

## *Kiowa and Cheyenne's Story*

### **Along the Santa Fe Trail**



My life changed forever along the Santa Fe Trail. It was hot August 2, 2003 as my family traveled homeward to Littleton, Colorado from a family vacation through Kansas. This side of Dodge City my husband, Jeff, nine-year-old Michael and seven-year-old Stacia and I debated whether or not to stop at a Point of Interest close to the highway. It was educational and free, so, why not, we stopped.

The parking lot was completely empty except for an elderly man sitting on a bench and two skinny dogs close by him. As we headed up the trail leading to a sign explaining the local history, the dogs



approached us. We glanced at the man for permission to pet the dogs. He just smiled in silence. We petted their thin sides, receiving kisses in return. The brown Boxer mix and the black Lab wearily followed us up the trail, laying down each time we stopped. After a brief rabbit chase, both dogs returned, following us back to the dry, dusty parking lot.

I told the man to call his dogs since we were leaving. He said they weren't his. But, they had to be; no one else was around. I called him a liar and we began arguing! A Winnebago arrived and Jeff asked if the dogs belonged to them. No. The old man kept telling me to take the dogs. Finally Jeff whispered to me that the dogs didn't act like they knew the old man any better than they did us. They weren't the man's dogs. I tried to figure out what to do. I turned to the old man; he had vanished in the heat waves.

My husband said we couldn't keep the dogs. He pointed out the two cats at home and not enough room nor time for two dogs. Jeff's logic was no match for my expanding maternal instincts, torrents of tears and the kids' chorus as well. It was three against one.

Jeff and I carried the exhausted, emaciated dogs to the van. They had not even responded to simple commands or being called by common names. I didn't know what I was in for - I'd never even owned a dog - but one look into those loving eyes and I was determined to try.

A return to Dodge City for information and help was a futile effort. Both the vet's office and Humane Society were closed and a police department accustomed to dogs being dumped got us no where. Then to Wal-Mart for basics of collars, leashes, bowls and food. Neither dog would eat. (Later at Sonic they would eat only French Fries.)



During lunch at Sonic in Garden City, we requested water for the two dogs we had just found. Excited, the manager said a lady had lost her two dogs and could she look at ours. I happily agreed. I thought God was using us to bring the dogs back to her. Disappointment. They weren't hers and she didn't want them to be. There was no police encouragement either. Jeff and I agreed to take the dogs on to Denver.

On the highway once again, we decided to name the dogs in case we kept them. Bat Masterson and Wyatt Earp would have great for boys, but girl pups named after the Frontier women of Dodge City just didn't fit my family's moral character. "Cheyenne," the Boxer mix, and "Kiowa," the Lab, slept during the five-hour ride to Denver.

At home the cats voiced their opinions. An internet search for lost dogs was unsuccessful. On to Banfield Veterinary Clinic where Dr. Bartley gave us a litany of the dogs' woes: malnourished, emaciated, dehydrated (they may have survived only two more days); they had ticks, tapeworms, and mange. All inoculations were needed. "Cheyenne," hit by a car, had an embedded grass stem removed. The vet initially guessed their ages at ten months. (As their health improved, she later thought they were more likely around six months old when we found them). Temperament tests for suitability around children were done. Advice to me as a first-time dog owner was given. The expensive vet bill was paid. We were signed up for obedience classes. What a full Sunday it was!



Recuperating, sleeping and attending obedience classes took up the dogs' first two weeks. Puppy hood and bonding progressed well. They hated being left alone so I took them everywhere including weekly vet visits for three months. We progressed to advanced obedience classes. They were the only ones in class to pass their AKC Canine Good Citizen Test. Daily work with me strengthened our bond. Soon healthy enough, they were blessed at my church. Each wears her St. Francis medal on her collar to keep God watching over them. I knew they were destined for more. Dr. Bartley and his assistant, Lindsey, told me about Delta Society. After the class we passed the test through the LAPP chapter of Delta Society. Both dogs received complex ratings. We were directed to DPP and Diana.



To be a member of DPP is not easy. I had the dedication, commitment and time; I just knew my dogs had the skills, temperaments and aptitudes. Since a little girl I had always wanted to be a hospital volunteer. Volunteering at Swedish with my puppy girls was for me.

I now volunteer twice a week at Swedish Hospital, alternating puppy girls. "Cheyenne" and "Kiowa" each walk with a spring in their steps, tails wagging, happy to go for their puppy massages. Each has had awesome experiences at Swedish.



On Christmas Day the nurses were petting "Cheyenne" when a lady asked if we could visit her Mom. Outside the hospital room she told me her Mom was dying. Would I wait while she announced that a surprise was coming. At the bedside, the Mom's hand was placed on "Cheyenne's" head. The Mom made a sound of pure pleasure. Everyone smiled. Fighting back my tears I knew that "Cheyenne" and I had made a difference.

It was "Kiowa's" turn. A lady we were visiting profusely expressed her love of "Kiowa" and how this beautiful dog made her day, week and year. She wanted to always remember what "Kiowa" looked like. I showed her "Kiowa's" picture then signed it with our names and the date. She vowed to frame it at home and never forget the day as long as she lived! I will miss her.



"Kiowa" and "Cheyenne" have gone from being afraid of everything to being secure in their new world and their new family. Through my bond with each of them, they have come to trust that I would never put them in harm's way. I have learned to watch TV sitting on the floor, my couch makes a great back rest, and puppies on my feet are warmer than socks. I have learned that there is nothing better in this world than a puppy kiss and a willingly offered paw, and petting my dogs is just as relaxing for them as it is for me. I have learned that each room in my house requires a dog escort (including the bathroom!).

As long as I have my puppy girls I am never alone in this world. How I made it this far in life without ever having a dog I just don't know. Raising and training two puppies simultaneously requires unending love, time and patience. From the moment I looked into their loving eyes along the Santa Fe Trail, they captured my heart. Taking "Kiowa and "Cheyenne" was one of the best things I ever did. My husband teases me and says that we'll never do a road trip again, the souvenirs are too expensive! My girl puppies will turn two in February. Happy Birthday "Kiowa" and "Cheyenne!" I love you two with every fiber of my being!



Editors Note: *Scientist June Singer once said, "In learning to sail you do not change the current of the water nor do you have any effect on the wind, but you learn to hoist your sail and turn it this way and that to utilize the greater forces which surround you. By understanding them, you become one with them, and in doing so are able to find your own direction." Sandie Owen is a wonderful example of this quote. She has an impressive ability to "hoist her sail" in order to utilize the greater forces around her. Her choice to not turn her back on those two needy dogs on the Sante Fe Trail started a chain reaction that has positively impacted many lives. What she has done for and with Kiowa and Cheyenne in such a short period of time is truly amazing.*

*What she has already contributed to Denver Pet Partners and the field of animal-assisted therapy in a short period of time is more than some people ever achieve. Sandie, for how you have embraced the mission of promoting the human-animal bond and enabled Kiowa and Cheyenne to reach their full potential as soul menders, Denver Pet Partners has chosen you, and your Kiowa and Cheyenne as Pet Partner Team of the Month.*