

# My Dog Was Waitlisted!

by Beverly D. Anderson

I have a Chocolate Labrador. He is fittingly named after the Pennsylvania chocolate company, “Hershey.” His pedigree can be traced to a farm in South Carolina where six years ago the trip to procure and thereby adopt Hershey was described by my then fifth grade son as “the best day of his life.” We are proud of Hershey. Hershey gleans praise from onlookers when he takes his daily four-mile walk. Statements like “oh what a pretty dog,” “what strong features he has” and “he seems so friendly” are commonplace. He has a suite underneath our house, a fenced in backyard and a 50-yard run—amenities that would make those in his canine peer group envy. Like I said, we are proud of Hershey.

My days as a high school counselor and a working mother of two teenagers are filled. Some would say that my commitments runneth over. So, from time to time I elect to purchase services that will save me time and ensure the proper health maintenance of my precious canine, such as the PetSmart® TopDog treatment. The technicians ooh and ahh over Hershey, treating him as if he were their only client. They provide quality care and send him home with a written analysis of his overall grooming health. I am consistently impressed with their selective verbiage that accentuates his positive traits, yet softens those less desirable (“He is classic ADHD with Oppositional Defiance tendencies”).

Recently I made a call to schedule a grooming appointment and I was told that my purebred Chocolate Lab would be put on a waitlist. I would be called if an opening occurred. The call never came. A week went by and I attempted once again to gain the TopDog treatment only to be met with another not-so-familiar deferment of sorts, “Hershey can be placed on the waitlist

and we will give you a call if a seat in the afternoon class opens up.”

*I thought Waitlisted!?! My precious canine? How could this be? He was the envy of his peers! What about his 50-yard run in the backyard... his posh suite arrangement? He's an outdoor dog—doesn't he deserve to land ahead of those who choose to keep their dogs inside—they don't have as much need for the TopDog treatment as my outdoor-only, 75-pound canine. He's a purebred for goodness sake! His father was a master hunter—we have the papers to prove it. He has inherited traits that should place him in the top three percent of agility training... if my husband and I were to have purchased private agility-prep training courses.*

*Surely this was a mistake. Who can I call? If I could just have 10 minutes with the Dean of Pet Grooming, I could tell her what a terrible mistake has been made. I could tell her all of Hershey's special traits—how Hershey could bring spunk, energy, strength, and a royal heritage to the afternoon grooming class. I know—I think my husband's boss knows someone who contributes large amounts of money to canine non-profit organizations. Maybe that will influence Hershey's placement on the waitlist.*

*Is there something wrong with Hershey? Did we as dog owners fail to provide him with the proper guidance? Did his counselor—I mean breeder—tell us everything we needed to know before we launched into the canine grooming search? Oh no... the future of grooming as we had planned is in ruin! We have no back up... no Plan B for grooming services. Yes, there was that other “branch,” but it was closer in town, it was a gloomy, rainy day when first we visited and the tour guide—I mean technician—wasn't as cheery. I felt panic-stricken.*

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Obviously, I am exaggerating, but to some degree this must be how parents feel when their “one and only” gets that mysterious deferred or wait list letter. Often, the student may not say anything, but the parent calls you—the school counselor—and expresses an overflow of emotions. Anger, confusion, embarrassment, heightened worry to name a few. How can you help? First, let's explain the terminology.

“Defer” is a status that simply means “not now.” Colleges may extend offers of admission to several hundred applicants and defer the remaining thousand in the queue. It appeared that all of Hershey's best buds were in the former group and Hershey was in the latter, so something must have been amiss. “Waitlisted” generally means that a freshmen class has been crafted and, if yield predictions hold true, there is no room at the inn. However, yield predictions are not rocket science and students in the former group may back out of their offer of admission. If so, this leaves a spot for the Hersheys on the waitlist. Openings for those on the waitlist typically don't arrive until after May 1st—the official candidacy reply date. So, Hershey may get a call on May 5th or July 2nd, or never.

I once had a boss who would often say, “If you want an answer now, the answer is ‘no.’ Ask me tomorrow.” What she meant was that she didn't want to review a complicated situation in a matter of three seconds,

because she couldn't possibly render a fair decision on the spot. Colleges have a similar approach. The thousands of students in the queue will be carefully reviewed—probably more so than the initial offers of admission. To the Hershey on hold, this can be somewhat encouraging. Hershey has an opportunity to add additional content to his file, perhaps noting significant contributions that were not evident before, such as missing agility performance testing.

It is no secret (at least to professional school counselors) that the landscape of college admission has drastically changed in the past 30 years. Applicant numbers are up exponentially, creating smaller admit margins for students and the luxury of greater selectivity—even at state land-grant institutions once deemed a guaranteed admission for state tax payers and their offspring. So how can school counselors calm the panic-stricken? I am not a canine grooming expert, but worked in college admission for a decade prior to my licensure in school counseling. Using Hershey's situation as an example of a college-bound applicant, here are some suggestions to offer both student and panic-stricken parents:

Working with the students, review their academic credentials. **Does the college admission file contain all the relevant information: an updated transcript, test scores, letters of recommendation?** Yes, most admission offices have online venues for students to track their admission status, but some are not clear as to whether or not *all* information is received. Additionally, if students are not organized throughout their college application process, they may not know if school A was requested to receive their latest ACT or SAT scores.

I had a student a few years ago who was denied admission to the University of Tennessee, Knoxville (UT). This student had a UT-core grade point average of 3.5, a solid



*"My owners seem pre-occupied with getting me into the best possible grooming parlor. Frankly, I'm more interested in my next meal."*

sampling of honors and AP courses, and a 26 on the ACT. When I called the admission office, they revealed that 1) the applicant applied two months after the published deadline and 2) they did not have the 26 test score. UT went on to explain that this particular student would have likely been admitted upon appeal with the additional test score submission.

**Given the facts, what are the student's chances of admission?** Was PetSmart® branch A Hershey's stretch school? If so, Hershey needs to be realistic in the chances of his admission and begin to consider the other schools on his list. Sometimes college admission officers will give subtle hints as to whether or not a student has a shot of getting out of deferment, whether the college will be able to go to students on the waitlist, or where the student stands on the waitlist. It is worth a phone call—ask, "Given the number of applicants this year and the numbers of students with a similar profile as mine, what are my chances of admission?" If the response is "nil to none," don't be obstinate in your one and only choice of PetSmart® branch A. Get real and look at the other grooming schools on the list.

**Review the student's college list.** Perhaps that other branch school closer into town warrants a second visit. Don't let a bad weather day or negative student tour guide

be the guiding factors in crossing a college off the list. Hershey just might find branch B to have many of the same features as the seemingly more popular branch A. Or, Hershey may find that branch B has benefits that branch A does not. Encourage a second visit to the remaining schools on the list. There are other schools on the list, aren't there? If not, add some.

**Assure the student (and parent) that there is nothing innately wrong with him just because he was deferred or waitlisted.** Often it is more a matter of supply and demand than the quality of the applicant. Colleges defer, waitlist and eventually deny thousands of highly-qualified students every year. Yes, Hershey is ADHD with Oppositional Defiance tendencies, but those were not the reasons he was waitlisted. In fact, it is likely PetSmart® has a policy to not discriminate against learning and behavioral tendencies. He was waitlisted because, by the time I called, there were too many other qualified canines in front of him. It was that simple. PetSmart® could not suddenly increase the technician-to-pet ratio just to accommodate my sudden need for grooming... no matter how much dirt had accumulated during his rigorous outdoor workouts. Colleges must adhere to enrollment limits and try to predict how many of their admission offers will result in a yield—how many will actually enroll.

**Encourage the student to show continued, genuine interest in the school.** This can be tricky. Colleges want students to demonstrate interest (this goes back to predicting the yield), yet the worst thing a student or parent can do is add more squeak to the wheel. Angrily demanding 10 minutes with the dean or threatening to pull a major donation may seem tempting, but there are better ways to demonstrate genuine interest. After all, it is the student who is attending college, not the angry parent or the friend-of-the-family with ties to big political interests. Research the college representative for the student's geographic area. Email or even hand-write a note expressing continued interest. Be sure to highlight any new information that may be relevant or bring strength to the applicant's file.

**Practice Spelling PATIENCE.** I remember loathing waiting in the doctor's office. As a little girl, I would often get frustrated and bored; I wanted to get out of there. I didn't

understand why, if we had an appointment at 10:00 a.m., we wouldn't be seen until noon. My mother's pat response was, "spell 'patience,' my dear... P-A-T-I-E-N-C-E." I never got that word wrong in a spelling bee. It is a dying quality in today's instant gratification, 24/7, social-networking society, but patience never dies. It is still a virtue.

For some, the offer of admission may come after they have paid enrollment deposits to their second- and/or third-choice schools. To others, their first-choice colleges come after a demonstrated semester or year at another school. Students need to understand that alternate paths are still paths: paths with detours. When standing at the fork of deferred or waitlisted, are they okay with the track of the detour or do they want to pursue another school? I believe in the "right fit" for students and a college. I just don't believe there is only one perfect fit. Thousands of colleges offer similar programs and a quality education.

Students need to understand there may be more than one "fit" for them.

What became of Hershey? Hershey is still the same happy-go-lucky canine. He paces back-and-forth in the back seat of my car, windows down, head in the breeze. He is happy as he ventures off to join common canines experiencing the rigors of clipping, shampooing and drying. Yes, Hershey got off the waitlist at his grooming location of preference and I learned to call a day ahead.



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