

## *Blue's Story*



I can't imagine not sharing my life with a Great Dane. Eleven years ago I fell in love with these wonderful gentle giants. I had become a single mother and was looking for a good companion for my children and a protector for my family. We found both in Duke, a Great Dane. He took his job quite seriously, teaching my children valuable lessons in responsibility, patience and love, along with providing wonderful companionship.

Duke did his superb job of helping me with the children, then, much to my dismay, the years sped by, the children grew up and moved out of the nest. I had heard about empty nest syndrome but had never realized how hard it could be. I found myself with a lot of time on my hands. By now no longer able to take long hikes in the canyon, dear Duke was much more content to stay home and keep the couch warm. He needed a new and different job; he could help me raise a pup to be as wonderful and magnificent as he is. I wanted a puppy to learn from the best and Duke was certainly that.

As I began my quest for a puppy, I remembered from many years back, the beautiful blue coat color of Duke's father. I couldn't find a local breeder, but an internet search found the puppy of my dreams. He was only two weeks old but his crinkled face and white chest told me he was the right choice. The breeder said the pup was available and could come live with me as soon as it was eight weeks old. Wow! What a gamble! I wasn't sure about getting a cyber dog, but just look at that face! Six weeks later, with travel arrangements complete, Blue came to live with Duke and me.



When Blue arrived he was twenty three pounds of scared and lonely puppy crouched in the back of a travel crate. When I pulled him out it was mutual love at first sight. He knew I was his new Mom, greeting me with big, wet kisses. As I held him tight, he snuggled up against me and has hardly left my side since. He has also become a best friend and constant companion. I can't imagine starting a day without waking to him nuzzling me to play his favorite game of catch or to go for a morning romp. Our days are spent together, playing, working and learning as he goes with me every where. He is the world's biggest lap dog and is certainly a Mama's boy.

Duke rose to the challenge of having a new pup around. At first it was difficult for him but I kept reminding him that

we had a big job to do. He needed to help me teach this pup to be as amazing as Duke himself. They have become wonderful friends and Duke has been an incredible role model for Blue. Blue has an amazing amount of respect for his dear mentor. I believe that Blue's playful, joyful spirit helps keep Duke young at heart.



Duke helped me immensely by teaching Blue all the good things dogs learn from each other, still, I needed help teaching this rapidly growing giant. I enrolled Blue and myself in our first puppy kindergarten class. Blue towered over all the other puppies, but he quickly made fast friends and enjoyed class immensely. His favorite part was playtime. Our instructor, Mark, was fabulous and gave Blue and me such strong encouragement. As the weeks passed Blue's training progressed, Mark mentioned the Delta Society and therapy dogs. He said that Blue had an ideal temperament for that type of work.



I had never heard of Delta Society before. At home I again used the internet to find my answers. I was amazed that there was such a wonderful organization. I could only hope that Blue and I could someday become part of such an amazing group. Since Blue was six months old at the time, and a year old is the minimum age for becoming a pet partner, we had lots of work to do and time to do it. We spent many hours together socializing my rapidly growing pup. We went to parks, playgrounds, malls, and anywhere that would allow us. He now weighed about 100 pounds, was very tall, had an unusual color and an especially sweet disposition that he attracted a lot of attention. Children, teens, adults, and elderly alike would ask to meet Blue. He was

thrilled with all of the attention. He loves to be loved and to love in return. Blue had found his niche.

Blue was almost a year old when I contacted Diana McQuarrie at Denver Pet Partners. Her immediate response told me about an upcoming class. I enrolled and we were on our way. By now Blue was just over a year old and I didn't know if we were really ready. Blue was still very much a pup, although he was doing well with his training he still loved to play a lot!! I took the class then he and I went through the team evaluation. We were not ready; we did not pass the evaluation. I was heartbroken. I began to wonder if this was meant to be. Had I misjudged his calling? Was I wrong to hope we could be a therapy team? We left the evaluation tearful and discouraged.

At home I received much consolation and encouragement from my husband. After crying for a bit, I decided to try again. I contacted Mark, my wonderful trainer and asked for help. He was great!!!

He helped Blue and me so much to get over the hump and smooth out the rough edges. He taught me so much and I will always be grateful to him for spending his time, energy and patience with Blue and me.

A few months later I signed up to do the team evaluation again. WERE WE READY?? I was so nervous. (I don't even think State Nursing Boards were as tough.) I was having some real doubts about my motives. Was this really best for Blue or was this something that only I wanted? Was Blue trying to let me know that he wasn't interested in all of this? Was I just being a pushy stage Mom and asking too much of my beloved friend? Maybe we should just continue spending all our time on hikes and off-leash parks frolicking in the water. Blue somehow communicated from his wonderful, sweet soul that he wanted to try again.



The confirmation to try again came when we encountered a sweet, very frail, elderly lady shopper. She asked to approach Blue. She was so tiny compared to this massive 140 pound dog, yet she hugged him as she started to cry. Blue nuzzled her gently, spending many minutes sharing his heart as this beautiful stranger told me of the beloved Great Dane of her youth. Before leaving she said how Blue had brought such joy to her day and thanked me for sharing him. I believe she was an angel sent to show me that this was what Blue should do. Yes, we were ready.

The team evaluation day came and Blue said "yes". He did all that was asked of him and we passed with flying colors. He had said "yes" to sharing his love with whomever needs it, to be a friend to someone who might need a kind paw or a gentle hug, to bring a smile to someone's heart today. "Yes", he wanted to be a therapy dog and be shared with others. His heart is as big as the rest of him, and he was ready to go.



So, now we go and go. Blue thrives on his visits to the Life Care Center. He knows the day we go to see all our new friends. He is excited to go and seems to take his work very seriously. When his Delta vest goes on he knows he has work to do. When we go through the doors at the Life Care Center he begins working. He turns on the charm and greets people with a nuzzle and a hug.

I am especially grateful to one

patient in particular. Beverly said that the day she met Blue she turned the corner in her recovery from surgery. She called Blue's giant ears "wings" and said that he is her angel. Blue and I have made some extraordinary friends. I feel very blessed to have such a wonderful dog friend which can touch so many lives with his sweet spirit and gentle soul. I am so thankful that he has met such wonderful people with whom he shares his heart. I am forever grateful for Delta Society and Denver Pet Partners for each has taught me the value of the



human animal connection and the joy that our beloved animal companions can bring to others. Thank you Delta and thank you Blue for being my amazing friend.



Editors Note: *Who can think of a Great Dane and not think of one of America's most beloved comic characters, Marmaduke? Well, for me that has changed... now when I think of a Great Dane, an image of a wonderful therapy dog comes to mind, that of Blue. He's certainly not the clumsy, boneheaded comic character that the Winslow family could never get obedience-trained. Blue is a graceful, well-trained, dignified looking, and wonderful young therapy dog with a heart for service as big as he is! Instead of focusing on his size, Lisa presents as a benevolent leader and the two of them work together seamlessly. Our clients and Lisa's team-mates alike have nothing but praise and admiration for her and Blue. What strikes me as noteworthy is that, despite Blue's size and the attention it naturally attracts, Lisa has a remarkable ability to turn a visit situation around so that the person they're talking with becomes the focus of attention. This clearly exemplifies a wonderful compassion for those she and Blue encounter. Despite Lisa's full-time work schedule and many other commitments, she faithfully visits regularly with Blue and also takes part in community education outreach for Denver Pet Partners. We are honored to have you, Lisa and Blue, as our Pet Partner Team of the Month!*

Diana McQuarrie