

## *Jaxon's Story*



Every day, as I count my blessings, finding Jaxon is definitely one of the most important ones. Volunteering at Denver Dumb Friends League in May 2000, he got my attention by doing what he does best: connecting with his steady, friendly gaze. He peeked out from behind a burly Akita mix, focusing on me. As soon as I finished my shift, I grabbed a lead and headed back to the kennels. Jaxon was gentle and well mannered as he trotted happily next to me. Later that day, my husband, Marc, and I witnessed Jaxon's special affection for children, when we introduced Jaxon to our ten year-old daughter, Hailey. Jaxon wagged his tail and lay at her feet. Eight years later, Hailey still enjoys his total devotion. Jaxon

was our foster dog for two months until he was healthy enough to become a permanent member of our family.



Jaxon and I attended obedience classes, and competed successfully in agility for a few years. He served as my "demo" dog in the obedience classes I gave. Our bond grew stronger. Observing his interactions with all types of people, I realized that Jaxon's natural empathy could be a source of comfort to others. Since I was volunteering at an assisted living facility, Jaxon came on board. He demonstrated great potential as

a therapy dog, giving each client his undivided attention and affection. We visited individual clients in their homes, as well as groups assembled in activity rooms. It was evident that Jaxon impacted the lives of the people we met, but I lacked training in how to visit safely and properly with my best friend.



Somehow, Jaxon and I made it through our evaluation (with another affiliate of Delta), after many trials and errors searching for a therapy organization. Through my friend Ann Rosenwasser (whose Pet Partner, Ted, is my former student), I heard about DPP. Her enthusiasm prompted me to join. I've found fellowship, support, and opportunities to serve with Jaxon.

When Jaxon and I visit Pine Grove Elementary (where I work as an educational assistant with special needs students), he shares his love with several children. Each student's time is spent either walking Jaxon, placing letters or numbers on his felt vest, reading to him, or brushing him. I am so touched by the special bond he shares with each one. Just last week, a first grader who has autism slowly brought his face to Jaxon's, inching closer and closer to give him a hug. This was the first time the little boy had been affectionate with Jaxon, and he



was beaming as he finally made contact with Jaxon's head! It was wonderful to see. As we walk down the halls, the students call out "Hi Jaxon!" and teachers stop to pet him, too. What a thrill to hear requests from learning specialists and teachers for Jaxon to visit every day. There's even a bulletin board dedicated to the DPP teams that visit Pine Grove.



A new opportunity for us is visiting the ER at The Medical Center of Aurora. Jaxon and I had visited several other units in the hospital for a few years, including the I.C.U., Oncology, and Surgery. As he ages, I find it necessary to reassess Jaxon's physical challenges when he visits. So, we've adjusted to his difficulty reaching patients in beds that are too high by visiting the ER and Pediatrics. His love of children was evident as he walked beside a two-year old girl. She and her mother had been waiting for over two hours in the ER when I introduced Jaxon to them. Jaxon brought a smile to the little girl's face, as she accepted the invitation to take Jaxon for a walk. She jumped up and proudly grasped the leash. Every ten steps or so she stopped, petted Jaxon's head, and said, "Nice puppy." Jaxon adjusted his pace to her unsteady gait, as we

walked the unit for fifteen minutes. The staff waved to us as we passed the nurses station again and again. Then, back in the room, Jaxon lay beside her as the little girl scribbled on the coloring sheet I had given her of Jaxon in his DPP vest. As I said goodbye to the girl and her mother, a gurney arrived with the girl's father, back from surgery. The mom thanked us for helping to pass the time in such a fun way. An experience like this is the reason we volunteer.



As an active DPP team, Jaxon and I participate in evaluations (he's a neutral dog), and present at workshops and meetings. We are grateful to be part of DPP and look forward to being a part of DPP for many years to come. The journey we began so many years ago is not over yet!

