

Allison Schovee and Abby

I grew up loving dogs, and in particular, Labrador Retrievers. But I also grew up in a home without dogs, and thus, shortly after I was married, my husband bought me my first yellow lab. That was almost 32 years ago.

Abby is our 4th yellow lab, but maybe our most special! By the time we received her, I had already raised a family, and my husband and I were now happily empty nesters with time to travel and visit family across the country. But the idea of not having a dog in the house was unthinkable. After much arm-wrestling, I convinced my husband to buy me yet another yellow lab.

Every lab we have had has been a gift to our family, but Abby was somehow a standout. From the time she was very young, it was obvious that she was extremely smart, very trainable (she loved learning and obeying commands); she had an easy-going personality, and most importantly, she was SUPER cute!



Knowing that there was something special about this dog, the idea of therapy dog work began to flicker in my mind. Unfortunately, we had a turn of events that sidelined those ideas. At only 6 months, we



noticed that Abby walked with a limp, and X-rays quickly revealed that she had torn her ACL. No longer was she allowed a normal puppy's life—no climbing stairs, no jumping in and out of the car, or no running around like a regular dog. I contemplated and agonized over the difficult and costly surgery required, but in time we knew that our sweet little girl would have to undergo the surgery that would completely reconstruct her knee. Surgery would then be followed by 10 weeks of total rest and no activity. Impossible!

No sooner had we managed our way through this painful 3-month process, when we noticed that Abby was once again limping, but this time on the other knee. X-rays revealed our fears—she had completely torn the other ACL. Surgery #2 was unavoidable, and we wondered again if she would ever have a normal dog's life. She was a special dog with an uncertain future.

DPP Team of the Month (August 2019)

DENVER PET PARTNERS



With all the surgeries behind us and brand new (and expensive) knees, the idea of therapy dog work once again caught my attention. My only problem was that I knew NOTHING about therapy dogs! Honestly, I didn't know the difference between a service dog or a therapy dog. Thus, I hired a dog trainer to train me to train her. I did my research and found Denver Pet Partners, and began the year-long process of preparing for DPP registration. We practiced our obedience and training in PetSmart stores, Washington Park, outdoor malls—any place where she would encounter every conceivable distraction. This was asking a lot of a young Labrador!



The evaluation process with Denver Pet Partners 'scared me to death'. We practiced and practiced, but I had no idea of how she would handle in the testing room. She wasn't perfect, but gratefully we passed, and I was elated!

Now the task that every new team faces—where to serve as a team? Susan Horecki was amazing in helping me assess where the right fit might be. We looked at many different facilities including nursing homes and hospitals. But those facilities didn't seem just right for us because I was looking for a place where I could build ongoing relationships week after week with the clients and staff. Susan then introduced me to KADEP (Kings Adult Day Enrichment Program) that seemed to be the perfect place for us. Abby and I have been happily visiting KADEP for almost 4 years.

KADEP is an exceptional facility that serves as an adult daycare/enrichment program. The clients range anywhere from having mild MS to some having serious brain injuries that have left them physically and mentally handicapped. Many are confined to wheelchairs. But in spite of their real disabilities, KADEP is a caring community that truly feels like a family of friends. Real joy and vibrant life fill this place! And Abby and I have been warmly welcomed and embraced into the KADEP family.

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I love the way that the clients light up when Abby and I arrive. I hear expressions of delight across the rooms with many calling out in a loud voice, "Abby is here!" Electric wheelchairs start motoring in our direction and often line up for time with Abby. This truly touches my heart in ways hard to describe.



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By far, the best part of our time at KADEP has been the friendships we have made. Over time, I have gotten to know so many clients whom I consider my true friends. I have loved getting to know them, hear about their lives, and learn about their families. I miss them when I am gone and think of them and pray for them when I'm away. They have brought joy, purpose and perspective into my life (and hopefully, Abby and I have done the same for them!). Every time I am there, I am inspired by the lives of so many who in spite of their difficult challenges, carry on with such courage and strength of character. Abby has been the bridge that makes these relationships all possible!

Thanks for letting us share our story with you!

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