

## *Kathy and Ne'ele's Story*



Ne'ele gets all the credit and accolades for our becoming a Therapy Dog team. Let me tell you a little of her story. Mary and I used to work for a vet clinic in Arvada many years ago. We keep in touch, getting together or chatting on the phone about once a month. One day in 2003, I met Mary at the clinic for lunch. The receptionist said that Mary wasn't quite ready but that I should go back to the treatment area. This was not unusual. At least I thought it wasn't! As I rounded the corner, there was Mary holding the leash of a Golden Retriever pup named Annie.

One look and I was hooked! Then Mary told me her story. She was brought in with a broken thigh bone at 3 months old. Her owners said they didn't know how she had broken her leg. When they found out the cost to repair the leg, they opted to euthanize her. It was a week before

Christmas and Dr. H just couldn't bring herself to do it. She asked the owners to relinquish her, promising to find her a good home. They agreed.

Dr. H got together with an orthopedic surgeon, Dr. D, who agreed to fix the leg for free. Dr. D traced the shattered pieces of bone from the x-rays and stayed up all night trying to figure out how the pieces would best fit back together. Using an external fixture, he was able to repair her leg. It's not perfect – the knee and ankle of her right leg have limited movement, and the leg itself is about  $\frac{3}{4}$ " shorter than her left. But let me tell you, it doesn't slow her down one bit!



By the time I met her, she was about 6 months old and just full of life. Mary told me they were looking for a home for her. At the time, I had a 10 year old Whippet/Lab mix named Ashby. She was getting on in years, but still active enough that she could handle a "little sister". I talked with Dr. H and decided to take her home to see how she would get along with Ashby. Ashby never was what you would call a "cuddly" dog. She would do what I called "run bys". You'd hold your hand out, she ran under it, and that was all the petting she needed. Poor Annie, she was just the opposite. When Ashby was lying on her bed, Annie would try to snuggle with her. Anne would just get her elbows onto the bed when Ashby would get up and walk away. Annie would be left there, half on and half off the bed with the saddest look in her eyes. She would come over to me, nudge me with her nose looking for comforting after being so rudely rejected!

When I took her back to the clinic after the weekend, I told Dr. H that I would definitely be interested in giving Annie a new home. Unfortunately, I was 6<sup>th</sup> on the list of potential forever homes. I left

there with little hope. A few weeks later, Mary called. She said that Dr. H had reviewed the list and after talking with Dr. D, decided that Annie should go to someone in the “biz”. Dr. D had taken another look at Annie and found that her right hip would probably need surgery and her left would need surgery in about 5 years. Knowing how expensive the surgery could be, Dr H wanted to be sure that Annie’s new owner would be able to provide this type of care. Since I was the only one in the biz, I became Annie’s new mom!

I was having a hard time calling her Annie, with Ashby already ingrained in my brain. So I called my mom and asked her what the Hawaiian word was for “Nosy”. The next day, at the dog park, I let her off leash (Dr. H ok’d it!). She was about 100 yards away when I called “Ne’ele”! She immediately stopped, turned around and came running back. That’s how she got her name!

We started going to dog parks and going for walks to work on strengthening her leg. It was after about a month that I noticed she was more interested in the people than the other dogs. As we entered the dog park she would immediately run up to someone, sit on their feet and look up at them. Where ever we would go, she would always seek out people. About a year later, Mary, who has a Therapy Dog, suggested Ne would do great at therapy work. I started looking into what was involved with being a Therapy Dog team. The more I learned the more I knew that this was something Ne’ele would be great at! The only concern was me! I’m not one to strike up random conversations with strangers. I have a hard time with small talk and wasn’t sure how comfortable I would be visiting at a hospital. As time went on, I watched Ne with people and realized that I had to bite the bullet, step outside my comfort zone and get us into the program.



Ne’ele and I became Pet Partners in October 2007. I’m still a little shy when it comes to chit-chatting with people (although I know our other team members at Platte Valley Medical Center would disagree!) but I’m getting better. I’ve gone even farther out of my comfort zone by joining the library reading program in Northglenn working with kids to improve their reading skills. We even participate in various events educating people on the benefits of Therapy Dogs. Most recently, we were part of a presentation to a Girl Scouts group. We demonstrated how to brush a dogs’ teeth and spoke about the difference between Assistance Dogs and Therapy Dogs.

I can’t tell you how much Ne’ele has changed my life - the new lifelong friends I’ve met and made through American Humane Association – Animal Assisted Therapy and the social challenges I’ve overcome since knowing her. She is truly my own personal Therapy Dog!

Thank you American Humane Association for selecting us as Animal Assisted Therapy Team of the Month!