

Getting to Know You ~
With Melanie Broughton

Are you a WAGS member? If so, you have likely already met Melanie Broughton. Among her many contributions to WAGS, Melanie is the Orientation Coordinator. She is also a member of the Evaluation Committee as the Evaluation Volunteer Coordinator. My Orientation was on Zoom due to Covid, but later Melanie arranged to meet me personally at the church parking lot, mask on and sanitizer in hand, to give me my manual. Since then, I've learned that kind of consideration is typical of Melanie, who often goes far out of her way to help others.



Diana (Di)

Melanie did not always have dogs in her life. She first heard about WAGS from a colleague at JCPS, where she was a school counselor for many years. She “filed the information away”, thinking that she would look into it more during her retirement.

Unfortunately, in 2001, Melanie was diagnosed with breast cancer. It was a challenging time, but a life-long friend knew just what she needed. Her friend suggested that they go look at a litter of puppies! Melanie, who had never had a dog, said she had no thoughts of bringing one home. (I am sure you are all chuckling at that naiveté!)

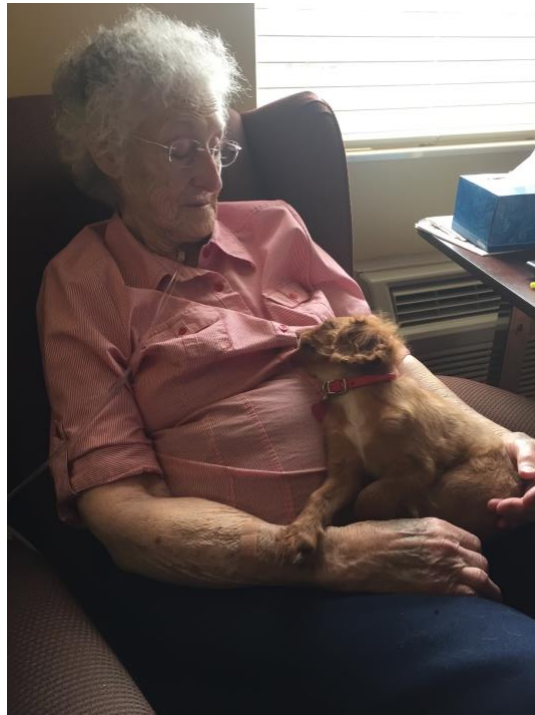
The litter was English Toy Spaniels, a small dog that was originally bred to be “the companion of kings”. The breed is known for their elegance, cheerful disposition, affection and devotion to their owners. The puppy who came to be named Diana, chose Melanie as her Mum. Diana became her first English Toy Spaniel.

Diana was very affectionate, but very shy and Melanie thought she would not have been happy as a therapy dog. But Diana turned Melanie into a dedicated dog lover. Diana lived 10 wonderful years with Melanie before she passed.



Melanie & Darcy

In 2017, Melanie felt ready to add a dog back in her life. She found a breeder of English Toy Spaniels in Virginia and made the trip to bring “Darcy” home. Darcy, a ruby colored English Toy Spaniel, like Diana, won her heart immediately.



Mom & Darcy



Melanie & Her Mom

During this time, Melanie’s Mom was in a rehabilitation center recovering from heart surgery. Melanie was given permission by the staff for Darcy to visit her Mom. It was during that comforting visit, that Melanie understood the potential for Darcy to be a therapy dog. She was a natural! She brought comfort to her Mom, several other patients, and the staff.



Darcy



Darcy in her Supergirl Costume

Melanie chose to train with professionals and completed Manners 1 & 2 classes, Canine Good Citizen, and Linda Laun's Pet Therapy Class. The training and bonding were immeasurable, putting Melanie and Darcy well on the path to becoming a pet therapy team.

They visited Hosparus Palliative Care, Hosparus Kourageous Kids Events, Magnolia Springs Memory Care, Baptist Health Cancer and Cardiovascular Units, Greathouse Traditional Elementary, and the

Louisville International Airport. Darcy touched so many lives and her beautiful spirit made her beloved by so many people. The special connection between Melanie and Darcy was noted by everyone they visited.

Sadly, in of October 2020, Darcy left us all too soon. Her death was sudden and unexpected, leaving Melanie bereft. She was so grateful for all the WAGS support that she received during this time. So many people understood just how special Darcy had been.

Once you give your heart to an English Toy Spaniel you will remain a devotee to the breed for life. Contacting Darcy's breeder, Melanie met Dash, who became her third English Toy Spaniel. His black and tan markings give him the "King Charles" distinction.



Dash with his Canine Good Citizen Ribbon



Dash passed his WAGS Evaluation. He is gentle, affectionate, and people are drawn to him. Melanie and Dash visit Hildegard House, Hosparus, Kourageous Kids, Baptist Health Hospital, WAGS JCPS Crisis Team, and the airport. They are also going to join the Hosparus Grief Counseling, and WAGS CASA outreach.

Melanie is a retired school counselor, who remains a Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor. Melanie applies the lessons she has learned to keep her current life in balance. She strongly encourages other WAGS members to do the same. Melanie relies on a consistent fitness schedule and healthy lifestyle. She sings with the Hosparus Louisville Community Comfort Singers. She has a strong community of family and friends, including many “Waggers.” Melanie is a passionate reader, loves the Arts, Broadway shows, ballet and orchestra performances. Her retirement has been enriched with world travel.

Melanie strongly encourages those who are interested in becoming a WAGS pet therapy team to pursue this rewarding, heart fulfilling, life-changing work.

