

WOLFHOUNDS & VISITING THE ELDERLY

by Cindy Hewson

My introduction to therapy visits happened quite by chance. In 2013, my mother ended up having to move into an assisted retirement residence due to ill health. I asked one day if my wolfhound Keegan was allowed to visit. They were more than happy to have pet visits and this is how my story began.

Needless to say Keegan was a hit with the residents. In typical wolfhound style he was eager for the attention not to mention the snacks he was constantly offered. Most days it would take forever to get through the lobby to the elevators and up to my mom's floor. All of the residents would be so happy to recollect their stories of the dogs they have had in their lives, not to mention the common questions that wolfhound owner's know all too well. You would be surprised at how many folks keep a dog cookie stash in the hopes that one will come in to visit!

Keegan took part in brightening the lives of so many residents. We would dress up for all the holidays, St Patrick's Day, Easter, Halloween, & Christmas. Some of the resident's prized possessions were the photos I would take and print of them with Keegan. One resident in particular was a lady who had lived through both WWI & WWII. It was a very sad day when I had to tell Mariette that Keegan had developed bone cancer and his days were numbered. Sadly, we lost Keegan in the spring of 2016. Keegan was seven and Mariette was 107.

In the late summer of 2016, Gilligan came to be part of our lives. At three months old, he was already following in Keegan's paw prints and bringing smiles to the residents once again. The residents were in awe at how quickly a wolfhound grows and they watched in wonder as each week he was growing before their eyes.

In December 2016, my mother suffered a stroke and was hospitalized. In the

New Year, she was moved to a long-term care facility, as her needs were too high for the retirement home. When I inquired at this new facility if I could bring Gilligan in to visit, they were more than happy to welcome him. Their only stipulation was that he was up to date on his rabies vaccine. I provided a copy of his vaccine records and he is now a regular visitor at the nursing home. The favourite part of Gilligan's visits is the ice cream



Gilligan wishing Mariette a 108th Happy Birthday

in the gift shop and the residents get a kick out of watching him get spoon fed his treat! Just recently on arrival, we discovered the gift shop had closed early. Gilligan sat there in front of the closed doors with the most pathetic look on his face. This did not go unnoticed and the girl at the front desk promptly called the kitchen staff and asked if they would bring him some ice cream down to the lobby! Gilligan definitely has the staff well trained!

The residents and their families are so thankful when I bring Gilligan in for visits. I cannot count the number of photos that have been taken by the families of Gilligan with their loved one. There is no greater feeling than brightening the lives of these folks in what sadly is the last chapter of their lives. And yes, there will always be those that are afraid of dogs but it is usually quite obvious and we just go the other way. One lady in particular would literally do the senior sprint to hide in the dining room when she would see us come in the front door!

We also still make time to go visit Mariette at the retirement home who will be 110 years old next January! Mariette proudly has photos of her with both Keegan and Gilligan displayed on her bookshelf. At her 108th birthday party last year, City TV was there to feature a story on her life. She had received a personal letter from Queen Elizabeth acknowledging her birthday; however, she was more interested in the 8" by 10" photo of her with Gilligan, which was featured in the news clip!

If you live near any local retirement homes or long-term care homes and are interested in visiting, don't hesitate to go in and ask if you would be welcome. I used to believe that you had to be certified to participate in these visits but have learned that as long as your wolfhound is healthy and happy to participate you will both be rewarded with the most amazing

experience of giving back.

I truly hope that when I am a resident of one of these facilities that someone is there to visit me with their four-legged companion.



Gilligan visiting Mariette for some treats



VISITING THE ELDERLY



Keegan with Dorothy for St Patrick's Day



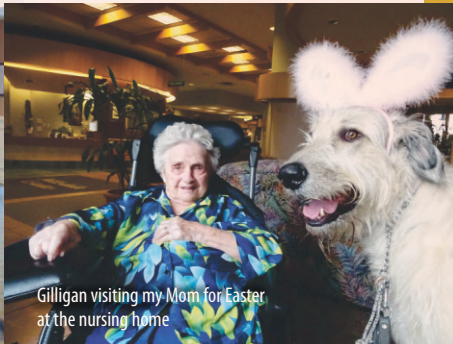
Keegan greeting the front desk for cookies



Keegan with Ruth for St Patrick's Day



Keegan with Muriel



Gilligan visiting my Mom for Easter at the nursing home



St Patrick's Day: Gilligan visiting my Mom in the nursing home



Gilligan finished his ice cream first, my Mom is warning him not to touch hers!



Me as Red Riding Hood and Keegan as the Big Bad Wolf disguised as Granny



Gilligan as the Cowardly Lion Halloween at the retirement home



Gilligan at the nursing home visiting Donna who has just returned from the store with her dog treat stash