



Wiley the Therapy Dog

by Rhonda Stickle

In 2006 when I first got Wiley as an 8-week-old puppy, I knew that I wanted to use my dog to help in the community to make people smile. I found it very hard however, to find a Pet Therapy organization in Ontario. Eventually, I gave up and focused on Obedience, Rally-O, Agility and fieldwork with her.

Wiley loves to work for me....I mean she LOVES it! Her focus and need to please are deep in her heart and nature. Wiley also prefers people to other dogs any day. At the agility training grounds we met and became good friends with a lady that was involved in Pet Therapy herself and she told us how and where to get started.

This past January 2009 Wiley and I began our adventure with Therapeutic Paws of Canada, also known as TPOC. We registered for Wiley's test two months earlier and received our official test date in December 2008 as testing only comes around 2-3 times a year in our area.

During each test your dog must have four feet on the floor at all times and remain well behaved, in control and calm. Yes, a Weimaraner actually passed this test! In fact, I think Wiley was the most well behaved dog of the bunch. One dog did not pass and another didn't pass one section.

There were six other dogs plus Wiley for our test date in January. It's really not a test for the average dog. Some things we encountered during our test included: stuffed toys were waved in the dogs face, people with canes dressed in housecoats swarmed the dog completely, little kids came yelling and running toward the dog, people in wheel chairs and walkers moved toward her, and then there were food tests - you walk by yummy stuff on the floor and the dog must leave it, pass other dogs very close and not react and this is to name but a few!

Wiley wiggled her little bum through the entire test and demonstrated true obedience. There were twelve tests in total and we were in testing for 4hrs straight! It was pretty intense, but rightfully so as vulnerable people could be at risk if the dog was not suitable for this.

This would be only the first part Wiley would have to pass. I still had to do a police check – which of course was fine. But, that takes 4-6 weeks to get back. Only then could we do the final three visits with an evaluator watching Wiley in your chosen facility. Since I work at an Adult Day Program with seniors that have Alzheimer's and Dementia, I felt this would be the perfect place to take Wiley. The Adult Day Program provides people with this awful disease a place to go during the week to participate in active games and interact with others. I work as an Activation Programmer, It's an extremely rewarding job and I wanted to be able to bring Wiley a few times a month on the days that I didn't work.

Wiley did very well for all three of her visits. The only thing she did wrong was bark and *point a duck* that was on top of the T.V. But, that was easily blown off!

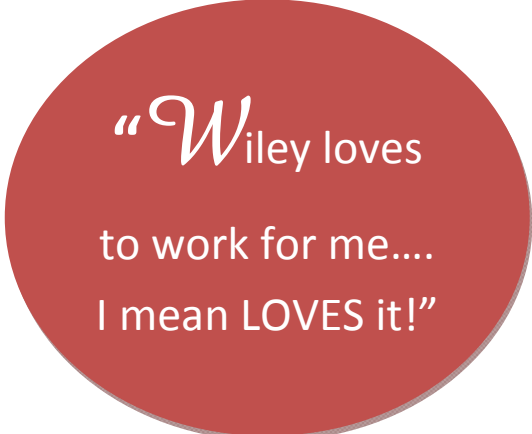
The thing that has been most gratifying about our whole journey has been how many of the clients react to Wiley. Wiley loves to interact with everyone and show off all her tricks. She especially enjoys getting her photo taken with a client, posing perfectly each time!

We have the clients all sit in chairs in a circle and Wiley will first do this funny "arrrroooo" sound she makes when she greets people. This always has the clients laugh! Then she will sit and meet with each person individually as they pet her and talk to her. We have Wiley perform some tricks and people ask us lots of questions and tell us stories about dogs and pets they use to have. For a client with Alzheimer's or Dementia this is great! The most fascinating thing however, is the clients that are usually quiet and never speak will often be the ones that really come out of their shell when Wiley comes to visit. It's enough to bring tears to your eyes to watch them interact with her knowing their background.

I have even had one client meet me at the door, as he just couldn't wait to see her! Several of my clients that have met Wiley often want their photo with her and will take them home and show relatives. I also have several clients that ask me how she is and when she is coming in next, they have claimed her as "their dog!"

To see a client whisper into her ear with a secret or to see a client's smile as they pet her has made this journey so worthwhile. Wiley has greatly impacted many of these people's lives and their smiles have greatly affected mine.

For more information about Therapeutic Paws of Canada you can their web site at www.tpoc.ca



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