

## *Kay Cook and Shelby Poodle*



Shelby Poodle and I are proud to be named Denver Pet Partners' Team of the Month, an honor that we will continue to strive to live up to.

Just this past week, December 16, Shelby, a standard poodle, turned nine years old. She came to live with us in March of 2014, and looking back on that time, I realize how much my motivation to get a dog had to do with my own need for a therapy animal, although we were not to become a team for 6 more years. In the fall of 2013, my husband and I lost everything in the floods that devastated much of Boulder County. We evacuated from our mountain home in a somewhat dramatic rescue, being led by teams over a mountain, across a zip line over raging flood waters, up another mountain, over to Sunshine Canyon where the National Guard took us into Boulder, grubby and worn out

after three days of being cut off by flood waters, where friends picked us up and offered us a hot shower, clean clothes, and a warm bed. It would be three months before we could move back to the mountains, into a new home, not far from the one we lost.

As I said, looking back on that time, I realize that I began talking about getting a dog and researching availability of standard poodles shortly after we moved back to the mountains. I had a yearning for a dog, quite frankly, and it had been a decade since we had said farewell to our first standard poodle, who died at age twelve, leaving us heartbroken. "I want a dog," I announced, and now I know that what I was really saying was, "I want a dog to help heal this trauma and sadness and fear from that 2013 flood." Shelby was unofficially a therapy dog from the very beginning.

Five years later, I learned about Pet Partners during a casual conversation with my sister Karol, who lives in East Texas, when she announced that she and George, her Cavalier King Charles Spaniel, were going to visit students at the university during finals weeks. I was intrigued, and Karol sent me all the information about Pet Partners. I signed up for the class right away. I knew that Shelby would be a good therapy animal after watching her greet people first of all at the dog park before romping with the other dogs there.

I was thrilled when we completed all the requirements and passed our evaluation in March of 2020, right before the COVID-19 shutdown. I admit that I was slightly embarrassed that Shelby scored higher than I did. I was nervous; she was not. We then joined Denver Pet Partners. We had a great evaluation team, and I knew we wanted to be part of the local organization. But then we waited for several months as it became clear that COVID precautions were here for the long term.

## *DPP Team of the Month (January 2023)*



As the world began to open up, Shelby began her first visits to an elementary school when the counselor put out a request for a therapy dog to work with students who had emotional trauma. Shelby worked actively with her student, who wanted to help train her to shake hands and to “find.” This was her first time to work with a child, and it assured me that she was good with that age level. The counselor reported positive changes in the student’s behavior after working with Shelby.

Last year, Shelby became a regular visitor at a middle school, again at the request of a counselor who had read that simply petting a dog can significantly lower stress levels. Many students at the middle school had suffered losses from the 2022 Marshall Fire, and Shelby met with those students at first and then extended her visits to the school as a whole during their lunch hour. This year, she met with students at that same school who were members of the Pride Club. She is now well known at that school, and it’s not at all unusual for us to hear, “Hi, Shelby,” from several students as we make our way to the library.

Our most poignant visit was to a reunion of survivors of gun violence where Shelby and I were one of several DPP teams that met with people on the first night of their retreat. We will soon begin visits to a safehouse, also coordinated with DPP.

I think all of our therapy dogs work in a non-official capacity, right? When we moved into a senior independent and assisted living facility last year, Shelby went right to work with both residents and staff, greeting them daily as we go for our walk and seeking out individuals who call her over. She is comfortable with wheelchairs and walkers and people with canes, and has developed a certain affection for several residents, seeking them out when she sees them. She has a special bond with Mort, pictured below, and seeks him out when she sees him. She and our staff member Joyce also give one another great comfort.



*DPP Team of the Month (January 2023)*



We all yearn to make the world a better place and often feel helpless in figuring out how to do that. Without question, our therapy animal teams and Denver Pet Partners make our little part of the world a safe and healing place for all people. Thank you, Denver Pet Partners!

