



AKC Therapy Dogs

Poggi (CH Allegro Apoggiatura, ThD, CGC, TDI) and Tina (CH Allegro Sonatine, RE, ThD, CGC, TDI), his mom, recently received their AKC Therapy Dog titles. They are registered with Therapy Dogs International. Being with therapy dogs has been an amazing experience. We visit nursing homes and participate in the Tail Waggin' Tutors Program at the library. It is a good situation all around. As the handler it has brought me great joy to make people happy by visiting. Not only the patients but the staff and visitors are all so happy to see the dogs when they arrive to visit. At first people were taken back by their size. Some of the nurses and aids would back against the wall or go in a room and hide but when they saw how gentle the dogs were with the patients they started coming over to pat them as well. People love having their picture taken with the dogs. I will take pictures and deliver them back at the next visit. Poggi and Tina's pictures are posted in many of the patients' rooms and also in the director's office. They are the most photographed visitors! Tina loves to go into the activities room and wow the crowd. Poggi is the quiet sort of guy who likes the individual visits.

He amazes me at how he sizes up the situation and decides if it is better to lie quietly at someone's side or to move in close for endless hugs. The dogs definitely know when they have made someone happy. Even a short visit can make someone's day. The dogs do have their favorite people and go find them even when they're out of their rooms.

One of the people we visited was a very special lady named Florence. She was in a nursing home that was a long drive to get to but we were more than happy to make the trip. Florence was 102 years old, a very young 102, and had owned a fawn Great



Dane,
Butchie
Boy, when

she was younger. She loved all the therapy dogs that visited her nursing home but said she would really love to hug a Great Dane again. She had never seen a brindle before and was just amazed at their beautiful stripes. Florence did not look or act her age and had a remarkable memory. She also (as she told us) "still had all her teeth!" Her impression of Great Danes never changed throughout her life and it was nice to know that near the end of her life we were able to bring just a little bit of peace and happiness to someone like Florence. We were even told by the nursing home staff that Florence took down the pictures of her family and replaced them with the pictures of the Great Danes who visited so that was what she saw when she went to sleep at night.



In the Tail Waggin' Tutors program the dogs lie on the colorful rug in the children's room and the children come and sit with them and read their books. They stroke the dogs as they read and even show them the pictures. The dogs are great listeners and don't make corrections so it is very relaxed. A couple of the children even come into the library the week before to select a book so they can practice before seeing the dogs.

We have always known as Dane owners of their incredible gentleness and now through these programs at the libraries and the nursing homes, I can say that from children early in their lives to older adults, now many more understand our attraction to this giant breed with such big hearts willing to teach the young and the old.