

Katherine and Kodi's Story



Thank you so much for honoring Kodi and me as Team of the Month. First of all, let me express my appreciation for the wonderful volunteer opportunities and friendships that have flourished from our affiliation with the American Humane organization. I have always loved animals and wanted to find a way to partner with my furry friends to bring comfort to others. My volunteer work with AHA provides me the avenue to spread the joy of animal companionship.

Kodi's story actually started way before he was born. Our journey began while I was volunteering for Freedom Service Dogs, a local service dog organization that provides a second chance at life for abandoned shelter dogs by rescuing and training them to assist

people with disabilities. I was in the process of training and socializing one of our rescues "Nemo" when the FSD staff came to the forgone conclusion he wouldn't pass as a service dog. Why? Well, he wouldn't retrieve. Yes, he was actually part Golden Retriever and Collie, but Nemo was a lover not a retriever. He would melt in your arms and calm any soul. We were all so determined to have him be a part of an animal-human bond experience in some sort of fashion. He was such a healer. So, the FSD trainers recommended that I do a little research into the Delta Society and see if there would be a better fit for Nemo within the animal therapy arena. Oh my gosh! What a wonderful alternative. I contacted Diana McQuarrie, the Director of the Denver Pet Partners, the local Delta Society affiliate. I explained Nemo's story to her and she encouraged me to enroll in the next available workshop and evaluation. Voila! Nemo was the first Delta Registered Therapy Animal and Denver Pet Partner for the Freedom Service Dogs organization. He was so relaxed and calm around children that he was registered as a R.E.A.D. (Read Education Assistance Dog) partner as well. So we were off and running, actually off and cuddling. We visited nursing homes, schools, and libraries. Everyone that met Nemo was instantly lured in his tranquil and engaging state.



Well, Nemo was such a hit in the animal therapy world, Dr. Robin Starr, the Director of FSD started evaluating alternative placement options for Nemo and Freedom Service Dogs. Although Nemo was not a perfect retriever for service activities, he was the best at calming energetic children. And there it was, right under our noses, the alternative that we were all looking for. As a result, FSD developed a secondary service placement program for skilled companions and Nemo was the first to be initiated. He was quickly matched with a child in need of a quiet constant companion, a match made in heaven!



When my good friend, Carmen Moyer, became aware that I was surrendering Nemo to a permanent home for companionship service, she knew that there would be quite a void in my life. I only had just a few months of visiting with Nemo and my volunteer time was cut so short. So, Carmen graciously offered for me to evaluate with Lodge, her career change guide dog, and I jumped at the chance. Another perfect match! I was able to continue my pet partner volunteer activities and Lodge was able to get a little more well-deserved attention and exercise.

So, where does Kodi come into the picture? Well, Nemo and I were at a booth exhibiting for Denver Pet Partners at the APDT conference in 2004, right after I found out that my pet partner, of just a few months, was actually going to live with another family. A woman stopped by our booth to love on Nemo, he was always so alluring. I told her our story and that Nemo was going to live with a new family in the near future. She said she was a Golden Retriever breeder and that she was planning to have a litter next fall. She asked if I would be interested in one of her puppies. My mind was racing, a golden puppy, that I could raise as a therapy dog, my own therapy dog. I told her to call me as soon as they were born. I was all in. The timing couldn't have been more perfect!

So, I was able to keep visiting with Lodge while the puppies were in the making. Have you ever been asked, "How did you know that your dog would become a therapy dog"? My answer for Kodi is, he was bred for it. I told Robin DeSio from Golden Touch, to breed the best for my little therapy puppy. I wanted him to be calm, smart, and loving. Well two out of three ain't bad. So who would ever think a puppy could be calm. I guess that would have to come with time. And well, the smart had to come with lots of obedience training. Finally, on October 2, 2005, Kodi was born. Only three in the litter. Oh my gosh! They were gigantic! They looked like little bear cubs. That is how Kodi actually got his name. Since Golden Bear sounded a little like Jack Nicklaus, I decided on Little Kodiak Bear. He was going to be larger than life and fearless, a gentle giant. And yes, Kodi was a loving gentle giant from day one.





Robin said that I could visit the pups often, so I went to her house every chance I could get. I held Kodi tightly in my arms for the entire time I was there. The puppies grew so fast. And on Thanksgiving Day, Kodi came home, such a magical day. I was alone when I picked him up at Robin's. We created a little round bed of blankets next to me in the front seat for him to drive home. I got in the car and started our trip home. He was all snuggled up in the blankets. But of course, he sat still for maybe two minutes and then, in my lap he went. I tried a few times to lure him back in the passenger seat to no avail. So, there he

slept, in my lap on our long trip home. Not a habit that I intended to make, however we still to this day cannot sleep without surrounding one another. And of course, his favorite spot is on my pillow, that I share willingly.



When Kodi and I arrived home we were greeted by my 3 year old Golden, Biscuit. He was already pretty familiar with friendly four legged visitors due to my foster volunteer work. But Biscuit could tell this one was different. He was much smaller than the rest. And oh my gosh, he was a spun top! Biscuit looked up at me and I knew he was asking, "This is temporary, right?" Whoops! Biscuit and Kodi needed a little getting familiar time. Assuming the role of the big brother, Biscuit tolerated the jumping, the tugging on his ears, and the

constant plea for attention. Although Biscuit was quite reluctant in the beginning to welcome this new little boy into our lives, they are absolutely inseparable now.

Robin encouraged me to enroll Kodi in her obedience classes as quickly as possible. Luckily we were invited to attend as many as we could. So, we did. We started in a kindergarten class, socializing with puppies the same age as Kodi. In every class, no matter the age or number of puppies included, Kodi always gravitated toward the handlers. Yes, the treats did have some small amount of relevance. But, Kodi demonstrated signs at a very young age that he wanted to be touched by people. He wanted human attention. And in return, a quick peck on the chin was his thank you. We continued to practice visiting in pet shops, outdoor malls, and in our neighborhood. He was playful with children and calm around elders. His bright smile and wagging tale were contagious. Once we completed the Delta Pet Partners Handler training and evaluation we were on our way to spread all of the comfort and joy that Kodi's bright smile and never ending wagging tale could muster.



There we were, walking up to the front of the Life Care Center of Littleton for Kodi's first visit. I know I was more nervous than Kodi was. There was a gentleman sitting right outside the foyer in his wheelchair. He sat up in his chair and asked, "Who is this?" I introduced him to Kodi. Kodi approached his chair slowly and sat down right in front of him, looking straight into his eyes. He asked if he could pet Kodi. Kodi and I looked at each other and then back at the man and I replied, "Of course." He started caressing Kodi's ears and shoulders and then began a loud laughter. I asked if he was ok and he replied, "It's a little bit of heaven." I didn't exactly know just what he meant by that, but I knew he was connecting with my Kodi.

For the past few years, we made a point to visit our friendly resident. And as time went by, so did his health. We could notice his condition was worsening. We continued to visit with him although we weren't sure he knew we were there most of the time. However, our last visit was very special. While Kodi and I were walking down the hallway, Kodi pulled me toward the television lounge. Kodi saw his friend asleep in his wheelchair. We quietly approached his wheelchair so that we wouldn't wake him. And then Kodi gently placed his head on his friend's hand. He opened his eyes, raised his head, looked directly into Kodi's eyes and out came his wonderful laughter once again. It was music to our ears. It finally dawned on me what he was feeling when he felt Kodi's presence. Even in his last few days, I think he recognized Kodi and felt his little bit of heaven one more time. Kodi and I will miss him greatly.

Kodi and I continue to volunteer at the Life Care Center of Littleton. We work closely with their physical therapy department and provide animal assisted therapy to their residents. Kodi always seems to sense the patients' rehabilitation needs and adapts accordingly. It is an amazing feeling to witness the healing nature of the animal-human interaction.

Kodi is my constant companion. He is my "Golden" ray of sunshine that brightens each and every day. I am so lucky to have him in my life. The changes he has made in my life are incredible. I became a Licensed Pet Partner Team Evaluator for the Delta Society as well as an Evaluator for the AKC Canine Good Citizen program. I continue my passion for promoting the animal-human healing interaction and devote most of my time volunteering with Kodi by visiting local hospitals, nursing homes, classrooms, and libraries. I am committed to increasing the animal-human bond and continue to keep my love of animals close to my heart. I have many memories of our volunteer work. Volunteering with American Humane is one of the most rewarding opportunities I have ever experienced.

