

## *Adrienne Marsh and Tyson*



I will never forget October 30, 2015, as it is the day Tyson was adopted and joined our family. My husband, Tim, and I had recently lost our first rescue Yeager. Losing Yeager was difficult for Tim, Buster, and I. Tim kept visiting the Foothills Shelter in Golden on his way home from work as this is where we rescued Yeager. One day I was in meetings at work and Tim kept calling my cell phone, so I excused myself to answer and Tim says “I found the one. I found a dog that looks like Yeager and he is in the cage we rescued Yeager from.” Fortunately, my boss at the time was a dog lover and she knew all about our

recent loss and she let me leave work early. I pulled into the parking lot at Foothills Shelter and there was my sweet husband Tim and this big young dog sitting right next to him on a bench. They both had these big smiles on their faces, and I remember thinking “Well I guess that is our new dog”. There is no way I could object when I saw the happy look on my Tim’s face. I need to mention at this time my husband and I just started rescuing a year and a half before meeting Tyson. Yeager was a 12-year-old German short haired pointer that was just released from hospice before we rescued him. Our current dog at the time Buster, was a 12-year-old fully trained and well-mannered Catahoula mix rescued from Arizona. Tim was sitting on the bench with Tyson who was a 2-year-old, 80-pound Chocolate Labrador retriever. I had absolutely no idea what I was about to agree to.

I realized right away that adopting Tyson was going to be quite different from taking in senior dogs. Tyson hated the crate and literally screamed at the top of his lungs if we put him in it. Seriously he does not bark but screams till this day when placed in a crate. Tyson and our dog Buster all of the sudden became “thick as thieves” and were also known as “Smokey and the Bandit” as they would get into all kinds of shenanigans while Tim and I were at work. They tore up things, broke into the pantry multiple times, counter surfed, hung out on the dining room table, and managed to get things from high shelves. Tyson even ate a package of new Christmas lights I left on the





counter. So, I did what social workers do. I did my research to figure out how to calm this big, dopey, high energy dog and it all pointed to training. I started exercising Tyson daily and we began training through Pet Smart weekly. I really focused on working with Tyson daily for up to 2 hours. I would exercise him and then work on his training, it did not take long until Tyson began to calm down and listen to me and Tim.

The trainer through Petsmart informed Tim and I that Tyson is a lab and labs want to make their owners happy ,so if we are interested he could probably go through all the training and become a therapy dog. I was thinking all I want is to calm this “wild beast”, so he does not destroy my home. Little did I know that Tyson was going to prove my inner thoughts wrong and become an incredibly talented therapist. Tyson went through all the training classes and I worked with him daily and eventually he and Buster began to refrain from participating in their adventurous shenanigans and they became best of friends. Once Tyson graduated from all his training classes I investigated becoming a volunteer team with Denver Pet Partners. I was so nervous as our test day approached as I have severe test anxiety and there are times Tyson will decide to ignore me and do his own thing. I had never trained a dog before and I did not feel confident moving into a therapy team role.



Tyson and I took our first test in July 2017 and not only did he pass he passed with a complex rating. I could not believe it; Tyson knew it was time to work and he stepped up to the plate as he does every time we volunteer.

So, Tyson and I started our journey with Pet Partners. As I mentioned before I am a social worker. I currently work in emergency room mental health, but I have a long history of working with foster and adopted children. I decided to work in a shelter with kids in the system as this is a population, I am comfortable working with. Tyson and I have been volunteering at the Shiloh House Sanctuary Program, which is a residential for adolescents. Tyson absolutely excelled in his abilities in this environment. He loves going there.

From the beginning Tyson’s therapy skills were evident. When we first started visiting the adolescents there was this one girl who was sad that she was removed from her home without her dogs. She missed her dogs terribly. The staff was not sure how she would react to Tyson so warned me in advance. When we entered the room, Tyson gravitated to her and sat right next to her. I asked if it was ok and she smiled and gave us permission to stay



there. Tyson then sat right in front of this girl looking at her as she was petting him then he sat on her lap and put his head on her shoulder. I realized he was hugging her, and she held him and cried. I checked in to make sure this girl was ok with this and she said, "Tyson knows I am sad and is trying to help me feel better." In all my years as a therapist who worked with traumatized children this was one of the most beautiful therapeutic moments I have witnessed. That was the moment I learned that Tyson was the true therapist in the family.

I went through the reading program seminar facilitated through Pet Partners and then began working with the younger children located in the Adams House which is another Shiloh Facility. I know the impacts of trauma on the child brain and how hard it is for children to learn and read



while they are encountering traumatic experiences such as being removed from their homes and being placed in foster care. I worked with Tyson utilizing the infamous "Cheerios" book and started the reading program. Most of the kids in Adams House were boys ages 7-10 and almost all of them when they started the reading program would tell me they could not read, or they were "bad "readers. I showed them the "Cheerios" book and explained how they could put Cheerios on the pages as it directs and control Tyson's behavior by telling him to wait or leave it and then they can release him so he can eat the Cheerios off of the pages of the book. The boys loved this and would laugh as Tyson would drool waiting to be released or sometimes, he would roll onto the book so the child would pet his stomach instead of reading. Tyson always did something silly and these boys would laugh and they learned to like reading and then would ask to read 2 books or harder books. This was such an awesome experience to be a part of.

There was one-time Tyson, and I went to the shelter and there was a boy we had been visiting and reading with who was having a bad day. I could hear him in the hallway screaming and having a tantrum and I truly just felt sad for this poor 10-year-old boy who we had been visiting for multiple months. The boy came into the room with a mad face and when Tyson saw this boy he perked up as Tyson likes spending time with this boy. I asked the boy if Tyson and I could visit with him and he said "NO!". So, I respected his wishes and Tyson, and I went to visit other kids. A few minutes later the boy approached Tyson and I and asked if he could have "Tyson time" I agreed of course. The boy laid on the ground and Tyson laid right next to him and they both laid there hugging until eventually the boy began to smile and Tyson was kissing his face. This reminded me of the importance of touch to





humans. Professionals who work with children in the system must be careful and keep boundaries, but children and all humans need and crave touch. Tyson does not have to follow the same boundaries and he is able to use his touch to help these traumatized children to feel better. This was truly another heartwarming experience I got to witness.

During one of our last visits before COVID-19, Tyson and I were at the shelter with the adolescents and this teenage girl ran into the room crying and upset. Tyson went right up to her and sat in front of her. She was crying but happy to see Tyson and bent down. Tyson sat there and kissed her tears away and eventually she sat in front of him and he hugged her until she stopped crying. She looked up to me and said, "Tyson is the best therapist I ever had." This brought tears to my eyes. I have been blessed to be on Tyson's team and witness the many magical moments he has facilitated by helping kids who are sad or who struggle with reading. Tyson always knows when to be silly to create laughter, when to get close to calm the kids with touch, and Tyson knows who needs the most attention during each visit. Volunteering with Tyson has been an amazing and eye-opening experience for me, and I miss it. Tyson does not like that he is furloughed, he is beside himself and keeps moping around the house and pouting as he does not understand why we are no longer going to work. He often gives me this side glance like he is saying "mom what is your problem why are we not working?" Covid-19 has had a big impact on all our lives, especially during this Holiday Season. Tyson and I look forward to the time we can get back to volunteering with the children as it became an essential part of our lives that we deeply miss.

