

Hannah's Story



The first time I saw Hannah, she was calmly looking out from a small kennel at the Dumb Friends League. I had lost my previous dog only three weeks before, and I was visiting the League "just to look". Hannah was only a puppy, but her sweet steady gaze told me she was the dog I couldn't leave behind.

She grew to be a long legged, slender reddish dog with a strong resemblance to a Dingo, or its American equivalent, the [Carolina Dog](#). Hannah had been transferred from New

Mexico, where dogs resembling her are known as "Indian Dogs". I've since learned there are populations of wild dogs around the world that look just like Hannah, and some people believe that such dogs were among the first to come to the Americas. Hannah exhibits many of the traits associated with pariah type dogs - she is clean, healthy, cautious, and totally non-aggressive toward humans. She also likes to hide in tall grass (or in my case, to mash down the flowers!)



Hannah and I immediately signed up for the Puppy class at the Dumb Friends League. Hannah was so eager to please, she was called "Teacher's Pet". Early on, she showed her talent for connecting with humans - while the other dogs were engaged in puppy playtime, Hannah would be working the outside of the room where the people were. I loved the class, and I later returned as a volunteer Obedience Instructor for the League.



I signed her up for Agility classes, and my belief that I had picked out the cutest dog was reinforced when a reporter visited Hannah's agility class, and she put Hannah's picture in the paper. I of course ran to the store and bought ten copies, making sure everyone in the checkout line knew that "That's my dog!".



With Hannah, I decided to try to learn about all things Dog, and she has been my patient and willing partner in numerous activities. We've been to Clicker workshops, and taken flyball, agility, and canine freestyle classes, and for one summer we tried sheep herding. We compete in NADAC and USDAA Agility trials, and Hannah sometimes serves as the "demo dog" during lectures at the Dumb Friends League.

I initially signed up for the Pet Partners training because I am a dog training junkie, and I wanted to take the class. Our training included four weeks of classes with the dogs, where we got to work with some excellent trainers, to role play common scenarios encountered when visiting, and to practice behaviors useful in those scenarios.



Then came the evaluation, where we demonstrate those behaviors to an evaluator. Sweet, docile Hannah did fine on all the exercises, but she failed because she played tug-of-war with my sleeve in between exercises! I knew this was "test anxiety" on her part, and also that it had been my fault. Ken McQuarrie followed me out the door as we left and made me promise to retake the test, which we did at the next opportunity. This time I wore short sleeves and I didn't jump up and down between exercises. Needless to say, we passed this time!

Once we started to visit, I realized that this may be Hannah's favorite activity. Our first assignment was visiting patients at Swedish Medical Center. One of the challenges for a therapy dog is that they must be able to handle unexpected events in strange environments. One day we were walking down a very quiet hospital corridor, when out from a doorway popped a tiny little cowboy, complete with hat, boots, and holster. Just as I was reassuring Hannah, "Oh look, it's a little cowboy!", out pops a second one, and then a third. All three of them came running down the hall, squealing "Oh look, it's a doggie!" When her tail began to wag and she calmly welcomed the hugs of the three little cowboys, I knew that she was a therapy dog.



When we got the opportunity to work with a class of developmentally disabled kids at Sabin Elementary I jumped at the chance. Each week we would visit with the kids in small groups of two to five, and I would try to come up with an activity where the kids could interact with Hannah. Hannah loves to work for other people, and the kids all learned how to ask her to Sit, Down, and offer her Paw. Sometimes she would bring flash cards, and the kids would read the cards, and then ask for the behavior.

Walking Hannah up and down the hallway was always a favorite activity, and I could see their pride as they told her "Let's Go" and Hannah walked alongside them. Some weeks I would bring a small basket and an assortment of small stuffed animals - the kids would toss them in the basket, and Hannah would fetch them back. One week we set up a miniature agility course outside - first the kids led Hannah through it, then they all tried doing the course themselves.

Now that Sabin is on summer break, we are participating in the R.E.A.D. program at the Bridge Project. The lucky participants get to read individually to the dogs. Hannah settles down contentedly and listens patiently as they struggle with unfamiliar words. One of the little boys read an entire story looking at the book upside down, just so he could be sure Hannah could see all the pictures.

Being a part of Denver Pet Partners has given me the opportunity to take Hannah into numerous places where dogs normally don't get to go. I'm always gratified by the nearly universal look of surprise and then pleasure which we get from people we encounter in

hospitals, schools, and nursing homes. I always knew that dogs were necessary to complete my life - I now know that's also true for many other people whose circumstances don't allow them to be living with dogs of their own. I am grateful for the opportunity Denver Pet Partners provides to share my Hannah with some of them.



Editor's Note: *"Faith goes up the stairs that love has built and looks out the windows which hope has opened"* (C. Spurgeon). I believe that destiny had a hand in Cindy and Hannah both being in the right place at the right time so that both of their lives would be immeasurably changed by meeting one another. They both had a need and who could have imagined what would become of that little homeless pup when it was adopted by Cindy and with love and hope, became "Hannah". Cindy's faith in Hannah that, together, Hannah would rise far above her circumstances is nothing less than partnership in its truest form. Each time Cindy and Hannah are involved in something, they take their hearts to work and give the best of themselves. They both have very special characters and spirits and, together, represent the true essence of a therapy team. Cindy and Hannah, Denver Pet Partners is grateful that you've chosen to share yourselves with us and commend you both for how greatly you enrich the lives of all those around you.

Diana McQuarrie