

Olivia and Willoughby's Story



I grew up with numerous pets including cats, dogs and horses. Because of this, I always wanted a career working with animals that involved thinking. So I chose to study the science of animal behavior, especially primates. With degree in hand, I did positive reinforcement training, enrichment and social housing for captive primate for many years. During that time, I started teaching family dog training with a very well known positive trainer and animal behaviorist. I had been doing this for a year before I even got my first dog as a grown-up. I got Olivia as a two year old from a very small, crowded and dank Humane Society in

Madison, WI. She was a very sad, disheveled, thin little mess. But I could see the beauty inside and named her Olivia for a lovely character in Shakespeare's Twelfth Night. From the start, Olivia perked up and got healthier and stronger. Over the years, I took her to numerous family dog obedience classes including agility, dog parks and social doggy dates. Olivia became an extremely well-behaved and beloved dog. We even managed to overcome that Nordic breed desire to run like the wind. We worked very hard on her recall and have a lovely result.



In 2000, still a dog trainer and with all the confidence in the world, I decided to adopt another dog and looked long and hard for just the right one. I finally selected another one from a Wisconsin Humane Society. This shelter was a no kill shelter and so had



no money for the animals. I saw a promising dog at this shelter but waited 2 months until Olivia and I were sure he was the right one. I did all sorts of temperament tests and evaluations to make sure he would fit into the house with me, Olivia and our three beloved kitties. He looked a little like Olivia, but who would have guessed how he would develop over the years. The shelter could only provide cement runs with no toys or blankets or shade from the sun. The new dog hadn't

had social interaction or chew toys or any stimulation of any kind for over a year. He had a long road ahead of him, and so did we. Willoughby was named for a charming and debonair character in Jane Austen's Emma. When he first arrived home, he was on stimulus overload. He compensated for a year of having nothing to chew to suddenly having a whole household to chew. Which he did. He struggled with potty training and separation anxiety and did thousands of dollars worth of damage to our home. Willoughby was a lot of work in the beginning and many people would have given up on him. But, I saw his potential and desire to make the right choices. I stuck with him and worked very hard to get the chewing and potty training under control. Over time the separation anxiety diminished as well. Underneath all that was a sweet, loving, eager to please little boy of whom I am very proud. He has become a very different, well-behaved, well adjusted and amazing member of the family.





My 5 furry family members and I moved from Wisconsin to Colorado in the summer of 2004. As a dog trainer, I decided to observe many different dog trainers in the area and their methods. In one such class, I introduced myself to some of the students, one of whom was Diana. We hit it off immediately and found we had many of the same goals, ethics and training techniques. Diana invited me to attend the next Denver Pet Partner training workshop. This is one of the best life choices I ever made. The experiences, knowledge gained, opportunities given and friends met are priceless and have driven most of my decisions and activities for the past year. I have had many amazing DPP teams as my dog training clients and I feel privileged to work with

such a stellar group of people. I thoroughly enjoy volunteering for DPP events like workshops, evaluations, fund raisers, booths and behind the scenes work.

Both dogs and I started doing animal-assisted therapy visits in a pilot program at The Medical Center of Aurora- South Campus in May 2005 and seemed to be naturals. I was honored to be chosen as the Team Leader for this new program. My hard work and that of my terrific team members have made the program a success. The Denver Pet Partner teams are briskly moving forward and making TMCA a very strong animal assisted therapy hospital. We are proud to be integrating DPP teams into more and more areas of the hospital.



Olivia is a wonderful therapy dog and does best in waiting rooms, with staff and with more ambulatory patients. Unfortunately, both dogs and I were victims of a car accident in May. Willoughby and I were fine, but despite a sturdy crate, Olivia's back was broken. She spent many days at VRCC emergency vet hospital and had a long and painful recovery. Her body will never be the same, but her mind and spirit are back to normal. She has resumed her therapy visits with enthusiasm and excitement. No one seems to mind that she walks funny. She enjoys the patients and the attention she gets and her special time in the spotlight. Never the same, but perhaps new and improved.



Willoughby does really well on his patient visits also, especially with immobile, bed ridden patients. We put his front feet on a towel up on the bed and he snuggles right into people's laps. Both dogs have made a success of their new job and put their best skills to use to make a lot of people happy. I often get told how sweet and beautiful they are. They have also helped train numerous new pet partner people and demonstrated the ins and outs of The Medical Center of Aurora. I am very proud of them both and the work we do to improve the quality of life for

patients, staff, visitors, and, of course, ourselves.