

## *Julie Yoder with Mackenzie, Jackson, and Auggie*



*Julie and Mackenzie*



*Julie and Jackson*



*Julie and Auggie*

Mackenzie and I have been Pet Partners since 2004; Jackson and I since 2007; and Auggie and I were just registered together this April, 2012. Our journey has been full of twists and surprises, but we've always been grounded by what originally drew us in – love of the work.



Mackenzie came to me as a rescue pup of 9 months shortly after my Catahoula mix Tuesday died. Tuesday died suddenly of a brain disorder only 3 weeks after being registered with Pet Partners, before our first visit. Mackenzie had a mission from the day I met her. She stole my heart and taught me that I can grieve and love at the same time. I believe she has passed that on to many others along our way. She is a wonderfully independent, strong-willed German Shepherd, with the biggest heart I've known. We certified with National Animal Assisted Crisis Response in 2005, and have been on many crisis calls together. We have forged our way through hurricane, tornado, and flood sites, as well as public shootings and lots of private grief. Mackenzie is now 9 ½, and what she lacks in physical stamina, she makes up for in enthusiasm and joy. She loves visiting inpatient psychiatric facilities and domestic violence shelters. I tell people she is a "let's snuggle up, have a cup of coffee, and talk about life" kind of girl. Mackenzie led me on a path I couldn't have envisioned for myself, and has brought me experiences I couldn't have had without her.

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I have lots of “ahhh” moments when I visit with Mackenzie. I think she has a way of making people feel special when she visits with them. We have what I call everyday miracles, where I can just see people connect with her, by the expression on their face, and on hers. I think most days hold a special story when we visit with our dogs.



When Mackenzie was young, I did foster work for a local dog rescue, and agreed to take in a mostly feral Weimaraner mix named Auggie. He needed social experience if he were ever going to be adopted. That was in 2005, and I think it’s going just fine! Needless to say, I flunked fostering. My goal for Auggie was for him just to be able to survive in the world successfully. He and his brother had been kept in a big pen on an abandoned farm where a neighbor would come by and



throw out food to the group of dogs. Auggie was never touched by humans until we got him into rescue. He has taught me about trust, caring for a tender heart, and depth of commitment. Through lots of time, patience on both of our parts and the help of a very balanced pack of dog friends, Auggie is doing great. He will always be anxious and view the world skeptically, but he has found a place where his heart is content and he feels safe. Auggie fell in love with a neighbor who is a senior, and I realized he has a knack for interacting with that population. Auggie is clicker trained, and loves to be my obedience dog when I teach classes, so we gave the Pet Partners evaluation a whirl. He did great, and now loves visiting nursing homes and does hospice work. He is still teaching me, and my latest lesson is not to put him in a box (mentally). He is a different kind of therapy dog – direct eye contact is too intimidating, and he is not gregarious as we think of the

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typical friendly dog. But he will end up resting his head in your hand while you pet him softly. I'm finding that most people end up talking softly and sweetly to Auggie. I think he speaks to the caretaking part of people who want to give back. I am ever mindful to watch his stress signals and not ask too much of him too quickly. We'll let Jackson and Mackenzie handle the kids, and Auggie will be very happy with the assisted-living facilities.

And then along came Jackson. Born in 2006, he is a tri-color rough Collie, and is a joy to live with. He is loyal, patient, and has taught me lots about pack dynamics. He is a peacemaker and a very sensitive boy. Jackson is my constant companion, and a versatile therapy dog. He was certified as a crisis response dog in 2010, and is a good ambassador for the work. He is good with kids and loves teenagers. He is patient and sturdy in spirit and body. Jackson has led me down a different path, to a new group of dog and human friends I now couldn't imagine being without. Jackson makes me smile every day, and grounds our pack with a sense of loyalty and commitment.



I am learning to appreciate every day as a gift, and my dogs help me realize nothing is as important as this very moment. My friend, Diana McQuarrie, helps me remember the very best thing we can do for people is to believe in them. I value my satellite affiliation with DPP and love soaking up the good karma and encouragement that surrounds your group. Thank you for including me on your journey.