

Lacey's Story



Several people had come by to pick out my brothers and sisters; there were six of us in the litter, also known as Buck's kids. Ruger was my mother's name, she and my dad General Buck Wheatridge (his friends called him Buck), were both Labrador Retrievers and were trained as hunting dogs. I wasn't really interested in all of that hunting stuff, based on the little I knew about it, so I intended to pick my new family out very carefully. Only a couple of my sibs had been picked yet so I knew I had a little time to be selective.

In April of 1998 I was a little over a month old and looking at moving on. A couple of folks would come by and if I didn't like them I'd walk away. It wasn't until Cynthia came by with her husband that I knew I had found a new family. After a brief consultation with Mom, I decided it was now or never and put on my best "cute puppy" act and headed straight for the easy target ... Cynthia's husband Patrick. After a short visit with them, I was awarded with the coveted blue collar with their name on it; I had done it; I got the family I wanted! A few weeks later, they came by and picked me up to take me to my new home.



My childhood was like one big doggie vacation. Like most human kids I had some time at home, before I went to school. I went to a two week training school, sort of a boarding school for dogs, to learn my basic manners like sit, come, down, stay, blah blah blah. While I enjoyed the learning, something I still like doing, I really liked playing ... exploring parks, chasing balls & Frisbees, swimming in ponds & running in creeks, playing "find it" with stuffed animals & treats. I also love meeting other dogs, people, children, basically anything that moves. I'm very social and have never met someone I didn't like, well maybe the UPS guy, but that's another story.

Sometimes when Cynthia & Patrick went to work, I got to go to the "The Big Backyard - Doggie Day Care". While I was there I would spend my days socializing & romping with other dogs. It's there that I found my first love! It turns out I'm attracted to big, male dogs, with German Shepherds being my favorite. I was always so tired after a full day at daycare it would take me a day or two to recuperate.



My schooling continued with Advanced Obedience, Agility, Tricks and AKC Good Citizen training. But after all of that schooling, it was time to get a job and that's how I came to be a Denver Pet Partner Therapy dog. In June 2002 I took my Pet Partners exam. What a great time that exam was. There were all kinds of people, equipment, and other animals. Since my breed has an enhanced capacity of smell, I really just wanted to sniff everything & everyone. One lady got down on the ground with me and talked in a high squeaky voice. I thought it was her way of inviting me to run & play. I got so excited I almost failed the test! Cynthia, who's always been the brains of this partnership, took me aside to calm me down. Well, we did pass the exam and I was rated to work in a "predictable" situation. Because I'm such an extrovert, I like to think of myself as a greeter ... a role not always appreciated in every

environment.



Upon our graduation, we found that Denver Pet Partners was starting a new program at Sabin Elementary School which would allow me to work with children. What a great deal! I went to work the first day and met another team Kirsten and Poko (yippee another large, male dog ... I fell in love again!). Oh yeah and I also met some really great kids. These children weren't the typical kids I was use to playing with. I could tell they had difficulties and yet they were very loving and excited to see me when I came to visit. They have a variety of abilities and are generally considered to be special needs children, however, I just

think of them as special.

My first visit to the school felt like I'd been doing it for years. We went to three classrooms in two hours. The thing I liked best was when I got to work with a girl in a wheelchair that has cerebral palsy. Her therapist asked that Cynthia and I come over so the little girl could pet me. When she reached out her normally clenched fist opened up and she gave me a good, long stroke on my back. It turns out that this young girl hadn't tried to open her hand on her own until she met me!

I continue to work at Sabin once a week. I say it's work, but it's really a good time. I don't know who feels better about the work we do with the kids, Cynthia or me, but we both look forward to our visits and meeting with "our kids". I've got a lot of stories to tell ... like the time one of the non-verbal little boys told me to speak ... or the time when I wore a Santa hat and each child took my picture ... or the tea parties we've held where each child exhibited the best table manners ... those and others are stories for another time.



Lacey



Editor's Note: *I find myself marveling at the significant impact Pet Partner teams like Cynthia and Lacey have on children. Lynn Stanton, Special Educator at Sabin Elementary, commented to me how Lacey and the other teams were "extremely calm and patient with the children, often influencing the atmosphere of the classroom or the mood of a particular student". She went on to say that, "the dog would sense a child having a difficult day and*

offer a little extra attention". Speaking of impact, some skills increased were interaction with another, verbal skills, mobility, patience, gentleness, and turn-taking. It seems some of the best teachers are equipped with four feet, a tail and a wet nose!. You're certainly one of them, Lacey!

Pivotal to an effective animal-assisted therapy program is the teamwork between handler, animal and client. Cynthia approaches her heartwarming commitment to the children at Sabin with acceptance and comfortableness with all the children. She also desires to learn from the teachers about each child and their specific needs. It is this comfort level, flexibility, knowledge, creativity and hours given which paves the way for an ideal working relationship and rewarding experience for all involved.

Some of the children that Cynthia and Lacey work with are non-verbal, but communicate volumes through their smiling faces and tears of joy. Cynthia and Lacey, for all the smiles you create and hearts that you cause to shed tears of joy, we applaud and commend you.