



Ellen James and Pennie



It Was All In Her Eyes

In May 2005 when our second Lab, Annie, reached her tenth birthday I got the idea that it was time to start looking for another dog. My thoughts were tending toward a rescue, and I definitely knew I wanted a Lab. I knew I wanted young enough to start training early as I was hoping maybe she would be the right temperament for a therapy dog. At that point in time there was only one Lab Rescue in Colorado and they tended to only have older dogs. Now there are many more. So, I started to look at out of state rescues for younger Labs who needed a home. I discovered that Lab Rescue OK would allow out of state rescues with reference checks. I spotted this incredibly sweet Chocolate female on Lab Rescue OK's website with the warmest eyes I've ever seen.

Unfortunately, you could also see every one of her ribs and vertebrae. She just said to me, "Come to Tulsa and bring me home to Colorado." My husband, David,

thought I was a total nut case, but that's just exactly what my youngest daughter, Emily, and I did. After filling out the application and packing up the car, the following weekend we made our road trip to Tulsa. We came home with Annie's little sister, Penny (which we changed to Pennie). David also gave me grief because Annie lived for another 6 ½ more years after "replacement puppy" came home as he affectionately referred to Pennie. Pennie's adventure as a therapy dog began under the gentle guidance of sweet, special Annie before her passing at the age of 16 ½.

Pennie and I first started our training as a therapy team with HABIC. I was working at St. Joseph Hospital in the Education Dept. as a nurse and we were the first team allowed into the Intensive Care Unit. One of my most favorite remembrances is when Pennie and I were working with a man who was ventilator dependent and having a really hard time with it. The respiratory therapist had been changing the settings trying to help the patient to fight the ventilator less. Pennie and I arrived in the ICU. She hopped up in bed with this patient and she laid down next to him per my signal. The patient started petting her and all of sudden started to get really relaxed. As a nurse, I am watching his respiratory rate get slower, his oxygen saturation increase, his pulse decrease and his blood pressure decrease. Pennie is laying there with her tail wagging. The patient is no longer coughing and fighting the ventilator. The respiratory therapist states, "Ok, I'm going home. I'm not needed anymore." The hard part was at the end of our visit because the patient really didn't want us to leave. There were tears in his eyes and he was hugging on Pennie. The power of the human animal bond not only for me but for others has always been an incredibly powerfully one.

DPP Team of the Month (January-February 2017)

DENVER PET PARTNERS



Six years ago Pennie and I started working as READ team at the Westminster Library with another organization no longer functioning. When they closed, Pennie and I found our way to DPP. While our primary assignment has been with READ, I have very much enjoyed lots of other assignments. We have participated in many evaluations as neutral dog and crowd, I love attending school distress events with Pennie, we have attended the holiday events at DIA, we have attended multiple READ events around the metro area and state. I really love working with the kids at READ. It is so incredibly rewarding to help a child in the process of reading. And even more special is to light a child's world up because they are cuddled up to a dog. Some of my most special moments have come either through children learning about dogs or deciding that they want a dog because of READ.

Pennie just celebrated her 11th birthday in December. Like all Labs, there are days that she is nothing short of a big puppy. Other days, when her hip is bothering her and all the up and down is causing her pain, she looks her age. So, I have decided it was time for Pennie's well deserved retirement. Her little sister, Winnie, a Lab/Australian Shepherd Mix is hopefully up and coming. We still have some training challenges before Winnie is ready for therapy work. While Pennie is retired, that does not mean that I am. I will continue to support DPP in any way that I can. I have made many incredible friends through DPP. I sincerely value my experiences of service to my community through my bond with Pennie and look forward to my continuing service with DPP.

