

Mara Kominek and Norman



Norman is an (almost) 8-year-old, 110-pound, big white lump of a Great Pyrenees dog. He was born on a ranch in Trinidad, CO. Great Pyrenees are born as Livestock Guardian Dogs, originally from the Pyrenees Mountains in Spain/France. They are guardian angels at heart! Norman's parents were working dogs on the ranch – they protected a majestic herd of horses from bears, coyotes, and mountain lions.

When I went to pick Norman up, the owner of the ranch handed me what felt like a toddler!!!! Norman was 8 weeks old and a bit over 20 pounds! Soon after we got home, I was telling my family about my adventures at the ranch and how Norman came to be. My mom wondered about his mom and dad – I let her know that his dad was

160 pounds and named Titan (the name of the elder Gods) and his mom was 130 pounds and was named Athena (Goddess of Battle). My Mom then exclaimed “His dad’s name is Titan, his mom’s name is Athena and you are naming him NORMAN?”. Yup!

At that time, I was a Pediatric Physical Therapist. Since you can't leave an 8-week-old puppy at home all day, without something catastrophic and massively stinky happening, Norman came with me to my appointments to see the kids in their homes. I started to notice that he was so calm, he would just lay next to the kids or on top of them, if that was a request. He never chewed on them with those shark-like puppy teeth, and he stuck close to them if we happened to move around. At the same time, I noticed that the kids stopped thinking of therapy as “the torture session” and they all stopped giving me the “stink-eye”. As we were driving home one night, I was telling Norman how popular I had become with the kids, and thought hummmmmmm, maybe we should make this a bit more permanent (and possibly legal?) and see if other folks might like to visit with “the big guy”. I contacted a trainer, and she suggested that I reach out to Pet Partners.

Norman's spirit animal is the Sloth. He moves as little as possible and takes the time to strategically calculate the degree of exertion needed to do any activity before he participates. I feel like this also became a key ingredient to his pet therapy and visitation as he is so calm and patient with everyone we see.

DPP Team of the Month (December 2022)



Prior to COVID, he was participating in the PAWS (kids read to dogs) program at the Golden Library. When people would ask me about what Norman did as a Therapy Dog, I kept making the mistake of telling them that he was “reading to kids at the Golden Library” ...obviously that is inaccurate as, if that were true, Norman and I would be on tour and I would have a way bigger house, and maybe a boat. Norman also loved to visit the elderly residents on the Alzheimer and Assisted Living units at Mountain Vista Senior Living Community – per Norman, they have really good lemon cookies (the ladies with Alzheimer’s would sneak him cookies) and the aviary, in their main room, was of utmost interest to him (not in a happy “look at the beautiful birdies” sort of way, but more like “those birdies are lucky they are in that glass box”).



While visiting the Alzheimer unit, the director of Mountain Vista, I and “the big guy” were walking down the hallway, and an elderly woman (resident) who had been pacing the hallway, finally looked up and approached us. The Director introduced her to me and I then introduced the resident to Norman. She bent over and started petting Norman’s head. Then, with a very heavy German accent she said “Bootiful boyeee. Is boyee, yes?” The Director gasped and explained that this resident had just moved in because her only living relative, a son, had passed away and there was no one left to care for her. Apparently, she was 94 years old and only spoke German - she had not said one single word since she had arrived, 1 month earlier. She spoke her first words to Norman and everyone was shocked! The Director asked if Norman could find out what her favorite food was and what she liked to do! Haha.

On another visit, the Director asked me if I would be willing to bring Norman to see a gentleman that was 98 yrs old and almost completely deaf. She said that it was extremely tough to communicate with him and that his room was 80 degrees all year long (per his request). He had just lost his wife of 77 years, 3 months prior, and was severely depressed. He had not left his room since her death and did not have any visitors. We sat with him and chatted as he petted Norman and showed both of us pictures of his wife and their time together. The Director had to leave for about 15 mins to take care of something (I think she went outside to cool off). When she returned she asked the gentleman if he wanted to come out and participate in their morning coffee and conversation group. He declared that he would go only if Norman came with him...so we went and had coffee – and on the way back through, Norman ran across one of his little “lemon cookie dealers” so he also got a treat. The Director told me that the staff had asked this gentleman to go to the coffee group every day for 3 months and for 3 months, he had refused!

I have a current patient who is very physically able-bodied but is intellectually disabled. He unfortunately got COVID and was put on a ventilator for 3 months. When he came back to

DPP Team of the Month (December 2022)



his group home, his endurance was very poor, he was now on a feeding tube and could not do the fun stuff he was able to do before. He became severely depressed as he loved to eat and do “fun stuff”. This, in turn, made him have some behaviors. He refused therapy and just got worse. I knew that he loved dogs so I brought Norman over for a walk with this young man. He more than willingly decided that he would walk with Norman. He has walked with Norman several times, and although he was only able to walk about 300 ft the first time, we are now doing about a mile. He is off of his feeding tube and back to eating and doing “fun stuff”. This young man is infatuated with Chuck Norris and the show Walker Texas Ranger. He has declared himself a Texas Ranger and has deputized Norman as his Assistant Canine Ranger. I inquired about the salary that Norman would be receiving as an assistant and he said that it would be 1,500 million dollars per year – maybe we are getting that boat after all!!!

When Norman isn't enjoying lemon cookies and devising a plan to get into that glass box full of birds, he LOVES to bark at everything (he will bark at a mosquito farting 5 miles away), he loves to dig (he has his own sandbox to dig in), he loves to sleep, he loves to chase the little woodland creatures in our yard, he loves to sleep, he loves to spend his day protecting me and our house from the various “assassins” (i.e. squirrels, birdies, bunnies, the mailman, Amazon guy, blowing leaves, the flag flying across the street, etc.) and he loves to sleep.

Denver Pet Partners is an amazing organization and I am so thankful that we are able to participate. I really enjoy visiting and volunteering with “the big guy”.

