

Curly-Coated Retrievers



Guest columnist Karen Reece has a 17-year-old son who has Asperger's syndrome, a form of autism. A Curly-Coated Retriever named Rainbow has improved their lives immeasurably. Here is their story.

Brandon and Rainbow's Story

My 17-year-old son, Brandon, has Asperger's syndrome, a form of autism. A few years ago, Brandon and I started working with Julie Frei, a social worker, on a regular basis. Brandon was having meltdowns at school, and I was fighting with the school district about the correct placement for him. At that time, many of the treatments now available and geared toward younger children had not yet become available.

One day, when I was having a particularly bad day, Julie brought over a Curly-Coated Retriever puppy she had just acquired. My son, who had very few friends and didn't like to socialize, loves animals and fell in love with the puppy almost immediately. I mentioned to Julie that I had always wanted to get some sort of service dog for Brandon, but wasn't sure how to do it because our housing did not allow dogs.

Fortunately, Julie was able to tell us more about service dog programs and put us in touch with Tracy Cook, her puppy's breeder. Tracy had a retired Curly champion she was willing to give to my son!

We took the long drive to Tracy's house and fell in love with a Curly named Rainbow. Brandon and Rainbow started playing catch right away! It took a while to adopt Rainbow because of the housing problem. Luckily, because Rainbow is a service dog and Brandon had a prescription for one, we were eventually able to bring Rainbow home.

On one of our first outings with Rainbow, I took Brandon and his new buddy to some sidewalk sales in our

small town. I instructed Brandon to sit on the edge of the sidewalk with Rainbow next to him. I showed him that I'd only be six feet away, but I kept an eye on them. Brandon sat there petting her. He has a lot of sensory issues and she helps him with those.

Very soon, some children and their parents came up to Brandon and asked Rainbow's name. Brandon had never before been approached by strangers. I could see he was becoming frustrated in trying to talk to them, so I went over and helped him with his answers. I explained to Brandon that Rainbow is a very special dog and that Curlies are not common. He then understood why people would be curious about her.

From the very beginning, Brandon took great care of Rainbow, feeding her, cleaning up after her, taking her for walks, and playing with her.

As the months went by, Brandon became more and more socially interactive and much less anxious as people came over to talk about Rainbow. Now, he takes Rainbow with him wherever he goes, and he's become very comfortable talking to strangers about her.

Thanks to Rainbow, Brandon has blossomed into a sociable, personable young man. When Rainbow came into our lives Brandon would not talk to people unless it revolved around his own interests. Now, just a few years later, Brandon requires very little assistance in school, and has even just gotten his driver's license—all thanks to a Curly-Coated Retriever named Rainbow! —K.R.

Thank you, Karen, for sharing this heartwarming story with us.

—Ann Shinkle, Grand Island, Fla.;
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Flat-Coated Retrievers



Guest columnist Claire Kosar is the author of *A Guide to Dog Sports: From Beginners to Winners* (Doral). Her English-bred Flat-Coats have held titles in conformation, field, and obedience, and she has judged

Sweepstakes at national specialties in the U.S. and Canada.

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In 1935, H. Reginald Cooke, whose legendary Riverside Kennels influences the Flat-Coated Retriever to this day, wrote an article for *Dog World* about the history of the breed, from the combining of the "retrieving characteristics of the Newfoundland and scenting qualities of the Setter" to the development of a distinct breed type. He concluded his article with this passage:

"I think it would be difficult to find a dog more loyal or of a sweeter disposition than a Flatcoat. Clever, very sagacious and anxious to please, he is at all times a friend and charming companion."

As true today as when written, these two sentences define the essence of the Flat-Coated Retriever. In the field, the show ring, and as a family companion we want a sensible, gentle, and responsive dog. Kindliness is the hallmark of the breed. The breed standard carefully describes temperament: *Character is a primary and outstanding asset of the Flat-Coat. He is a responsive, loving member of the family.* It continues, *In competition, the Flat-Coat demonstrates stability and a desire to please with a confident and outgoing attitude characterized by a wagging tail. Nervous, hyperactive, shy or obstinate behavior is unacceptable.* The severe fault of poor temperament is stated plainly: *Unprovoked aggressive behavior toward people or animals is totally unacceptable.* No Flat-Coat with any indication of that behavior is deserving of any award regardless of any other virtue.

It should be stressed, however, that it is highly uncommon to find a Flat-Coat with anything but a sweet-natured disposition. Is it because responsible and caring Flat-Coat