



## *Debbie Eckhart and Pugsley*

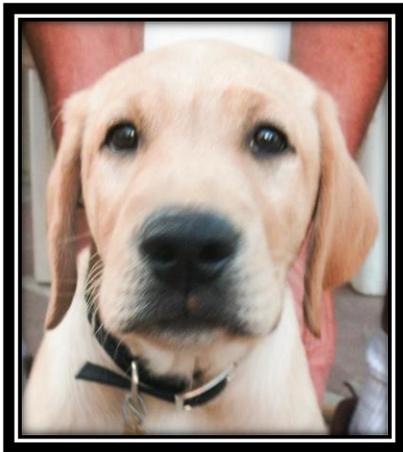


It was August of 2011, I was standing outside of the puppy truck for Guide Dogs for the Blind. I heard my name called and I stepped through the crowd and closer to the door of the puppy truck. Just a few moments later one of the puppy truck drivers stepped out of the truck with a yellow ball of fur. He held the ball of fur high in the air and announced "this is Pugsley" I had just been handed my 11<sup>th</sup> guide dog puppy!

Pugsley is a yellow lab and has always been very curious. As a puppy he was always willing to learn anything new and he learned very fast. Being a Guide dog puppy he was allowed to go everywhere. So some of our adventures were to the grocery store, the doctor's office, the movies, the stock show, restaurants, downtown Denver, and countless other places. Every time I would pick up Pugsley's gear to go out, he was ready. I can truly say that he enjoyed every single time we would go somewhere. To show his happiness Pugsley would not only wag his tail he would wiggle his whole back end. At the time he was a pup there was a song on the radio that had a line in it that said "wiggle wiggle wiggle" well, that became Pugsley's song. Every time it came on the radio we would dance to it and he would wiggle his back end!

I trained Pugsley for approximately 13 months. Not only did he learn to go out in public but he had to learn 12 different commands. We worked on his training daily. Then came the day that I had to put him back on the puppy truck. He was going to go to the San Rafael, Ca. campus for Guide Dogs for the Blind to learn all of his harness work and to learn how to guide his new partner. This is such a bitter sweet day for puppy raisers. On one hand you want your puppy to succeed and have a wonderful life as a guide dog yet, on the other hand you are crying, you have spent over a year with this pup and you have fallen in love with him and you don't want him to leave. You also may be secretly thinking that your pup won't make it and you can get him back as a pet. Of course the last part is never our intention.





So off Pugsley went to San Rafael. The first few weeks I didn't hear anything about him. Around the 4<sup>th</sup> week he finally showed up on the weekly phase report. The weekly phase report tells us puppy raisers what phase of training our puppy is on. The phases are 1-8. So over the weeks and the months I watched Pugsley get all the way up to phase 7. I was so excited that he was almost at the end of his training. Then one day I got a phone call from my CFR (she over sees all the puppy raisers in CO & UT) telling me that Pugsley has been pulled from the program. My heart just sank. I asked her why and she told me that he was career changed due to fear. His

trainers had taken him to Fisherman's Wharf and he had barked at a vendor. Unfortunately, that is unacceptable to become a guide dog. Here my fearless little puppy that was willing to do anything and go anywhere was career changed. She asked me if I would like to have him back as a pet and I jumped on the chance to have him back again. So a few days later he was put on an airplane and flown back to Co. Once he got home I realized that I had to find a new job for him. He was so used to going somewhere every single day and sitting at home was not for him.

Years ago I had made my first career change dog a therapy dog with Delta Society and Diana McQuarrie. Unfortunately, that wasn't the right job for him and we didn't continue. So fast forward to 2013 I had to decided that Pugsley would make a great therapy dog. He needed a job. Over the years I had seen Diana at Guide Dog functions and during our conversations she had told me that she was still teaching people how to have their pets become therapy animals. So once again I took a class from Diana, and Pugsley and I took our evaluation and we passed!

We also became registered with the READ program. We volunteer at the Any Think Library in Thornton. Pugsley lovingly listens to the children while they read to him. One of the funniest parts of the library is when the kids are reading and they turn the book around to show Pugsley the pictures!

We are now volunteering at the Adams County Courthouse in the victims' advocate waiting room. In this room victims are waiting to testify in court. It can be very stressful for some but, Pugsley loves interacting with everyone and putting them at ease. The court house also allows victims to request a therapy dog to be with them when they are going to testify or if it is sentencing day for the guilty person. We had



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DENVER PET PARTNERS



such a request from a woman that was deaf. The first day we met her she had to testify and she was very scared. The victim had a lot of support from family and friends but really enjoyed having Pugsley there. Although we were not allowed in the court room with the victim we all sat in a separate room where Pugsley could sit next to the victim. After the victim testified she thanked Pugsley and I for being there to help support her. We had gotten to the court house at 8am and we left at 5pm. We came back for sentencing at the victim's request. She told us that she might not have made it through testifying had it not been for Pugsley. That just made my heart full to hear that.

Pugsley and I also enjoy volunteering at special events. We have participated in an Elementary School READ event, Whole Foods event for DPP, the De Stress event at Aurora Community College, The Conference for Attorneys and Child Law, Swedish Hospital for 2 years, and the special health program for children at Swedish for 2 years in a row.

