



## Mind Matters

articles on mental health from experts in the field

### **The Therapeutic Value of Pets**

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For me, it was love at first sight. The freckles immediately drew me in, and the deep brown eyes had me even before “hello.” Recently single, I had been browsing the Internet daily in an attempt to find the perfect guy. I thought I would doggedly insist that the new guy meet certain standards. And then that face, the one that couldn’t compare with any other, won me over in an instant.

I was messing around on a pet finding search engine, when I first saw Stein, a rescued white German shepherd who had experienced trauma. My plan had been to find a dog like my last one. My former pet *had chosen me* to be her best friend, and stuck with me unconditionally right after I had lost my father and was living on the Wind River Indian Reservation, lonely, in Wyoming.

Ideally, I was looking for a smaller, somewhat older, relatively low-maintenance dog, preferably containing some mixture of border collie in its breeding. Stein was huge at 95 pounds. He was estimated to be about 4 years old and had a fear of thunderstorms, cars and abandonment. The only part of him that remotely resembled my former canine buddy was his eyes. They were deep, understanding, chocolate-colored pools that seemed vaguely familiar. I immediately started the adoption process. Through the paperwork, the meetings with him, the interview, and the home visit, I continued to become more attached. The adoption was completed on November 14, 2008.

Now, more than six months later, I can’t imagine my life without Stein. (I actually lengthened his name to Jazzybeau B. McDuckenstein, so that he could be called his given name for short). He’s an always-willing running buddy and a persistent irresistible alarm clock on days when I just want to stay in bed. He likes to cuddle. He’s very social and he keeps me laughing. I still can’t resist his freckles and his tendency to “purr” like a kitten when I scratch his ears.

I initially chose to adopt my dog for two primary reasons. First, I knew that I would not be able to devote the time and energy necessary to raise a puppy with my full-time job. Second, I know that puppies are much more readily adopted than adult dogs. Stein was abandoned at a shelter after a history of abuse, neglect and

other trauma. He was taken in by a local pet adoption agency primarily focused on rescuing white German shepherds (although they often rescue all kinds of abandoned dogs). It didn't take very long for Stein and I to develop a routine that helped him feel secure and build his trust in me and other humans.

Although I have come across many articles over the years discussing the multi-faceted therapeutic value of animals, including the finding that pets can actually increase a person's quality of life, I'm again a first-hand believer.

If you or someone you know is ready to have a mutually beneficial relationship with a new pet, I hope that my experience helps you consider adoption. There are thousands of unwanted pets available for adoption across Colorado. Many pet adoption agencies work with families and individuals to ensure the best match possible between pet and family. These pets can be found in local shelters and adoption agencies through the pet finder search engine on the World Wide Web, or in your phone book.

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