

## Denver Pet Partners – Team of the Month (Feb 2012)



### *Linda Forsyth and Kenzie*



It's amazing how life works, isn't it? I had spent a big portion of my life as a total cat lover, never able to imagine living with a drooling, panting, smelly dog for Pete's sake. Without dwelling too much on the past, suffice to say, a gorgeous canine female (of the golden retriever variety) changed my life. Her name was Belle and she belonged to my cousin. She was a miracle dog to me. Instantly, I was in love. Oh, I never actually owned Belle, but have shared my life with four dogs since then - each one so special and lovable and heartbreakingly dear.



Kenzie (aka Mackenzie) wiggled her way into our hearts (that would be my husband, Dennis, and me) in 2007. She was then living with her first owner, Kay, a delightful lady whom I had met in our 2006 Handler Training Class for Denver Pet Partners. I was training to visit with my golden, Toby, and the resemblance between her dog and mine was uncanny. When Kay started to work for the airlines she found it necessary to leave Kenzie with friends while she traveled, including us. Toby and Kenzie became instant best buddies. Eventually, and with a heavy heart, Kay realized that Kenzie would be a happier dog staying with us full time. Kenzie then became a part of our family.

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Toby and I enjoyed four years as pet partners, visiting patients at Swedish Medical Center. We would often visit fifth floor east (women's surgery) and Orthopedics. I was reminded of the power of our therapy animals when Toby and I were having a conversation with a lovely lady who was finishing her last chemotherapy infusion. She was so thrilled to see Toby. Toby and I were her first visitors on 5 east after her surgery. And, then we were there to see her off to a healthy (and hopefully) long life as a cancer-free person. It was a special moment for her. Toby is now retired and happily living as a spoiled, couch-hogging house doggie.



Kenzie is now my 'hospital pal.' Known for her very cute tail wiggle and her determined lean (that would be the 'please pet me' posture), she is a confident and eager therapy dog. She is long past the early days when she would totally flatten, 4 legs sprawled, on the elevator floor when it moved. Nowadays she leads the way, knowing which hallway to walk through - a considerable

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feat considering the convoluted structure of Swedish. We remember many special visits - the elderly patient in the ER who murmured, "It's ok, it's ok...." as she petted Kenzie. The patient's daughter in tears, she was so moved by the experience. The ER staff getting down on the floor, hugging Kenz, perhaps unloading some of the stress that is such a part of their daily life. Watching Kenzie 'work the room' in Critical Care Waiting, instinctively knowing who needs her attention and healing touch the most. The work she does is a miracle to see.



Our little girl Kenzie is now 9 years old. She's moving a little more stiffly but still eagerly runs to the door on our 'Swedish' days. If I am a little slow to get ready, she's there, standing next to me, staring, as if to say, "OK, what's the hold up...let's get going." How does she know which day it is? When the time comes for her to retire, I know it will be hard for both of us, but I will be comforted in knowing how much she cared that every person she met should feel happy - because she is.

Jon Katz expressed the wonder of pet-therapy work in his excellent book, Izzy and Lenore, discussing the connection between his dog Izzy and hospice patients that they visited -

*"Izzy couldn't communicate in human terms, but his bearing and demeanor spoke for him... At times something so palpable passed between Izzy and these people that it awed, even disturbed, me, because I couldn't understand it or explain it. These were humbling moments, spiritual, beyond my experience or comprehension. Several times I felt I was in the presence of something much mightier than the two of us, that I was meant to be in that room, to witness those events for a reason"....*

Pretty amazing.

Thank you for honoring us as Team of the Month.  
Linda Forsyth