

Anne Holton and Wiley



Eight years ago this month, my daughter Sarah stopped for gas in Wiley, Colorado and found this personable but skinny, filthy little puppy. He was going up to every car and every person at the gas station begging for food and attention. After determining that there was no owner around, Sarah fed him, popped him in the car with her Lab, and Wiley left the eastern plains for good. He was ten to twelve weeks old. As soon as I saw him, I knew we were meant to be together and abandoned my plan to get another Labrador. I would like to say that I never regretted it for a minute but that would not be entirely true.

It turned out that this "Aussie/Sheltie/who knows what else" puppy was hell on wheels. They say that



herding dogs need a job, but Wiley needed a career! I turned to training and lots of it. After puppy training and basic obedience, we put a lot of time and energy into Agility but ultimately flunked out. Wiley loved Agility! He just preferred to run his own course. He got his Canine Good Citizen (CGC) certificate with no problem, but I knew his heart wasn't in it.

Then I met Angela Eaton, an amazing clicker trainer, and everything changed. Turns out this dog loves to learn but I hadn't found the right way to let him. We did classes and "out on the town" training for over a year and we both loved it. I knew he was ready for a career when I caught him flying across my yard with a live squirrel in his mouth. I yelled "Wiley," he stopped, dropped the squirrel and looked at me! Time to move on!



I was interested in working with Wiley as a therapy dog and explored some possibilities, none of which felt right. I talked with a friend who had a therapy dog and she let me know that DPP was the way to go. Wiley and I did our first evaluation in the spring of 2014 and passed! Two things I remember about that evaluation, first that Wiley scored higher than I did. Plus, I was honored that Diana McQuarrie was the evaluator who welcomed us into the DPP fold.

Wiley has been a constant at Swedish Medical Center (SMC) since then. He has been with little folks shortly after arriving in



this world and other folks shortly before leaving it. I have asked him to take on extremely challenging situations and he has come through every time. Wiley has shown me time and again that he will let me know when he is uncomfortable and it is time to leave that room or leave the hospital. What a blessing for a therapy dog handler! Before Wiley and I started at Swedish, I had questions about how I would deal with difficult hospital situations. I still wonder if I could do it alone, but with Wiley at the other end of the leash it's all good.

Wiley's personality and energy have been both a challenge and a joy at SMC. A trainer once told me that Wiley has the best sense of humor of any dog she had worked with. Sounds silly, but true and it shows. Staff all over the hospital know Wiley but the Emergency Department is where he shines. They call it "Wiley Wednesdays" and shower him with affection, which he always returns. If you volunteer in a hospital you know that pages are rarely used. But I was leaving a patient's room in the ED a couple of years ago and heard, "Paging Wiley, paging Wiley. If you are on the floor, please report to the nurses' station." We turned toward the nurses' station and saw a group of nurses and techs cracking up in the hall. Wiley has a way of creating fun that just makes me happy!



At an acute care facility, you generally don't see a patient more than once, but we've been lucky to visit with two very long-term patients, both children. One was a two-year-old boy, a burn patient (P) who was in the hospital for months. Eventually Wiley was able to assist in his physical therapy, first by letting P walk with him to encourage P to start walking again. Later, P gave Wiley lots of treats on each visit to encourage him to use his badly burned fingers. I didn't realize it at the time but when I saw a picture of him, on a loose leash taking treats from those little hands, I saw just how much trust I have in that dog.

And then there was T, a four-year-old from Rwanda. T was at SMC for over two years. Probably because of her culture, T was not comfortable with dogs. She allowed Wiley to visit her with one rule, he could not touch her!

After a very long time T wanted to give him a carrot from her lunch. He had refused carrots at home but couldn't get enough of them from T. T continued to treat Wiley every time we saw her and every single time she squealed and made a face because Wiley's tongue touched her finger! In two years of visiting with T, she never touched Wiley. But she learned English and after almost two years said, "thank you Wiley." Drop the mike moment!



Wiley and I have done several DPP events, met the Whole Foods challenge a couple times, and attended events and seminars at D.U. With so many dogs and so many folks at these seminars, I have the only dog who barked in the middle of a presentation, fortunately greeted with a lot of laughs. I tried working with him at a nursing/rehab facility, but it wasn't a good fit for either one of us. He is a hospital dog and that works for both of us.

I have had pets my whole life and have worked with service dogs for several years, but I have never met a dog with Wiley's devotion, energy, character and personality. He's given me so many opportunities volunteering, brought purpose and joy to my retirement and allowed me to meet so many friends at DPP.

