

Lisa Vitry and Mocha



Mocha came into my life on August 10, 2020. She was almost 4 years old, untrained, and did not have her own family to love. She lived at Mama Sue's home her whole life. Mama Sue (Sue Bailey) is an amazing breeder of English Labrador retrievers who has been dedicated to supporting the health, longevity, and the kind souls of this breed on her 40 rural acres near Lake Placid, NY for over 30 years.

Mocha is the only dog I have ever owned. Our family-owned Mocha's 5-times great aunt, TC, when I was a kid. We got TC as a 10-week-old puppy from an incredible breeder and wonderful person, Nancy Shultz, in Saratoga, NY. Nancy went to high school with my mom and was nationally recognized for her kind, smart, healthy, beautiful champion English Labrador Retrievers, some of whom have posed in the L.L. Bean catalogs!!! TC was a member of our family and a faithful hunting partner for my dad for 13 years. Nancy continued her breeding business - Manora Labradors - for many years and my older sister was lucky enough to get TC's niece, at 10 weeks old. Her name was Casey. We knew Nancy kept Casey's sister, Rhythm of the Rain, to breed and when my younger sister was ready for a dog, she contacted Nancy and was gifted a smart and sassy 3-year-old, Abby, who was a pup of Rain, and when Abby crossed the rainbow bridge 10 years later, my sister contacted Nancy again and was gifted with a beautiful 4-year-old, Greta, who was a 2nd cousin of Abby and Casey. That was when we found out Nancy's health was failing, and she was ending her breeding business and giving her dogs away.



Fast forward to 2019, my husband's PTSD from being an Army Medic was becoming unmanageable. I knew the only thing that would save him was a Manora Labrador. I knew Nancy had passed and all her dogs were given away long ago. I googled Rhythm

of the Rain and got a hit- Sue Bailey, Designer Labradors, NY. I emailed Sue and asked if she knew a lab from Manora Labradors named Rhythm of the Rain. That was when I found out Sue had been Nancy's student and dear friend in all things Labrador



breeding and partnered with her for decades to create her own breeding business Designer Labradors. Sue even showed Rain, for Nancy, and won a championship. Sue also knew Abby and Greta! I asked Sue to put me on her puppy waiting list and she said no. She said my husband and I needed a Manora Lab as soon as possible. Sue asked if I would take an adult dog. Mocha was bred and raised by Sue. She is the closest living relative of Rain and TC. Sue loves Mocha and planned to keep her and breed her. When she was 3, Mocha had a litter of puppies. That was when Sue found out Mocha carries a rare recessive gene for a heart defect. Mocha was not bred again and waited at Mama Sue's for a long time for the right family to come

for her. We met Mocha for the first time on August 10, 2020 when we picked her up. Sue said good-bye to her precious girl and we drove for 3 days from Lake Placid to Golden, CO with Mocha in a crate in the back of an SUV. Her first night away from Mama Sue's was at the Marriott, and her first day with her new family started with a morning walk, for the first time with a collar and leash, at Niagara Falls. Mocha was full of love and joy and eager to please. This is when Mocha began her journey to be a therapy dog and crisis response dog.

I trained Mocha myself, during COVID shutdown. To socialize her, we walked the pedestrian/bike paths in our neighborhood a few times every day, at different times of the day. Everyone was out walking, running, biking, skateboarding that summer. We encountered baby strollers of all types, good and bad dogs, llamas, horses, a rogue cow, deer, elk, coyotes, bobcats, snakes, people of all ages, with canes, walkers, wheelchairs and crutches. I never said no to anyone who wanted to pet her, and I would ask people if Mocha could approach them, to encourage her to visit on command. I am grateful to the staff at Home Depot, Duluth Trading CO, and L.L. Bean who let us in their stores and helped socialize and train Mocha. To this day, Mocha is still recognized at L.L. Bean and loves hiding under a rack of puffy coats, waiting for an unsuspecting shopper to peruse the selection and get a surprise when Mocha sticks her head out of the coats to greet them.

DPP Team of the Month (May 2024)



Mocha has been a therapy dog for 3 years and a crisis response dog for 1 year. Her very first experience as a therapy dog was walking into a 5th grade classroom of 30 kids at a local Elementary School. She was a natural and sat in the front of the room while groups of students would take turns petting her. She was the therapy dog at this school for 2 years, visiting every classroom, every Friday, so every student and staff member could spend time with her. She was there on the last graduation day and comforted the students who were visibly upset that their school was closing. She continues her elementary school visits with a weekly visit to a new larger elementary school

where she visits approximately 150-200 students every Friday. Last week, a parent stopped me in the hall to tell me about the impact Mocha has had on her family and how grateful she was. Her older son is visually impaired and has always been afraid of dogs, but he enjoys sitting on the floor with Mocha and touching her and talking about how her fur feels. She had never seen him interact that way with a dog. She also told me that her younger son has come out of his shell, thanks to Mocha's visits. Mocha was the therapy dog at the Marshall Fire Relief center and was the greeter and the one to absorb the sorrow and dry the tears of so many who lost so much, including their most precious possessions, their pets. Mocha is in her 3rd year of her weekly happy hour gig at the local senior living facility. She stops in for 30 minutes before the music starts and the drinks are poured to say hello to everyone and check out the buffet. The seniors love petting her, running her through her obedience commands, giving her treats, and hearing about her visits to the Elementary school. She visits our first responders here in Golden, and joins DDP teams at other events. When Jefferson County Sheriff's office K-9 Graffit was killed in the line of duty last year, she wanted to walk to his memorial every day and just sit. In this photo, she is not on command. It is the moment I see with every visit- she just knows how to do her angel work.



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