

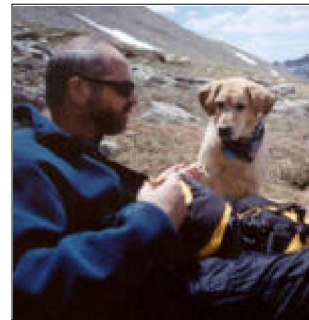
Tawni Paws' Story



This is the story of a pampered pooch; no exotic "tails" or stories of being rescued. Tawni Paws was born on September 24, 1995 to Sandy Paws VII and Clive's Clyde of Halsey. Purchased from a local Colorado breeder; Tawni Paws comes from a champion hunting blood line. She was the smallest of the litter, but she had the biggest heart. And since no one wanted the "runt" for hunting, we were fortunate to get her as our family dog. Already 12 weeks old when we brought her home, she was past the "baby" stage which made her easy to train. However, her gentle disposition also helped. During her obedience training, she was so eager to please and learned her commands

quickly. On the day of her obedience testing, she worked through each command with ease and we felt confident that she would receive the best in class ribbon. But that was not to be. On the last command, she was positioned next to a male Labrador retriever, and instead of performing her "down stay" she performed "belly up". So much for best in class as the instructor summoned the "yellow lab" to the center of the ring.

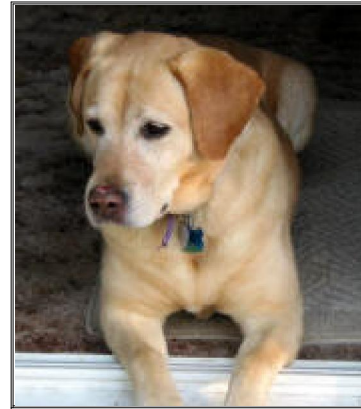
Before her days of animal-assisted therapy, Tawni Paws camped, hiked and climbed with the family and shared **her** home with our younger, chocolate lab, Shadow. Having two dogs is like having two children; constant competition for attention and toys. But when we hike and climb, Tawni is in charge and in her element! Always hiking 2 to 3 times more mileage than her humans, coming to the flank to check on me and then running back to be in the lead. Tawni has hiked several "fourteeners" with us and has braved scree and boulders to be with us. Snow on the trails, streams or mountain lakes are a welcome relief to cool the sore paws. During one backpacking trip, it was necessary for the dogs to carry their food; which wasn't heavy. Since we only had one pack, we thought it was fair that Shadow and Tawni alternate wearing the pack. Shadow went first and dutifully cared their food. However, when it was Tawni Paws turn to wear the pack, she had other ideas. She took a few steps and fell over to her side. It was like watching a cartoon. She laid there and gave us the look that said, "no way, I am the Princess". She got no sympathy from us as we walked away laughing. Realizing that we weren't going to take the pack off, she got up and continued the hike with us.





But I knew there was more to life for Tawni than being a house dog. I had always been interested in animal-assisted therapy for both of us, but many of the organizations that we contacted had two year waiting lists. Tawni Paws was 6 years old and I was discouraged that we would never get the opportunity. Several years passed until I saw the article about the Denver Pet Partners in the newspaper. I immediately called Diana McQuarrie and the rest of the story is history. In the spring of 2004, Tawni Paws (at the age of 8) and I were registered as a Delta Society Pet Partners team. Since that time, we have visited at the Littleton Life Care Center and Swedish Medical Center. Tawni Paws is very comfortable in the hospital environment. I can tell that she enjoys her visits by the spring in her step.

Over the years, we have had many memorable visits at Swedish Medical Center. But there are two that were very special. One Sunday, we entered a patient room and asked if she wanted a visit. The patient was crying and I thought she would say "no" and turn us away. But to my surprise and without saying a word, the patient quickly got out of bed, sat in the chair next to the bed and threw her arms around Tawni Paws neck. I wasn't sure how Tawni would react or if she would pull away from the patient. But, Tawni knew and sensed her pain, allowing the patient to hug her for several minutes. I said nothing, but put my hand on the patient's shoulder. Eventually, the patient released Tawni and started to pet her and to talk to both of us. By the end of our visit, the patient was smiling and thanking us for helping her through a difficult afternoon.



On another occasion, the nursing staff asked us to visit a patient who had been critically injured. They described the patient's condition to prepare me for the visit. Although the patient was in a chair, he was only able to move his arm. He was not able to communicate with us verbally. I positioned Tawni next to his chair and hoped that she would not fidget or move. Again, I know she sensed his need and sat quietly next to his chair, allowing him to pet her for the entire visit. Although he couldn't talk to us, he was communicating with her as he stroked and petted her head, ears, neck and back.

But every Sunday that we visit at Swedish Medical Center is memorable for Tawni Paws and me. It is the smiles, the appreciation of the patients, family and staff, the comments that we brightened a patient's day, that make our experience as a PetPartners team so rewarding.

