

## *Sherry Clapp with Gilly and Maddie*



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Maddie and Gilly came into my life as service dogs-in-training thru Canine Companions for Independence, an organization that provides service dogs (free of charge) to adults and children who have limited mobility, and as hearing dogs and service dogs to military veterans who have PTSD.

Maddie came first, at eight weeks of age. I went to twice monthly training sessions for over a year as she progressed through puppy kindergarten to puppy college. With tears in my eyes I flew back to California with her as she went on to advanced training. Maddie was stressed out from the training so CCI called and said they were going to release her from the program and would I like her back as a pet. Of course, I would. When we returned home she no longer had public access so could not go with me every time I left the house. What sad eyes I saw as I went out the door leaving her behind.

Two years later Gilly came to Tom and I through CCI as an eight-week-old puppy. We went to classes again for a year, cried when we said goodbye and took her to Santa Rosa for advanced. Gilly was only there a month before we got the call that she was being released for a medical reason. Did we want her back as a pet? Oh yes!

So, we had two well-trained dogs needing a 'job' – a change of career. I wish I could remember how I heard about Denver Pet Partners, but I don't. I signed up for the two-day handler class then went through the evaluation with Maddie.



Joyfully, we passed and I started looking for places to volunteer. We tried the Parent's Respite Nights, the Rodeo and Whole Foods booths. But I was looking for something that would provide us with weekly visits with the same people. I heard about the Easter Seal Day Stroke Program. It was a good fit for Maddie and me. We volunteered there until the program changed days and we couldn't go any longer. Maddie enjoyed letting the stroke patients walk with her and letting them brush her and work with their strength training tools.

Shortly after this volunteer position changed, Gilly and I passed our evaluation and I had two therapy dogs. So, my daughter Julie took the handler class and evaluated with both Maddie and Gilly.

Then came grand babies, and Tom and I were spending Monday nights and all-day Tuesday in Parker with Tommy and Caroline when another volunteer opportunity opened up. Gilly and I started volunteering at Pine Grove Elementary in the R.E.A.D. program. Julie was working as a juvenile diversion therapist with the DA's office and got permission to bring Maddie to work as a therapy dog. That turned out to be a perfect fit for Maddie.

I started taking Gilly to Pine Grove Elementary in Parker after going through the R.E.A.D. class online. I have since gone through the on-site class. We volunteered there for two years. When Tommy started school, I approached the principal at his school to see if they would be interested in the R.E.A.D. program and they were, so Gilly and I volunteered there for four years. Then Tommy, Gilly and I transferred to Frontier Valley Elementary School and the school was also interested in the program.

Due to privacy concerns, neither Julie with Maddie, nor I with Gilly can share pictures, but we can tell stories.

I am amazed at how elementary school children snuggle up to Gilly and read to her. It isn't always the child who is struggling with reading. One young boy had Asperger's Syndrome and was refusing to come to school until he was bribed with a weekly time to read to Gilly. Another youngster who had very low self-esteem was chosen to read with Gilly. And, of course, there were the boys and girls who were struggling with their reading skills and found comfort and enjoyment reading to Gilly in a non-threatening reading environment. To see a child with a book in one hand and the other hand on Gilly tells me we are doing what is meant to be.

Julie started working with Maddie in 2007. She primarily does individual and family therapy with teens and their families. From the beginning Maddie has shown a gift for sensing trauma and depression. Before Julie starts an initial intake questionnaire with a client, Maddie seems to automatically know who is

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struggling with trauma or depression and immediately goes to that person and curls up around their feet and lies down. That in itself has an instant soothing effect on clients. They feel singled out and loved before treatment begins and they are more willing to open up during the intake session. Maddie sometimes leaves Julie's office during lunch to go lie down at a colleague's closed door to wait for them to finish their session, and found out later that the client they were meeting with was severely depressed. This skill was not taught to her but it is truly remarkable. Maddie is used to teach very shy or overly angry children how to be appropriately assertive. Most animals will not respond to commands given in harsh tones nor in very timid tones. By using Maddie, who is only going to respond to loving assertiveness, it is an excellent way to bridge the gap with social skills.

Now that Maddie is almost twelve and slowing down, Tom and I are thinking about her retirement. No longer does she volunteer for long days, but goes on weekly visits with Tom (who also took the handler class and teamed with Maddie) to visit at the Evergreen Senior Resource Center with clients in the elderly daycare program.

We really are a team of therapy dogs and handlers. I started out first with Maddie and then Julie joined with Maddie. Then I became a team with Gilly and the Tom teamed with Maddie and Gilly. We all get so much joy from the service and comfort that Maddie and Gilly bring to people.