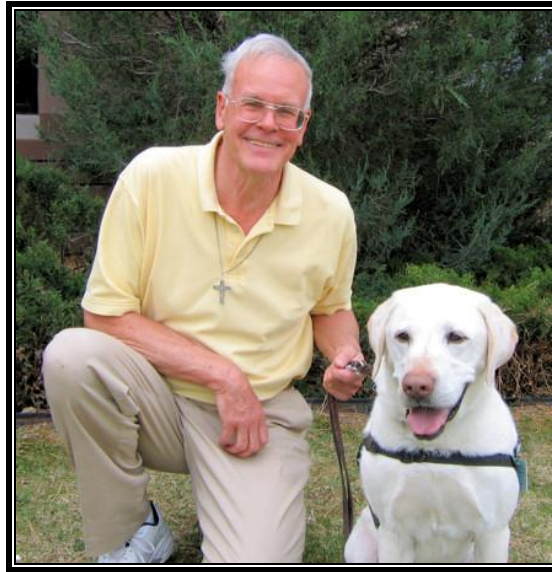


Ludwig's Story



From the very beginning we knew our yellow lab, Ludwig, (a.k.a. Lu, Louie, Lupe, Lulabelle) was a very special dog with great sensitivity.

I had recently retired from a job with a lot of traveling and knew that finally I could have a dog again. In a few of my last working trips I had seen people with very young dogs wearing the green jackets of Guide Dog Puppies in Training and became intrigued with the idea. Ludwig arrived as an 8 week old white ball of fur, our first Guide Dog puppy. He was doing well with his training and socialization and we were very proud. Quiet suddenly, he developed severe allergies that sadly disqualified him from becoming a working guide, but happily made him a permanent member of our family.



We knew the first time we took him to visit a friend who was a resident at the Hospice of St. John that something very special happened when he entered the room. We became invisible and as she pet him, Ludwig made our friend smile and cry happy tears. At the end of our visit, as we left, she said she didn't care if we returned, but she sure wanted that dog to come back to see her!

I immediately began looking for a way to bring that same feeling to others who were confined. I read an article about the Delta Society in Renton, Washington and thought how fortunate they were to have such a program there. Checking with Children's Hospital I found they had a 3-year waiting list for their visiting dog program and even then rarely had openings. After calling several other hospitals to see if they had similar programs, Swedish Hospital told me about a relatively new program in Denver connected with the Delta Society. Thanks to Diana McQuarrie and her faith and perseverance, I know how truly fortunate WE are!



In November 2002 Ludwig and I passed our evaluation and became Pet Partners at Swedish Hospital. Being an introvert, I was a little apprehensive as to how I would be able to initiate and carry on conversations with a good number of strangers. I soon realized my fears were unfounded. Ludwig was the icebreaker, the ambassador and very little beyond supervision was required of me. I was along for the wonderful ride. It's funny how the staff and patients always recognize our dogs and know their name and on occasion realize we are there.

When Lu enters a room he puts his head on the bed patiently waiting to receive that special petting from the occupant. He looks at them with his big brown eyes as if to say "I know your having a tough time and I want to help." Once that is accomplished he makes the round of the room greeting all visitors and offering a tail wag and a chance to pet him. Children especially love to ask him to "give me five" to which he quickly responds by brushing his paw against their hand. When its time to leave, Lu sits near the doorway and says goodbye with a wave of his paw. Sometimes he will even give one of his famous smiles. (He is smiling in all of his Delta photos and on his Swedish Volunteer's Badge.)

One of our most memorable encounters was with a young man being wheeled on a gurney in the hall. His parents had seen Lu in another room and asked if I could bring him to their son down the hallway. Their son had been severely injured in an accident, was very depressed and not responding in anyway to anyone. We approached the boy who slowly put his hand down to touch Lu and then he began to cry. We all were speechless and knew we had witnessed a very special moment.

We gave Lu a particular challenge last December, when I was a patient myself at Swedish. He wasn't quite sure what to do when I was in the bed and not on the other end of his leash, but as usual, he worked his magic. He brought me comfort and made me smile. He also continues to play the role of mentor and big brother to all of the new guide dog puppies that come to us. If Lu is nearby and the puppies are not sure how to respond to a command, they look at Lu to see what he is doing and follow his lead.

Last year, we became a Denver Pet Partner family when my husband, Jim, trained and passed his evaluation, as Ludwig's other partner visiting Swedish.

