

## *Princess Anika's Story*



I felt honored when Diana McQuarrie asked if Princess Anika and I would be the Denver Pet Partner team of the month for March 2006. It also provided the opportunity for me to express my thoughts about Princess Anika (pronounced like Chanukah without the H.)

On Valentine's Day of 2001 I flew to southern California. My destination was the southwest regional headquarters for Canine Companions for Independence to pick up an 8-week-old Golden Retriever puppy that I would raise and train for about 15 months. Hopefully, the puppy would become a service dog. This became a true heart and soul commitment the second the little Princess was put into my arms. She was a gorgeous, very blonde, fur ball with deep, dark, soulful eyes.

Wearing her tiny CCI cape, she flew home at my feet, arriving to 10-degree Denver weather. I thought my southern California girl would freeze to death. After we got home I decided to take a hot bath while she explored the bathroom. I never expected her to take a bold jump right into the hot tub with me. Either she loved the water or just did not know what she was doing. Subsequently, she has proven herself to be half otter and seeks out water everywhere.

As a puppy raiser for CCI, I was expected to go to CCI training classes as well as acquaint Anika to an extensive variety of places. I would hear people say how gorgeous Anika was. She was already a beautiful dog with an even more beautiful heart.

Fifteen months later I returned to Oceanside, California to return Anika for advanced training. I cried nonstop. I thought I had done everything possible to prepare both of us for this heart wrenching time. It was still very difficult for me.

The Princess continued advanced training for four months, then, she decided to chase a rabbit while she was being tested.

Immediately she was released from training and back into my arms as quickly as I could get to California and bring her back to Denver. (She told me she did not like the menu at advanced training, that she was hungry and had decided the bunny might make a good dinner. NOT A GOOD MOVE FOR A SERVICE DOG!)





Even after being separated during her four months of advanced training, she literally jumped into my arms, knocking me down. This was one of the happiest days of my life!!!!!! Anika came back home and became my running partner. Yes, now she loves to run and train with me; it is our spiritual time together. No words are needed. We just run and run, Both of us have huge smiles on our faces.

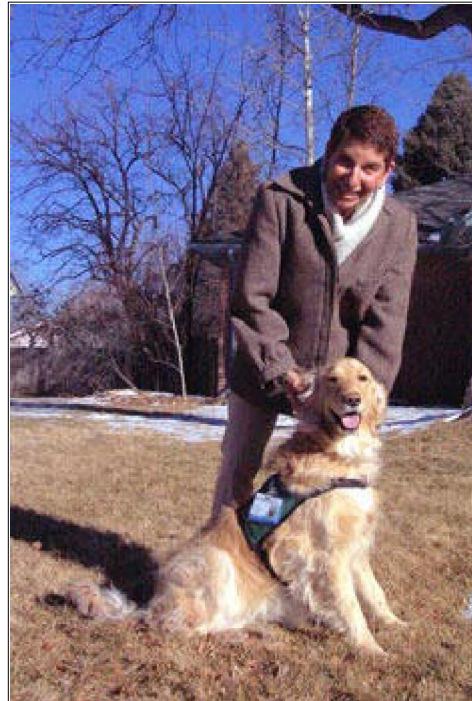
The Princess and I have continued our relationship with CCI. Anika and I puppy sit for other puppy raisers in Denver. The Princess shows the puppies exactly what to do: how to wait patiently for dinner; how to heel without pulling on the lead; how to speak on command; and how nice it is to share toys, her crate, etc. We also run with some of the CCI puppies after they are a year old, and also take them cross-country skiing.

Anika returned home as a well trained dog. She loves to deliver paper messages back and forth between my husband and me when we are in opposite ends of the house. She starts her day by retrieving the newspaper, then waits for the mailman so she can run out and get our mail. Her favorite activity is putting clothes in the washing machine; a series of four commands consisting of "fetch", "up", "drop" and "off". (No, she cannot take the clothes out of the washer nor does she do the ironing.)

Of course, I wanted to share the Princess with others who needed a special smile or warm soft touch. Since I am a R.N., I knew about therapy dogs. Interestingly, my little sister was licensed to start the first therapeutic riding school in Durham, N.C., back in the 70's so I was well aware of the huge impact therapy animals can make.

A dear friend told me about the Delta Society. I was tremendously impressed with the organization and knew it was the perfect place for Anika and me to share a bit of joy with others. After going through the certification process we started visiting at Medical Center of Aurora North on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor as well as the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor, which is a locked geriatric unit. We visited at Aurora North for over a year. The reception from the staff, patients, and families was huge. I remember once when an elderly lady on the locked unit grabbed Anika by the muzzle as hard as possible and would not let go. Poor Anika just looked at her with big soulful eyes as if to say, "I did not hurt you. Why are you hurting me"? The staff intervened and Anika calmly continued making her rounds.

After a year at Aurora North I decided we needed a change and went through the arduous volunteer process at Namaste Comfort Care. We were assigned several families intermittently over a period of several months. I wanted Anika to keep working regularly so we investigated being a team at Medical Center of Aurora South, which has been a perfect place for us for almost a year.



We do visits every other week in the ICU (Intensive Care Unit), on the orthopedic floor and the surgical

waiting room. I am not sure who loves doing the visits more the Princess or me but we just have a blast. We know so many of the staff now and sometimes I think they get more out of Princess Anika's visits than do some of the patients. Anika was dressed up as an angel on Halloween and stole even more hearts!

One day while we were visiting in ICU, a nurse asked us to visit a young man who was on a ventilator. He also had a "Do not resuscitate" bracelet on. The nurse wanted to see if this young man would respond at all to the Princess. I sat in a chair next to his bed and had Anika do a "lap across me" so that he could reach her soft head. I took his hand and started stroking her head with his fingers, talking softly and explaining why she had come to visit him. His parents were on the other side of the bed with his nurse when we all realized that he was petting Anika on his own. When we left, his nurse said that this was the first time he had visibly responded to anything. His parents came out and thanked Anika.

I should share that there is nothing in the world that Princess Anika loves more than being loved. If someone will touch and stroke her she almost purrs like a kitten and will just try to get closer and closer. She was born to be caressed and cannot ever get enough.

One day in ICU we were asked to visit a lady. I was concerned that the patient was going to climb out of bed trying to get closer to the Princess. She started petting Anika's beautiful soft head, then her tears started flowing. We stayed with her for a long time while she just petted Anika and had a good cry. I never said a word. I just softly touched the lady on her back while she cried. When she was finished she thanked us and I gave the lady a loving hug and told her we hoped she felt better.

When we are through visiting with someone, I ask Anika to do one last thing, her Princess bow (front paws down with her cute butt in the air). It brings down the house!

Princess Anika is about love. I wish I could share her with the world. Touching her is like touching an angel. This is our story. I always remind people that DOG is GOD spelled backwards.

