



Paul Rogalla and Hayden



I first saw Hayden in the parking lot of the Glendale PetSmart at one of their big adoption weekends in May of 2009. After having had a black retriever mix and a flat-coated retriever in my past, I had decided that I wasn't going to get another black dog, but I was going to adopt a golden retriever or yellow lab. However, once I saw him I could not resist at least taking him out of the cage and putting him on a leash. Hayden was confident that he had found the right person, and quickly persuaded me that he was the one. On our first trip home, I expected Hayden to be nervously excited, pacing in the back of the car and sticking his head out the window. He slept all the way home.

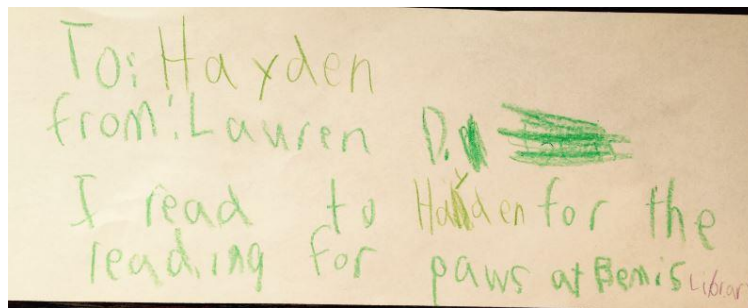
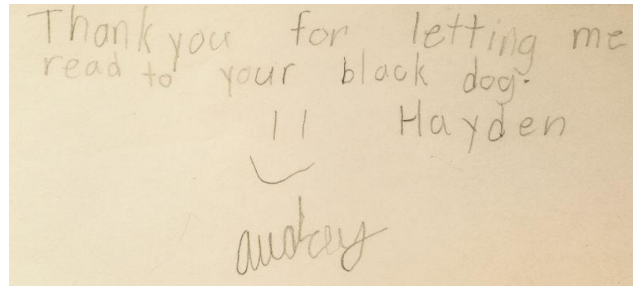
Even before I adopted Hayden I knew I wanted to do animal therapy with him. When I saw a flyer about the Paws to Read program at the Englewood Library, I asked the librarian about it and that's how I found out about Denver Pet Partners. After taking the handler training (a full weekend!) and passing our certification in the spring of 2010, it turned out that the Englewood program was at its full complement of therapy teams. Fortunately for us, the Paws to Read program at the Bemis Public Library in Littleton was looking to add another team, and there we were (and still are).

The decision to work in a library setting was a very conscious one for me as a handler. My previous dog Max and I had visited the Englewood Meridian Senior Care center for three years under a program originally created and administered by the Denver Dumb Friends League. I started at Englewood Meridian with the same energy and interest that I had coming into Denver Pet Partner. However, as time passed, working in a nursing home environment even twice a month became very draining experience for me. In the Pet Partners training, in team meetings, and other settings we often talk about being advocates for our animals and making sure that they are in an environment which suits them. However, it's just as important we advocate for ourselves as well, and realize that some environments may not be appropriate or productive for us as handlers.

Happily, working in a library setting seems to agree with both myself and Hayden. Even though (or maybe because) I don't have any children of my own, I enjoy their company in Paws to Read sessions, and I almost always feel more positive when I leave a Paws to Read session as when I came in. One of the best things about working with the kids at the library is their joy at seeing the animals, and being able to tell the kids "Yes, you can pet him". Occasionally, one of the readers will leave behind a note for Hayden thanking him for letting them read to him. These have become some of my most favorite memories of working at the library. Even those not participating in the program (both kids and adults) enjoy the presence of the animals and the irresistible urge for an ear-scratch or a pat on the head. I



have also been blessed to have worked with other handlers who have a wealth of experience with children and I am constantly trying to learn by watching them work.



Hayden and I have volunteered at several evaluations as a neutral dog team, and have worked numerous times as the evaluation demonstration team at handler training courses. Hayden is especially fond of the handler training courses. Since the demo usually happens immediately after lunch, students return to the conference room with a little extra time before class resumes, and Hayden is perfectly happy to become the sponge that soaks up their attention and affection. I can't recommend enough volunteering for these kinds of activities, it's a great opportunity for you and your Partner to display (and/or improve) your evaluation skills.



I feel fortunate to have found an organization like Denver Pet Partners. I am indebted to those who came before me at DPP who make it possible for me to practice my community service with confidence and competence, and my work beyond that of half of an animal/handler team is inspired by them.

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