

## *Rachel Cain and Gunner*



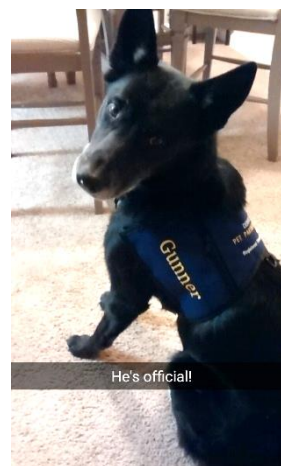
Gunner entered my life while I was still engaged and had recently graduated college. I was back visiting my alma mater and my fiancé mentioned to me that he was thinking about getting a dog. Of course, I gave him all the encouragement he needed, and then some. We went to the local shelter to see what dogs were available and came across this cool looking, athletic, black dog. We played with him in the field and quickly discovered that he loves to chase things. It took us all but a day to make the decision for him to come home with us. One of my most fond memories when we first adopted Gunner was when we were walking him around on campus and he saw a squirrel run up a tree.

Naturally, he was barking at the tree and jumping up on it, then, out of nowhere, he ran away, leash in tow. Did I mention this dog is incredibly fast? My fiancé chased him down as fast as he could run. I honestly don't remember how we ended up getting him back, but we did and from then on, we knew Gunner was a bolter.

Fast forward several months and we moved to Colorado. Gunner lived the apartment life for a time, but was able to come with me to the dog kennel I was managing. He got all the day playing he could ever ask for. I changed jobs a while later and was working for a horse barn. So again, he was able to tag along. It was at this particular barn that sparked the interest of him becoming a therapy dog. Although he was still a bolter at this time, he was the friendliest dog I had ever met. I called him the "welcoming committee" at the barn because whenever he heard a vehicle coming up the drive, he would perk up straight, stick his tail in the air, wait a couple seconds, and then run as fast as



he could to the front door, booty wiggling and back curled with excitement. It was his favorite part of being at the barn - even better than stalking the mice or chasing the deer. A client asked me if I had ever thought about using him for therapy work and the spark ignited. I found DPP in 2016 and we passed on our first go-around.



Initially, I wanted to visit the hospitals with Gunner and found Angel Paws at Castle Rock Adventist. We were visiting for a little while and I realized that Gunner wasn't really enjoying it as

much as I had hoped. He would give me these eyes while visiting hospital rooms and then look at the door. I took that as his way of telling me that he didn't want to be there. So, we stopped visiting. This worked out anyway because we were moving down to Colorado Springs and Susan from DPP connected me with the Shandy Clinic. I knew as soon as I shadowed another team there that this was the place Gunner and I needed to be. Shandy Clinic offers speech, physical, and occupational therapy to kids. We have been visiting the Shandy Clinic now for about 3 years and we will continue to visit as long as Gunner still loves it.



The most favorite trick that Gunner has with the kids is "speak." Sometimes he will use his low, quiet indoor voice, but other times he will full out bark and the kids will jump, not anticipating it. Then the giggles start. The kids also work on core strength and muscle conditioning by doing "doga." This is yoga moves with Gunner, where they can do downward dog over him while he's laying down, or they can reach and stretch in certain ways to give Gunner some scratches. Gunner really brings these kids out of their shell. I have never worked with these kids without having Gunner there, but I have been told by the therapists that his presence makes an incredible impact in how the kids perform that

day. Gunner's favorite part of being there is of course the treats and belly rubs. But he also gets to play fetch and on special occasions, the kids will make him homemade dog treats as their exercise that day. As soon as the vest goes on at home, Gunner bursts with excitement. I have seen this dog go from overly excited and crazy, to, as soon as we step in the building, he is calm and eager to work. One particular day that we were supposed to go visit, Gunner got out of the yard and we were unable to find him for several hours. I had to call Shandy Clinic and let them know why I wouldn't make it that day, assuring them that this has happened many, many times before and he always comes back. They were so worried about him. I did find him a while later with a belly full of who-knows-what, approaching me with this body posture of "mom, I did something you won't like. I'm sorry. I love you." The therapists at the Shandy Clinic still mention this day and how worried they all were about Gunner. He is very loved at this facility and it brings so much joy to my heart being able to share Gunner's ability to love people--not just the kids, but the therapists as well.



## *DPP Team of the Month (December 2021)*

DENVER PET PARTNERS



I am very grateful for Denver Pet Partners and all of the work and connections they have. Since adopting Gunner he has broken his bolting habit and is living the good life as a farm dog on our 5 acres near Colorado Springs with our other dog, Shadow. He keeps watch for mice, foxes, and cats, being sure our property is free from all such dangers. He has entered his ninth year of life so has definitely slowed down recently. I know that there will never be another dog in my life that even comes close to Gunner. He is an extremely special canine and one that will go down in history in my life and the lives of people he has touched.

