

## *The Endless Charm of Canine Companionship*

Pet therapy has offered a powerful opportunity to connect with others and bring joy to those facing challenges. Through adventures with my dog in public spaces, pet therapy has revealed the positive impact animals can have on people's lives.

My name is Patrick Murphy, and my dog Pickles is a sweet and friendly Labrador Retriever who loves visiting with anyone willing to give her a second look. Today, I want to share not just one specific visit but an overall summation of our exciting journey as a pet therapy team.

I have always been a dog person, finding joy in entertaining neighbors with the silly antics and playful tricks of my beloved furry friends. Where else could you see a dog, driven by the promise of a mere sliver of cheese, gallivanting halfway across the backyard on its belly? Not to mention walking in reverse, busting out a dance, ringing a bell, or even sneezing without batting an eye.

Once, a friend bravely questioned my dog's capabilities, foolishly wagering that a *number two* could not be performed on command. My four-legged pal rose to the challenge, effortlessly proving him wrong and earning us a well-deserved free lunch. Such moments reaffirmed a special bond between us, filled with laughter, camaraderie, and *the endless charm of canine companionship*.

Following the heartbreaking loss of my beloved companion, I realized that the only path forward was to open my heart to a new furry friend. Determined to channel my grief into something positive, I devised a plan. Equipped with a spirited new pup sporting a whimsical name and fueled by a desire to share her boundless affection with others, I set my sights on the world of pet therapy, hoping to one day visit a medical facility.

Knowing that a hospital's solemn and bustling environment starkly contrasted with the carefree atmosphere of my backyard escapades, I sought guidance and direction. Joining the ranks of W.A.G.S. Pet Therapy of Kentucky, I embarked on a journey that promised to heal the wounds of loss while bringing comfort and joy to those in need.

When my wife and I stepped into the first W.A.G.S. meeting, we were embraced with open arms. Surrounded by a community of compassionate and knowledgeable dog enthusiasts, we immediately felt at ease. Their willingness to share a wealth of experience and offer guidance was pivotal in helping us achieve our goals. Thanks to their unwavering support, Pickles and I proudly earned the title of an official Ambassador Therapy Dog Team. We were eager to make a difference and excited to go to work!

I quickly discovered that working as a therapy dog team in a healthcare facility presented emotional challenges. Our interactions with patients would often bring tears to the eyes of hospital staff. Sometimes, a nurse might kneel in the hallway, overcome with emotion, after we leave a room. Due to the intensity of some of our visits, I have occasionally been left speechless, unable to communicate with a patient or their family. Although moments of silence can be unsettling, the experience taught me it does not signify failure. Our mere presence seems enough, offering a quiet comfort that surpasses words. Pet therapy lowers anxiety and brings a smile to countless faces, and if only for a moment, it might be the greatest medicine. Participating with my dog in this simple act of kindness is incredibly rewarding, often humbling, and always an honor.

I hesitated to write a small part of our adventure because I did not want it to come across as if we were somehow special. Undoubtedly, every member of W.A.G.S. has had or can have similar rewarding experiences. Finally, I want to share some invaluable advice that has helped me and may resonate with others. I was once told by a W.A.G.S. evaluator that “pet therapy does not have to be perfect to be effective.” This wisdom has stayed with me, serving as a reminder that imperfections, though perhaps unwelcome, are simply a part of our journey.

Although my journeys with Pickles have not been flawless, I find comfort in believing they have been quite effective. And at the slightest suggestion, you might still find us eager to indulge in a bit of backyard nonsense.