

My Life With Art II ...A Canine Companions Success Story by Rhonda Clark

When I was asked to write a success story about Art II my assistance service dog from Canine Companions For Independence since we becoming a team in February of 2008, I thought it would be fairly easy, but it's not simply because each day is a success.

Art II or Handsome Man” has really helped to enhance my independence. By this I mean where I used to have to rely on other humans to assist with things such as retrieving dropped items. Since I live independently, there were times that it would take me several minutes to retrieve dropped items from the floor and there were times that I would have to wait several hours until a neighbor came home to assist me. Art has also stopped me from falling while transferring back into my wheelchair by simply standing in front of me



The thing that I enjoy most about having an assistance dog is the sense of pride that I feel now. He is a wonderful help to me, but an even greater companion. The unconditional love that he shares with me is so special. There is definitely a bond. I often tell my friends he is the closest thing to a baby I'll ever have and for me that is the most rewarding feeling.

I often get asked about Art and Canine Companions For Independence by others when we are out in public and I love to talk about him as well as the organization. I encourage everyone who is interested in an assistance dog to contact Canine Companions For Independence because you will be amazed how much your life will be changed.

The two week training with the dogs is a very intense process and it has to be to match the right dog with the right person or team. I have to say though it was the best two weeks of my life. The trainers take every aspect of your life, personality, etc. in to consideration while working with the dogs. They also use shorter leashes for folks who use wheelchairs and adapt other equipment if necessary so that the recipient and/or facilitator can work safely and successfully so both you and the dog can make a great team together. The post-graduate support is also always there. The training team is always just an e-mail or phone call away if you have a question or problem. This is a great asset of Canine Companions For Independence.

Before being teamed with Art I always considered myself a pretty outgoing person, but now I see things much different. Yes, I still went to work, college, physical therapy, occupational therapy, or church, but with some of it before Art, I was just going through the motions and doing what I had to do. Now I enjoy going to everywhere with him. Part of it may be because people come up to me now and ask about Art and what he can do for me and I get to talk about him, us as a team, and Canine Companions For Independence. The focus is on him now and not me which is so great.

Art is a huge help to me a work. No matter how many times I drop my pen he is right there to pick it up for me. He also pushes the elevator buttons. It is great for me because I can be independent and not have to take anyone away from their job if I need help.

Art has helped me in so many ways I have a greater sense of self worth now and I'm very proud to have him and be a part of the Canine Companions For Independence family and the Circle of Love that we all share.

Life without an assistance dog was much harder before and I much rather prefer assistance from my four legged friend that way when I need help due to a situation that's affected by the fact that I have Cerebral Palsy and use a power wheelchair for mobility that I don't have feel like I'm putting people out when I need assistance. Besides, no matter what kind of day I'm having my Handsome Man is ALWAYS there no matter what and I would have to go on walks by myself.

