

Willow Award 2006

*Team Nominations: TAJA & Michael Small; SNICKERS & Rhonda Gold
Submitted by: Rhonda M. Gold*



TAJA (Artemis in the Garden SC, FCh, CGC) has been visiting patients, residents, and children for over 5 years. She has lots of experience with the old and the young alike and has mentored her team partners, Michael and Rhonda in serving others in the local community! TAJA's visits (she never thinks of it as therapy "work") now focuses on regular trips to our local nursing facility.

TAJA's favorite activity is visiting with several distinguished ladies. She sits patiently alongside her mother, SNICKERS and quietly listens to Michael reading poems and stories chosen or requested by the ladies. You see, two of the residents were once school teachers and reading even just the very first few lines written by renowned poets or authors invokes their sharp minds, engaging them in sharing their childhood memories and youth. Many hours have been spent together over tea and biscuits reading Eliot, Cummings, Longfellow, and Kipling, to name a few.

TAJA and SNICKERS (DC Whippetrees Gold Nugget, FCh, CGC, CD, NA, CAVX) always start their visits by greeting the residents as they walk slowly up and down the halls. They simply stop and savor every stroke, gentle touch, or kind words they receive while surely recognizing the smiles and joy they are bringing to the elderly. They always ask to visit the lounge area where several family members spend time with their loved ones. But TAJA and SNICKERS are soon ready to head towards their favorite room, first to receive gentle strokes to the head, face, and neck from Mrs. M and Mrs. H and then to settle quietly onto the resident's bed.

Michael reads from George Eliot,

"You love the roses - so do I. I wish the sky would rain down roses, as they rain from off the shaken bush. Why will it not? Then all the valley would be pink and white and soft to tread on. They would fall as light as feathers, smelling sweet; and it would be



like sleeping and like waking, all at once!" The room is silent and still with the exception of Michael's soft spoken voice as he reads the words that warm and reunite Mrs. M. and the others with their past and their youth. Mrs. M. recollects her gardening experiences and spending time together with her mother planting roses as a child.

At the conclusion of the reading, the teams head along the hall greeting other residents and stop to see Mr. T. SNICKERS helps Mr. T. tone his muscles and work his arms by encouraging him to stroke and brush her. Mr. T. talks about his animals, spring planting season, and recalls his early years working hard to tend his farm and fields, all the while stroking SNICKERS. She lies on his bed next to his wheelchair offering him the opportunity to find pleasure in the

tactile stimulation that stroking her soft coat provides, as well as to gain additional strength from the upper extremity range of motion activities.

We feel blessed to have the opportunity to know these special people and to be able to touch their lives. Our therapy dogs provide the special bond and connection we feel with these individuals. We cherish our relationships with these incredible residents who have opened their hearts to us. We know the animal-human bond is very real and we appreciate the impact our visits have on their lives, as well as on our own.



TAJA, Snickers, and our greyhound Fergie's therapy work is inspired by the work of Willow and her partner, Linda. By example, they have encouraged and supported us every step of the way.

Photo Credit: Rhonda M. Gold

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