MEGHAN PETS AS THERAPY DOG

My name is Meghan, I am a Welsh Springer Spaniel, and I’m 9 years old. Although I say it myself my coat is a lovely russet red and white. All Welsh Springer Spaniels are the same colour it makes us look very striking. Also there is not many of us about. Around 300 puppies a year are born, not like our English cousin that has over 10,000 puppies born a year.

My human mom had me when I was 8 weeks old. I came to live with her and her Cocker Spaniel dogs which were quite old and didn’t appreciate a new young puppy around the house. I went to training classes to learn to be an obedient dog. My mom had retired from the NHS and volunteered at the then new Acorn Children’s Hospice in their Hydrotherapy pool.

When I was nearly two, she thought it would be a good idea to see if I could qualify to be a Pet As Therapy Dog, (PAT) as I love people and enjoyed having a fuss. So to be PAT dog we had to have an assessment to see if I was suitable because you have to be well behaved. Mom was a bit worried because I can get excited especially when mom’s grown up son’s and grand daughters come visiting.

Assessment day arrived, where a lady asked us to walk nicely to heel round the hall, then mom sat and talked for what seemed ages, while I had to lie down quietly. Then mom had to groom me (I thought I was already looking good). Mom then had to handle me quite firmly. Suddenly there was a loud bang as the lady dropped a crutch on the floor, to which I took no notice. Then I got a big fuss from the lady and was given a treat, which I took very gently. We were then told we had passed the assessment. Mom was so pleased. Very soon our uniform arrived. A sweat shirt for mom, and a nice smart jacket for me. Then our very first visit was to Acorn Hospice where mom knew all the staff quite well. It was lovely to see them all the children and staff. I had a lovely time.

Very soon after that first visit we were told that Bramble, the PAT dog for St Richards, had retired, so we started visiting the clients there. First we went into the Day Unit where we were very welcome with lots of lovely people to meet and greet. Both visitors and staff were very welcoming. On that first day it happened to be someone’s birthday. The cake crumbs on the floor was very tasty. Then we went to inpatient unit. The clients where in individual rooms with their relations or visitors. From these rooms I could see the pond with ducks on it. I must admit that distracted me doing my meet and greet. Finally we would greet a group of men who sometimes were gardening. Sometimes we timed it right and visited just at coffee time, where hopefully there was a biscuit for me. Learning to shake a paw or give a high five came in very useful with this group of men. We made a lot of regular friends with nurses, staff volunteers in all departments and on reception where we were always given a warm greeting.

Five years ago it was decided that it would be nice for me to have puppies. All at St Richards were told and as the weeks passed we were asked ‘Are there any puppies yet?’. On the 22nd April 2015 I had 5 puppies, 4 boys and 1 girl. We sent a birth announcement to St Richards.

When the puppies were 6 weeks old and quite demanding to me but more so for my mom. It was a lovely sunny Thursday when mom put me and puppies in the car. She and a friend then took us all to St Richards for a visit. On the lawn by the Day Unit mom put up a puppy pen and all puppies were running about. Lots of people from all over the Hospice staff and visitors came out to see us. The day unit people sat outside and had puppies on their laps. There were lots of photos taken with staff having cuddles. I was a very proud mom. Then the puppies were taken into IPU to see clients in their beds. I do hope the puppies didn’t disgrace themselves. My mom said that was such a special day that she will never forget, seeing the pleasure my puppies bought smiles to so many peoples faces. We did the same at Acorns Hospice the following week.

I overheard my human dad say before my puppies arrived that ‘we were not going to keep any are we?’. When puppies were 8 weeks old, four went to their new homes at various places around the country. One called Pip had to stay because his owner was going on holiday. It was lovely just having one to play with, of course I was sorry to see my offspring go but they were getting quite a handful by this time. Two weeks later Pip went we were all sorry to see him go. To our surprise, the next morning he was back as he had cried all night. I was so glad to see him. Then, someone else rang up to see they could have Pip. But dad said Pip was to stay. I was so pleased.

When Pip was one year old he went for his PAT assessment too. This time it was with a Vet in large Pet Store. Mom was a bit worried as he had to walk nicely by the rabbits in their pens. He did behave very well and passed with flying colours. The Vet was very taken with Pip and I was so happy for him.

So now we both of us make lots of people happy and we both enjoy our visiting days. Pip got very friendly with a Day Unit visitor who liked to have him sat on his lap. Mom was pleased when a photo she took of the pair which she entered in the volunteers photo competition and it was the winning photo.

Mom loves showing us to the many people at St. Richards, and talking to people about their own dogs that they have or did have in the past.

At Christmas my mom dresses me and Pip up. One time we had a lovely photo taken with the pair of us dressed like reindeers and a Day Unit visitor dressed like an elf. Mom thought it would make a nice Christmas Card photo.

Besides St Richards and Acorn, we visit Worcester Warriors dementia café, Worcester University to see the students. Many are from abroad who are missing their own pets. Annually, several PAT dogs go to a school, where year 5 children ask us questions about our dogs, then read a story to the dogs.

My mom, Pip and me, love meeting all the lovely people at St Richards and we are really can’t wait to get back when are able.