

Sylvia Collins and Molly



The journey with Denver Pet Partners began when I was nearing retirement. I started to look for opportunities to volunteer but I wanted to do something with my dogs. At that time, I had 2 Lhasa Apso's-Tiki & Kishu. Since I couldn't come up with any great ideas, I put this decision on the back burner.

During this time, I went to a friend's funeral where there were several very well-behaved dogs in attendance. I had never seen a dog at a funeral. I talked to some of the handlers and found out that they belonged to an organization called Denver Pet Partners with whom my friend had been working (thus the dogs at the

funeral). They told me that they had a monthly meeting where I could find out more. I went to one of those monthly meetings. A light bulb went off and I thought "Hey, maybe this is the volunteer opportunity that I have been looking for." So, I took my thoughts about what to do after retirement off the back burner and put it on the front burner. As they say, the rest is history. I had taken the 1st step on this wonderful journey.



I joined Denver Pet Partners in 2005 with my 2 Lhasa Apsos, Kishu and Tiki. After I lost them, Molly came into my life. She has followed their paw prints and is a wonderful therapy dog. She was super shy at first but now, if someone walks by her and doesn't stop to pet her, she looks at them as if to say "Hey, I'm down here. Why aren't you paying any attention to me?"

We have visited in many, many different situations - some of which include:

Kishu and my first visit was at Fletcher Miller Special School. This is a school for SEVERELY disabled children many of whom are in wheelchairs and are non-verbal. One day in Kindergarten class it was decided that I should take a little girl for a walk around the school with Kishu. This particular child could walk (a bit unsteady perhaps but she could walk). I double leashed Kishu and away we went. She chattered away the whole time. When we got back to the classroom, the teacher asked how our walk went. I told her about the little girl "telling" everyone all about the adventure she was having. The teacher wanted to know what she said. I said that I had no idea because I couldn't understand a word but apparently Kishu understood everything she said. He was very attentive to her. He walked when she walked, stopped when she stopped, and never pulled. She had a wonderful time and was sooo happy. The teacher then told me that the little girl had hardly ever uttered a



sound all school year (we were about 3/4 of the way through the school year at this point). This wasn't at all what I saw when walking around the school. She was bubbly and outgoing and "talked" to everyone (even though they couldn't understand a word). And to think - all this had happened because of a therapy dog.

Tiki (the other Lhasa Apso) and I visited Special Ed children at Kendallvue Elementary. I made what I call 'Worry Fur' for these kids. Worry Fur is similar to a 'Worry Stone' except Worry Fur was made using fake fur backed with some of Tiki's hair.

The object was that a child could keep this in their pocket and rub it when life got cross-wise and they felt themselves losing control of their emotions. Because Worry Fur had fake fur on one side for a tactile feel and some of Tiki's hair on the other side, the child would be reminded of the calmer times when they were with Tiki.

All 3 of my dogs and I visited at Swedish Hospital for 12 years. Some people wanted to talk about dogs they used to have or currently have OR they wanted to know all about my dog OR they simply wanted to talk about something else entirely. No matter what we talked about, mainly they just wanted to hold, snuggle, and love on the dog. If they closed their eyes, it was a good bet that they probably no longer heard a word I said. The dog had transported them to another place and time where there were no shots, pills, doctors, nurses and all the necessary medical stuff that was now a part of their lives.



One gentleman had been having problems with blood pressure. His blood pressure readings were all over the place. Molly was on the bed giving him lots of doggie love when someone came in to take his blood pressure & check his vitals. The person checking was very surprised that his blood pressure was in the normal range, his breathing was deep and regular, and his heart rate was strong & steady. She told him, "I definitely prescribe a therapy dog for you - 24 hours a day."

When I first started at Swedish Hospital, I thought we were there only for the patients. That's not true at all. It's for everyone with whom you come in contact - from the valets who park the car, the front desk, people in the hallways, nurses, staff, visitors, and doctors (I even had a doctor apologize for interrupting my visit one time). We were often stopped by a visitor or nurse who requested that we visit a specific person.

Molly currently visits at Rocky Mountain Cancer Center in Aurora, Church Shut-ins, Rocky Vista University, & Columbine Library.

*At the **Rocky Mountain Cancer Center**, we go to the Infusion Unit. People there are receiving medicine intravenously. It usually takes several hours for the medicine to drip



into their veins. So, it's a long - long day for them. A visit from a therapy dog helps bring some much-needed normalcy into their life that has been turned up-side-down.

*We also visit Shut-ins at my church. They are usually in nursing homes or assisted living facilities. Molly snuggles with them. They get to introduce Molly to other residents and that makes them feel so special and important. Therefore, we also interact with many of the other residents --- not just the person we originally came to see.

*We go to Rocky Vista University during their lunch time. These are students who have completed 4 years of regular college and are taking additional medical training to become a doctor. They want to help others. The dogs help them de-stress during this very intense training.



All my dogs have participated in Library reading programs. This is where a young child reads to a dog. Studies have shown that a child's reading skills improve quite dramatically when they read to a dog. Reading to a dog brings them out of their shell and makes them feel very special because THEY get to do something that others don't -- that is -- THEY get to read to a dog.

One little boy at a Library had no problem coming out of his shell. He was a little pistol. At one point he said - "Why isn't she LOOKING at me?" I said "Oh, she's listening. Haven't you ever closed your eyes

when someone is reading to you and you can picture what is happening in the story?" He thought about that a moment. You could see the wheels going around in his head. Then he said, "WHERE?" He had probably only seen dogs whose ears stood up or were quite visible. Molly kind of looks like a mop when she's laying down. I picked up one of her ears and said "See, this is her ear". Either he didn't HAVE any more questions, or he figured I had an answer for every one of his questions. I was just glad that Molly didn't start snoring at that point because I wasn't quite sure how I was going to answer that one.

