

Anne Przybyla and Molly



Molly came into my life when I still had Katie, my previous animal-assisted therapy dog with Denver Pet Partners. I never had more than one dog at a time and felt this might be quite a challenge for me, but since Katie was getting older and already had one bout of soft tissue cancer of her left hind leg, which had to be amputated, I wanted to have another dog in place to continue in Katie's footsteps as an animal-assisted therapy team.

I found Molly on-line at Second Hand Animal Rescue when she was 8 months old. A mini-Katie, I thought. Second Hand is in Lamar, Colorado and after contacting them, I drove down there with Katie on a beautiful

winter day in January 2013. The two dogs seemed to get along well together and we brought Molly back to Denver with us the same day. Molly sprawled out on the back seat, leaving little room for poor Katie, just as she does today when she sleeps next to me in my bed.

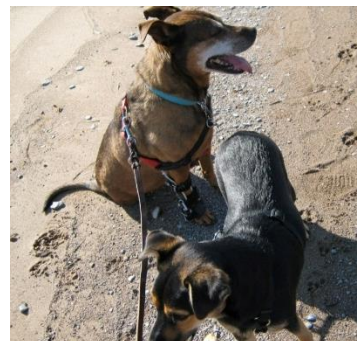


I had learned from the rescue group that Molly came from a litter of five pups who were thrown into trash cans before their eyes were even open and that Second Hand rescued and bottle fed them. The four girls were originally named after the sisters in *Little Women*, Molly being named Beth. She had been adopted once, but for some reason (I think the couple was moving and couldn't keep her) returned her to Second Chance (their policy). The adoptive couple had changed her name to Molly, the name that I kept.



I recently heard an interview on NPR or read something on the internet about whether or not animals experience feelings. The conclusion was that they do. I was quite sure I had observed that with Molly when we lost Katie.

I had been planning my annual summer trip back to my hometown in Michigan at the same time Katie's advanced cancer was nearing the end. I wasn't sure she would be able to make the long car trip, but I also didn't want to leave her behind with someone else. The Monday of the week we were to leave, Katie made the decision for me, and I knew it was time to take her to my vet to send her over the rainbow bridge. Molly and I left on our very sad trip and when we returned a



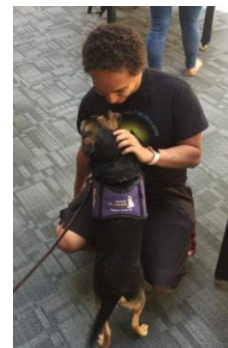
DPP Team of the Month (May 2023)



couple of weeks later, she excitedly ran into the house. After a few minutes, she came back out looking very dejected. After 18 months together, she and Katie had formed a strong bond and I truly feel that she expected to find her big sister still in the house. It broke my heart to see her that way.

Molly loves people and has an exuberant personality, two contradictory traits that could present problems as a therapy dog. She was and still is a bit dog-reactive. I needed to do some training with her, but because Katie had terrible separation anxiety, I couldn't leave her home alone while I took Molly out to work with her. Only when we lost Katie to a second cancer in 2014 -- a sad way to free up time exclusively for Molly -- was I able to do so. When I finally felt she was ready, but with trepidation, we did our first Pet Partner evaluation and with relief, passed.

Molly continued in Katie's "pawsteps" at the facilities we visited -- Platte Valley Medical Center in Brighton and The Denver Children's Home in Denver, the same facilities we are still visiting. We had visited Rose Medical Center prior to the pandemic, when all pet therapy visits stopped, and at this point, have not returned. In Molly's early career, we took part in a Read program at the State Department of Education in downtown Denver, across the street from the State Capitol, where kids were bussed in from outlying schools. The event was organized by Hillary Cole Davis, a Children's librarian at the time who had worked closely with DPP and who I had gotten to know when Katie and I volunteered on Saturdays at the Read program at the Englewood Public Library, where Hillary was head Children's librarian. We also attended several distress events at Johnson & Wales--Denver campus, before they closed this campus.



At Platte Valley Medical Center (PVMC) during Covid in the warmer weather, we visited with staff outside on the lawn. When we received the go-ahead to visit inside, we started out just in the lobby visiting with staff and visitors. Molly was a bit confused during that time, not understanding why we weren't going to the units or the ER (her favorite place to visit). On one of our early visits in the lobby, I went to the restroom and when I came out with her and turned left to return to the lobby, Molly went only so far with me, stopped, and wouldn't move. If we had turned right, we would have headed towards the ER and the elevator to the units. It took me awhile to convince her that visiting those places was not an option at that time.



We have been visiting freely at PVMC and about a month ago, much to my delight, the hospital terminated their mask mandate. We are scheduled to visit the 1st & 3rd Wednesday of the month, but Wednesdays this year have been notorious for bad weather, primarily snow. Because I live in

DPP Team of the Month (May 2023)



Denver, I have canceled several of our visits. While other teams visit during the day, we visit late afternoon/evenings, which the evening staff appreciates.



We have been more consistent visiting weekly at The Denver Children's Home (DCH) on Monday evenings as it is closer to my home. At this time, unlike PVMC that has ten teams, Molly and I are the only animal-assisted therapy team visiting DCH, having lost some teams during Covid. DCH is a residential treatment facility for kids with family/emotional problems and an age range of 10 years to 18 years, and at times as young as 8 years. Some have been in multiple foster homes, some court ordered for treatment, and many with depression and acting out.

When Katie and I were visiting there, we were assigned two kids that we generally spent 30 minutes apiece with. I was given their admission history and treatment plan and we generally followed them until their discharge, giving us the opportunity to get to know them quite well. One of my fondest memories is of a teenage girl that we followed, who prior to discharge, asked for a hug and said we were like family to her.

After the Admissions Director left for another job, DCH changed their policy to having the animal therapy teams visit with each kid for 5 minutes each, their choice if they want to visit or not. Unless the resident offers information, I am not privy to their specific reason for being there. Molly loves visiting there, and I love seeing her cuddle up to the kids for petting and hugs. It's especially heart-warming to see her with some of the teenage boys. DCH has 3 boys' dorms and 2 girls' dorms, all on the same floor with a capacity for 7 in each dorm. I share all this in greater detail in case we have teams who would be interested in visiting. I know the facility would love to have more teams. It's a very rewarding place to visit and if anyone is interested, please feel free to contact me with any questions.

For fun, Molly and I do a Nosework class. Many of the participants do trials, usually a full-day affair and sometimes quite a distance from Denver, but Molly and I stick with just the classes for quality time together.

As a long-time member of DPP who appreciates the support they have offered over the years, I along with Molly, feel honored to be DPP May Team of the Month.



DPP Team of the Month (May 2023)

