



Vicki Denhoffer with LT and Lacey



My pet therapy story started when I realized my now almost 14 yr old mini-Yorkie (August 16th birthday), LT, was an unusual Yorkie. Unlike most Yorkies, who typically connect with only one person in their human family, and are unfriendly to strangers, LT bonded with me, my husband, my son, and my daughter. He was also friendly and welcoming to anyone who entered our house, people we met when out and about, and even to other dogs, small and big (he thinks he's big, of course, regardless of his total weight of 5 lbs). It was 2010, he was 2 years old, we were living in Florida, and I didn't know anything about working as a therapy team.

In the summer of 2010, we moved to Colorado and life became busy with acclimating my family to our new environment, adopting a puppy in 2012, and the years passed quickly. In the fall of 2016, I was at a reception and met a woman who volunteered her time to train therapy and service dogs. I had not given up on LT working as a therapy dog and inquired if she knew how I could pursue my interest. She suggested I look up Pet Partners and the rest is history. I registered for the online handler class, worked through the exercises with LT and had our evaluation in February 2017. The evaluators were skeptical at first when they saw us, knowing how Yorkies typically behave. By the end, they were calling him a rockstar, as he didn't even flinch when the bedpan was dropped on the floor. He is one cool character.

Soon after, we became a regular team at Parker Adventist Hospital, in their PawPals program, visiting staff, patients, and visitors every Tuesday morning. He enjoyed it as much as I did, wagging his little tail in the air, accepting the love, giving hugs, and bringing smiles to all.



He has a particular way he approaches people who are standing or sitting. He walks up to them, positions himself between their feet and turns around. This is his way of signaling that he is ready to be picked up. Over the years, we have participated in some additional Denver Pet Partners events including those at local colleges, the Denver airport, and the Colorado Department of Education. Five years later, LT is still at it, but shares the spotlight with his big little sister, Lacey.



Lacey is an almost 7-yr old Yellow English Lab (July 5th birthday). She was a sweetheart from the very beginning. She joined our family along with a Chocolate English Lab born one week before her, who we named Cagney. Unlike her wiggly, excitable friend, Lacey was calm and gentle, eager to be near us, happy to cuddle and snuggle.



Immediately, I knew she would be a perfect therapy dog and, before she turned 2, she was an official member of Denver Pet Partners, taking turns going to



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Parker Adventist. She also has participated in other DPP events including visiting with children at a local church's monthly parent's night out for parents of children with mental and physical disabilities (the kids had fun playing dress up with Lacey).



One particular interaction stands out for me. We were visiting the hospital and were walking by the ICU family waiting room. Several people were standing outside the door and we were asked by one of them to go in to see her friend. She explained that the family had just lost their 22-year-old son to suicide and a few months before had lost their yellow lab. As a mother of a 22-year-old daughter and a 24-year-old son, my heart immediately broke for her. We proceeded into the family room, introduced ourselves, and were welcomed to

approach the grieving mother. Lacey sat right beside her, leaned into her, as the woman put her arms around Lacey and rested her head against Lacey's back. The mother cried and told me how much her son would have loved Lacey. She held on for some time and thanked me for bringing Lacey to her. Tears come to my eyes even now as I relay this encounter. Please know how much our work means to the people we serve. I am grateful to have found Denver Pet Partners and for the opportunity it has brought me to make a difference in people's lives. It helps me as much as it helps others as I relish in the happiness I see in people's eyes and smiles when they see us and have the chance to interact with us. And, a genuine "You've made my day" goes a long way when all in the world just doesn't seem to be alright.



A special thank you to the board of Denver Pet Partners for your effort and hours of work to make this organization run smoothly. I am proud to be included as a member.

