him and held a memorial for her, planting a flowering crab apple tree at the picnic table where we met in good weather. DS and boys he invited dug the hole and planted the tree, and DS tried to read the story of The Rainbow Bridge. When he choked up, the chaplain finished for him. DS and a friend had made two plaques in woodworking class, one for me and one for the pet therapy room.

Luke's boy had been paroled a few weeks earlier, and with DS's permission, he and I continued to work with DS. He made steady progress, and in March, 2010, the court modified DS's sentence, paroling him to Third Way four months early. Luke and I continued to see him there, though we were no longer working with a therapist. Luke died in July of hemangiosarcoma, the same cancer that struck down Cinder. Luke had tumor on his heart and on his spleen, both hemorrhaging, and the vet said that at 10 and a half, Luke could not survive the surgery. Euthanasia was the only choice I had. Although it broke my heart, I knew I had to help him go. *"First, be your partner's advocate."*



Abby was born two days before Cinder died. I'd been following the litter because I knew the breeder and admired the lines behind the breeding. I called her and, yes she had a female puppy! And although I'd been telling myself that I was too old to have another puppy, I took the plunge. Ten weeks later, Konigin's My Abilene arrived on a Southwest jet, entirely unfazed by the experience. Although she was a terror, she was endlessly entertaining — curious, fearless, inquisitive, and sooo smart! She was also very sweet and affectionate. I took her everywhere; we went to puppy kindergarten classes; we went to my grandson's ball games.

I had promised myself that if I were physically unable to train Abby properly, I would have her trained by someone who could. After she had dumped me twice, I knew we'd reached that point. A trainer I have known for years and whom I respect has a program in which the dog stays at the kennel for three or four weeks and receives professional training. I went to work with her and the trainer once a week while she stayed at the kennel, and when it was time for her to come home, the three of us worked for two hours to ensure that I knew how to continue her training. I'm can return should I have a problem throughout her life. I missed her like crazy, but when she came home, she had the rudiments down, and I could work with her.

We enrolled in Canine Good Citizen classes. It took three sessions, but she finally passed with flying colors. After that I let her mature for about six months, and in June of 2012, Abby passed her Pet Partners' evaluation just before her 3rd birthday.

We tutor two boys at The Bridge Project at Westwood once a week. One is a sophomore at Lakewood High School who wants help with his writing, and the other is an 11-year-old who reads below grade level. He reads to Abby and when the reading is done, he teaches her tricks and plays with her. He's helped teach her to High Five, and he taught her the shell game with a treat hidden beneath one of three overturned paper cups. He's thrilled and proud when she learns to perform the trick. He brings his friends at Bridge to meet her, and it's clear she's helping boost his self-esteem.

A side note — two years after DS's parole, Abby and I still see him regularly. He's 17 now and a sophomore at an Aurora high school. I'm hoping to be able to help him find a program that will help him go to college or trade school. I definitely know that Cinder and Luke and Abby have made a huge difference in this boy's life, and I am so glad to have been a part of it.



Fran and Luke



Fran and Cinder



Fran and Abby