

## *Charlene Tilton and Amos*



I first met Amos on a lovely fall Minnesota afternoon after driving two hours to see him at a small rural shelter. He was a quiet little mix with big ears, an unsure expression, and the kind of presence that makes you feel like you've known him forever. I fell in love immediately and brought him home the same day. It didn't take long to discover that this sweet rescue dog came with a few quirks, including a very strong urge to herd my elderly cats. I realized quickly that he needed structure and a job to thrive.

So, we began training. What started as a desperate attempt to create peace between species turned into one of the best decisions of my life. Amos took to training like a duck to water. We went through beginner, intermediate, and advanced classes, earned his Canine Good Citizen, and I watched this once-nervous rescue dog come out of his shell. My trainer told me, "The only class left is therapy work, and I think he'd be perfect for it."

She was right. With his blend of Corgi, German Shepherd, and Husky, Amos has the focus of a working dog and the intuition of an old soul. We completed therapy-dog preparation to expose him to elevators, busy hallways, stores, and new environments. We tested with Pet Partners and passed... then COVID shut everything down.

While the world paused, my next chapter began. I packed up my small Midwest life to drive fifteen hours to Colorado for new opportunities. Amos was my co-pilot the entire way, happily observing every mile like it was his job.

I worked in a research lab at CU Anschutz that year and, one day in the hospital, I saw a therapy dog walking the halls. I asked the volunteer office if animals were allowed, expecting a "not yet," but learned they were welcoming therapy dogs for staff support. That was all I needed. Amos and I went through UHealth's process and soon became regular volunteers there. That experience also connected us more closely with Denver Pet Partners, who have been our community ever since.



## DPP Team of the Month (January 2026)



We spent three years volunteering at UCHHealth before I started medical school at Rocky Vista University. Knowing how much therapy dogs helped my stress as a pre-med, I began bringing Amos to campus after difficult exams. Now, as a second-year medical student, Amos and I visit not only my classmates but also first-year students, master's students, and PA students. They tell me all the things I understand deeply: how hard exams are, how overwhelming school feels, how relentless the pace can be. Amos offers the one thing medical training rarely provides, a moment to breathe. His calm presence lets students reset, even if only for a few minutes.



Amos himself is a funny mix of dog and cat energy. He's fiercely loyal but loves his personal space. He sunbathes like it's a competitive sport. He avoids puddles, hates getting dirty, and dramatically tolerates baths only because he knows the snacks are worth it. He is a ball fanatic, especially rubber balls with spikes. His current favorite is a worn-down green ball that has lost more than half its spikes and is no longer round... but it's his treasure, so it stays.



One of my most meaningful moments with therapy work happened during a UCHHealth visit with a patient recovering from extensive spine surgery. She lit up the moment she saw Amos and immediately told me about her own dog at home. At the end of the visit, she said that seeing Amos reminded her how much she missed her dog and gave her the motivation to work even harder in rehab so she could get home sooner. That moment has stayed with me. It was the first time I understood, in a profound way, how therapy animals can influence a healing journey, not just emotionally, but physically, by empowering someone to keep going.



Another favorite memory isn't from a hospital but from my own wedding. Amos was my ring bearer. A friend served as his "wrangler," and when the moment came, she simply let him go. Without hesitation, he trotted straight to me and stood faithfully by my side as we finished our ceremony. When our guests cheered after our vows, he jumped up with joy as if celebrating right along with us.

Therapy work has brought out a confidence in Amos that he didn't have when I first rescued him. Our bond has grown so deeply that I can often tell what he needs by the way he looks at me. He may not speak, but he communicates loudly through quiet gestures and soft eyes.

Amos has been a grounding force through every chapter of my life, from my Midwest beginnings to my move across the country, from my research years to my medical school journey, through joy, uncertainty, and growth. Being able to share the comfort he gives me with patients, students, and staff through Denver Pet Partners has been one of the greatest privileges of my life.

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