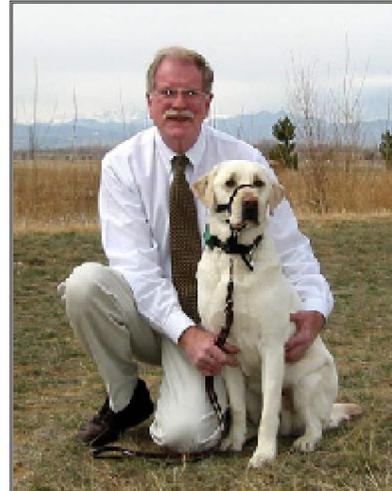


Nimoy's Story

Guide Dog Puppy To Delta Society Dog



Nimoy and I first met in California when he was twelve weeks old. He was an armful of fuzzy very white, yellow Labrador Retriever with melt-in-your-heart soft chocolate brown eyes. I was there to escort him and two littermates to Colorado to be raised by trained volunteer puppy raisers for Guide Dogs for the Blind. Jack and I would raise the female; Nimoy and his brother would go to other raisers. It would be six months



before Jack, Nimoy and I would walk down the path as a team.

The McPartland daughters, Mary and Susan, began raising Guide Dog puppies while in high school. Jack and I were actively involved. Being a volunteer puppy raiser requires a tremendous amount of time and effort. A pup is borrowed for at least a year then given it back to GDB for formal training. Love, labor and bonding is integral to instilling good house behaviors, solid obedience, and providing extensive socialization to virtually every thing a working guide dog might encounter. Raisers do give from the heart. It is often difficult to understand and stay focused on expectations of a future working guide dog. Having the patience and the energy to follow through with the pup's daily training requires much resolve. Seeing the pup mature, gain confidence, and refine its obedience is always very rewarding. Excellent care, ample praise and constant human companionship solidify the dog/raiser bond. The pup and raiser really become best friends. Every thing is done together. If the dog can't go, then going probably isn't worthwhile anyway. It is with full knowledge that the time will come when "your" pup will be recalled for its harness training. Each moment is to be savored, even those memories of freezing your fanny in the middle of the night while the pup looks for just the right place to relieve.

The day comes when the puppy goes back to GDB for formal guide work/harness training. Pups get into the Puppy Truck while the two-legged ones are left sharing boxes of Kleenex. Then life revolves around those weekly phase reports about training progress. Only fifty-five percent of pups make it all though training. Some have medical or temperament problems. Some just decide that guide work really isn't their thing. Nimoy made such a choice thus came to be included in this newsletter.

When Nimoy was eight months old, his raisers realized that puppy raising just wasn't working out for them and wanted him transferred to someone else. This is always an available option. Jack and I asked if we could puppy sit him until a new raiser was found. The inevitable happened and we fell in love with this winsome pup. We applied to finish raising him, knowing that being granted permission was really a long shot since we were also raising his littermate sister. (The rules didn't allow for two pups close in age in one household, let alone the same age. But, there were four trained raisers in

ours.) He and his sister were romping in the puppy wading pool when the phone call came that we got to keep him BUT just don't expect to do this again. Joy eventually sobered into serious planning of how we would actually "work" two dogs the same age and have them be independent of each other.

During the following eight months we kept our standards high. Each family member expected a realistic level of obedience from each dog. We went different directions for our multi-mile walks, sometimes meeting in the middle. Both dogs looked identical except for their plumbing, and few people notice that. There were many, many confused people who would stop one of us saying, "I know I just saw that dog but it wasn't with YOU." Sometimes a McPartland would become exasperated because a dog wasn't paying attention, only to discover that we were talking to the wrong dog. We kept daily logs of who went where with which dog and did what. Both dogs were hard workers. After working hard Nimoy was also willing to chill, preferably touching one of us.

On their fifteenth-month birthday, Nimoy and his sister returned to San Rafael, California and began their formal guide training. She graduated five months later. Then we got THE CALL. Nimoy had been "career changed". We were in a state of shock! He did everything so well! We were told that he just didn't have enough confidence to assume the weighty responsibility of actual guide work; he needed people's help too much. Then the question, did we want him back? We had to decide soon. Jack and I made our lists of pros and cons. This was a very important decision to make. Obviously we loved him, wanted him, but what were the real ramifications of getting him back? This healthy, energetic, twenty-two month lab would require many years of care, attention and expense. We were retired. How would he fit into our lives for the next twelve years or more? Raising a guide dog puppy and giving it back is a focus we were used to; getting a dog back was an entirely new picture. We take very seriously acquiring a pet. After much discussion, we decided that we were in accord about what to do with him so we would take him back.

Two weeks later we had our big boy back. He certainly had not forgotten us during the intervening six months. Within thirty minutes he had visited everything and every one in the house. Later that day when Mary called from college, I put the phone receiver to his ear, upon hearing her voice he ran around the house looking for her. The next evening I had just put his dinner dish on the floor, he heard her voice at the door, LEFT HIS FOOD long enough to greet her, then zoomed back to eat. No memory loss there! He and our Sheltie were also happy to see each other. She is deaf; he is her ears. In the backyard dark his white coat is a beacon for her diminished night vision. They are good buddies. The herding dog and the retriever have devised unique play satisfying to each. Best of all, the coveted blue dog bed was all his. Nimoy was home for good!

Jack and I had decided we would maintain his guide dog obedience and we have deviated very little from that protocol even with his toys. We frequently puppy sit with guide dog puppies in training so our structure and routine needs to remain within those guidelines. Nimoy is an excellent role model for these visiting pups.

Years ago when I first heard the term "career change" applied to guide dogs puppies which were dropped from harness/guide training, I thought it sounded very cute and considerate. Nimoy is an example of what that really means. Immediately after his Colorado return he not only became a delightful, very well mannered, fun pet, but he began routine attendance at Dogs With Vision, Guide Dogs for the Blind Puppy Raisers Club meetings, where he a superb role model for puppies in training. He gives prospective raisers a taste of how a well-trained dog works. He joined the puppies in our Club as everyone worked for and received the Canine Good Citizen badge. He participated in the Guide Dog Halloween Party as King Kong. He is an invaluable asset to Jack and me as we carry on our active involvement in helping raise guide dog puppies. We also keep guide dog females that are "in season". He is very appropriate around these special ladies, providing companionship and play they would not have if in a commercial kennel for three weeks. He is even a good sport, not pouting too much, during that special week or so when he is not allowed interaction with the lasses.



During the eight months that Nimoy was a guide dog puppy in training, he was already distinguishing himself with young children. The two-year-old boy next door was terrified of dogs, but not of Nimoy. It was safe to crawl over, under and just be around Nimoy. During a demo at a preschool, Nimoy was so well behaved, as were the children, that the kids got to "dress" Nimoy in his green puppy coat. This marshmallow yellow lab with the limpid brown eyes is a magnet for children.

Nimoy's obvious like of children resulted in his having children read to him twice a month in the Waggin' Tales reading programs at Denver Academy and the Aurora Central Library during the 2002-2003 school year. Being a pillow was just fine with him, too. One look at his handsome, kind face and he was often a child's best friend. Calm, patient and so well behaved. Nimoy always makes us humans look so good and brings compliments to us about him, but what you see is what he really is.



Healthy, calm Nimoy, with the desired blood type, is a blood donor at Animal ER on County Line Road at Broadway. Nimoy remains calm even during the "blood letting". He patiently waits for the can of dog food he receives as a reward for donating. Carmen Moyer is to be credited with getting so many of us with "career changed" dogs involved. She and Dot Dill told us about the blood donor program.

Again, Carmen and Dot (you don't realize how much I really do listen to each of you) encouraged Jack and me to investigate becoming Delta Society Denver Pet Partners as we continued our inquiries about activities for Nimoy. One of the most difficult aspects of having a "career changed" dog is not having the public access that puppies in training have. We people often say that the dogs miss going all those places with us; I guess they really do. As we have expanded Nimoy's activities with other people and places, he seems so happy and content. The second time he has been some place, he knows the routine. He enjoys meeting people, especially children.

Jack and I enrolled in the Delta Society training. Diana McQuarrie opened new windows for us. Her patience and professionalism were deeply appreciated. How challenging to instruct the bunch of us;

we came from so many different directions and disciplines. You made it all make sense, Diana. Thank you. Then, the evaluation: I started to worry. All I knew was the handling of a guide dog puppy in training. In Nimoy's early months with us, if I was upset or nervous he became unfocused. What if I upset him? After all, this was a test! Worry, worry. And Jack scheduled me to go first. Fink! Maybe he would learn from my mistakes.

Test Day. I worried and wondered, then Nimoy and I were next. Nimoy showed his true nature. He relaxed, calmly walked past those other dogs, entered the inner sanctum, and graciously took both of us through the entire evaluation. He really came through for me. He proved to me that we are truly a team. Nimoy had passed another milestone toward what he wanted to do...work with people. Nimoy did the same for Jack. Life is good.

Now we were looking for Pet Partner facilities we would be interested in visiting. Of particular interest were potential school programs located close to the foothills where we live. Jack, Nimoy, other teams and Diana met with Fletcher-Miller School staff investigating a potential program there. Nimoy was a rock around the children. We are currently waiting for the program to begin and commence our visits.



Jack, Nimoy, and I began routine visits at Kendallvue Elementary in October. The teacher, Mrs. Mary Ann Fuhrman, has integrated dogs into her personal life. When the opportunity arose to establish a program for her students involving a Delta Society Denver Pet Partner team which included a dog, she enthusiastically agreed. This is a new Pet Partner program for Emotionally Disabled children, with learning disabilities, sensory integration and attention deficits among the assessed educational needs. Goals are clearly defined for Nimoy assisted activities. Wearing his felt board jacket (Kirsten Duell's idea; Dot Dill's creation) individual students work on vocabulary, spelling, sentence structure and math. Nimoy lays quietly during the academic endeavors, receiving the loving pats and hugs "his students" give him. The tasks are in small steps building on the basic academic abilities and needs of each student. Students are instructed in appropriate social skills. Well informed about courtesy and consideration of Nimoy, students listen quietly for their turn to greet Nimoy, shake hands with him, listen for instructions, use his felt board, or just give him a hug. Bonding and trust are sometimes issues with the students. The cooperation and coordination of parents and school are crucial to the student's success. Nimoy and the students already have a definite bond and a mutual trust. He is another part of the positive circle in bringing together the complementary academic and social abilities.



Mrs. Fuhrman and her staff see the clear success of having Nimoy work with her students for two hours every week. Two thirds of the time is spent with her kindergarten students. The remaining time is with older kids in the adjacent class. She and her staff report that every visiting day the children's individual and group behavior is more stable than usual and interest levels are high.

Student motivation is strong to complete desk work in order to interact with Nimoy. The students maintain appropriate social behavior during his visits. Mrs. Fuhrman also states that knowing Nimoy will be coming regularly, motivates the children to apply themselves socially and academically on an ongoing basis. Their four-legged reward will be coming through the door.



Mrs. Fuhrman's believes strongly in the core value of each student. Helping each child to strengthen its self-esteem leads to positive thinking, academic achievement, social success and overall enhancement as a person. Nimoy's presence assists each student in this journey.

Nimoy is a catalyst for Jack and me to widen the circle of giving back to our community. As retirees, Jack and I find that being Denver Pet Partner teams meshes well with our human abilities. Delta Society is the special niche enabling us to work with our dog in his new career, and still utilize his unique training and ability. His intelligence, temperament and personality fit perfectly with the needs of the students in Mrs. Fuhrman's class. He truly enjoys each visit. He is so relaxed that sometimes he goes sound asleep as a felt board. The high standards of Delta Society enable us to feel at ease as we participate in programs which help individuals help themselves. Besides, we really like what we do.



Editor's Note: *Nimoy, you possess many of the same qualities inherent in a fine Guide Dog, such as intelligence, undying dedication, and loyalty... but what's extraordinary about you is that you have so effectively transitioned from a prospective Guide Dog to a Delta Therapy Dog. Your patience and gentleness with children is exemplary and your capacity to serve is remarkable.*

Jack and Bonnie – having been a puppy raiser myself, I know how much of yourselves you've poured into Nimoy to prepare him to grant a person with vision impairment independence and dignity. I'm sure that Nimoy becoming a career-change Guide Dog was welcomed with mixed emotions. His genetics and formal training has prepared him to serve people on a very challenging level. Your sharing of Nimoy through therapy work so appropriately combines his and your skills... this makes for a truly special partnership. We're honored to team with all three of you in making a difference!

Nimoy, I dedicate the following poem to you because your heart beats almost as one with a Guide Dog. You were prepared to serve one and you now serve many.

FROM A GUIDE DOG

"What Color am I?"

I'm the color of the streets we walk safely together.
Of granite steps and rough brick paths.
I'm the color of the wind that touches, coolly,
on your cheek
and the sun that warms your face on summer days.
I am the color of the nights we spend, just you and I
alone.
The color of the stars that watch us from afar.

"What color am I?"

I'm the color of a child's voice at play.
Or of a lover's touch and gentle, simple words of
trust.
I'm the color of the freedom, blessed, in your life
and the bravery in your heart and in your hopes.
I am the color of the soul we share together, just you
and I alone.
The color of the years we walk together.

[WZ]



(Poem from "Labrador Tales", Copyright 1998, LABMED Inc., www.labmed.org)