

# THE PET SITTERS OF AMERICA, INC.

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www.petsittersofamerica.com

The Leader In Professional Pet Sitting Since 1987

Spring/Summer 2002

## Grandma Belle and Pet Therapy: An Unlikely Combination

by Sandy Kamen Wisniewski

From the time I was knee high, animals have always been part of my life. I cherish them, am fascinated by them, and surround my life with them. I love their innocence and find great humor in their everyday antics. To this day it never ceases to amaze me how they find a way to crawl deep into the crevices of humanity and teach us a lesson or two. Today I will tell you about one of them.

My grandmother's new residence was a nursing home. It was the fall of 1991 when she was wheeled inside for the first time. My grandma Belle, the matriarch of my dad's side of the family, was given last call. Time was moving way too quickly. It seemed like it was just yesterday my grandmother was a strong, vital woman who made magical chocolate cake and was quick to boss anyone around that was within hearing distance. At 4 foot 10, she had gumption and guts of a person twice her size. She was queen bee, head honcho, and CEO of our family unit.

I thought my heart was going to shatter, as the weight of her predicament lay heavy in my chest. I entered my grandmother's apartment for the last time on a cool spring day. As I stood there watching relatives pack up her belongings, it seemed surreal, like watching a movie in slow motion. Her dishes were being packed in cardboard boxes, knickknacks gingerly wrapped in tissue, her bedding folded in a pile.

Weekly I visited my grandma at the nursing home. I would tote my two babies, three and two years old, along. The nursing home was run down, cold, and the pungent smell stayed with me long after I left. I suspected early on that the care was less than standard. Upon research I found out that the nursing home had many violations, and questionable conduct was cited by the organization that regulates nursing homes. Roaches scurried away one day when I flicked on the bathroom light. I was appalled by the place but helpless to change my grandma's circumstances, until I decided to find a reason to be there other than just visiting Grandma. I reasoned that if I developed a relationship with the staff they would take better care of my grandma and inform me of what is going on there on a regular basis. What that involvement would be, I didn't know. But in short order it came calling.

One morning, while flipping through a magazine, I came upon a picture that caught my eye. In it, a big golden retriever was being stroked by an older gentleman. The caption read: "Sadie Gives Love To Local Senior Home." Intrigued, I read the article. It appeared that a small group of animal lovers were bringing their dogs to a nursing home to visit with residents. The article talked about the positive psychological and physical benefits of what they called "Pet Therapy." Being the owner of a pet sitting and dog training service, I knew I had my answer: Pet Therapy.

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### Services provided by P.S.A.

Care of your pets while you travel

Overnight/house sitting

Daily dog walking, while you work or play

Dog training in your home

### Volunteer Programs

Monthly visits to nursing homes with pets

Advice and guidance for adopting a new pet

Children's educational programs

Join us!



# Pet Sitter Profile

Pet Therapy continued from page 1

## Vi Wesel

Our featured pet sitter, Vi Wesel, has been a pet sitter for PSA for over 3 years. She has also been working at Underwriters Laboratories in Northbrook for over 18 years.

It is not hard to pick Vi out in a crowd. She is vivacious, enthusiastic, and kind. Vi has a sense of humor that makes her

the life of all our staff meetings and parties and has a laugh that's contagious. Her sweet warmhearted nature makes her the perfect pet sitter and friend to all of us at P.S.A.

Vi's family includes her 30 year-old son Floyd and his wife Debra, who live in Arlington Heights, and her cat Tiki. In her spare time she enjoys going to movies, theater productions, and

to restaurants. She collects Beanie Babies and coins.

When asked why she pet sits Vi said, "I like the idea that I can call anyone at Pet Sitters if I need help with anything or have a problem."

One of her most memorable experiences pet sitting is the time she took care of 2 dogs, 3 cats, 3 birds, and 3 turtles. She said that the job really got her to appreciate all types of pets and we are so proud to have Vi on staff and hope she stays in situations for Otis of the birds. One of the birds, a Macaw, would squawk, "Hello, hello" whenever the door bell or telephone rang. She would reply by saying, "Wait, wait." Well, in just a short time she had

the Macaw saying, "Hello, hello, wait, wait."

**Have you checked out our website lately?**

**Go to:**

**[www.petsittersofamerica.com](http://www.petsittersofamerica.com).**

**Want your pet's picture on the site? Send it in and we'll gladly include it!**

We'd like to thank all our pet sitters for all the hard work and dedication they have shown to PSA, their clients, and the clients' pets. Our staff is an extension of our family and they all mean the world to us. They are an awesome group of people with warm and generous hearts.

Sandy and Chuck

It was a challenge convincing the staff to allow me to visit the home with animals. At that time the concept of pet therapy was brand new and my vision came with some skepticism. Some of the concerns were animals transmitting diseases to people, aggressive animals biting, and residents being allergic to the animals. I gathered together what little information there was available about pet therapy, assured them by explaining that I would have a thorough screening process, and agreed to oversee the whole operation. I was thrilled when I got the okay to move forward with the program. My next task was finding other volunteers who shared my vision.

Looking through my list of clients and sifting through my personal address book, I began making calls. Some forty calls later I had my volunteers. The first evening set the program in motion. We started out by having the residents that were physically able meet us in a large room for the program. We began the hour by having each volunteer with pet in tow stand center stage and talk about their pet. We learned early on to talk very loudly and use animated body language, all in an effort to be able to communicate with those people who were hard of hearing, had poor vision, or both. When everyone was through we walked around the room letting people pet the dogs.

The staff wheeled my grandmother to the back of the room to watch at the beginning of each program. When it was my turn to go up front to talk about my dog she would yell out, "That's my grand-daughter! That's my granddaughter!" raising her right hand and waving in big strokes, like a flag flying in the wind. And then she'd blow me dozens of kisses. "Hi, Grandma!" I'd call back, tickled by her enthusiasm. You see, ironically my grandma was not an animal lover and, further yet, had a fear of being physically close to them. She would join us for the presentation but sit way in the back of the room, far enough away from the animals so she felt safe.

My grandma and many of the other residents were able to go to the meeting room but not everyone was able to leave their rooms to join us. After a couple of months we began stopping in rooms on the way to the meeting room and visited those people who couldn't come to the meeting room. The response was better than I ever imagined possible. The smiles and eyes that sparkled could have lit a room with its brightness.

Since the time the program started it has blossomed into a volunteer program that touches many more people's lives than I could have imagined. We have over 50 volunteers who go to nursing homes throughout Lake County every month. They bring with them their sweet pets and smiling faces and share with the residents their love of animals. Although my grandmother died a year after the program began, whenever I think of pet therapy I am thankful for my feisty, no-nonsense, petite 4'10" Grandma Belle. Without her, this whole program that brings such incredible joy to so many would never have happened. Thanks, Grandma. Blessings truly do come in small packages!

**Care For Your  
PET**

**Have Your Pet Spayed or Neutered!**



## Our Photo Gallery



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New clients receive 50%  
OFF sign-up fee  
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Not valid with any other offer  
One coupon per person  
Expires 9-1-02

-coupon-

Regular clients receive  
10% off pet sitting  
(up to \$10.00)

Not valid with any other offer  
One coupon per person  
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### IN MEMORY OF OUR PETS

*You will always be in the hearts of those people you've touched.*

Misty Stueckman

Mugsy Mroz

Arnold True

Underfoot Diegel

Brandy Zurck

Monty Paige

Amber Hada

Mitzi Glick

Posey Diegel

Baby Wesel

Sammy Gallagher

Molly Zurek

Shannon Wendt

## A Note From Sandy

Dear Friends,

I hope you enjoy this edition of our newsletter. This is truly one of the favorite parts of my job. I spend hours and hours in my office tinkering with this publication, trying to create an image that really reflects who I am, who we all are here at Pet Sitters, and how we feel about our job and animals in general.

In this issue we have a smattering of different kinds of information. I loved the story from Shari Brady about her precious parrot Pookie. The article on arthritis by Shari Count is a real eye-opener and a great help to me personally, being that I have four pets that are experiencing the affects of arthritis. The article I wrote about my grandma is deeply personal and a tribute to her. The photo gallery is meant to make you smile.

In every issue we also include a reminder to have your pet spayed or neutered. There are millions of dogs and cats living in shelters and euthanized every day. I've heard more times than I'd like to admit people saying, "My pet never gets out." If that were the case then there wouldn't be an overpopulation. Also, neutering/spaying eliminates certain kinds of cancers that your pet might succumb to had you not fixed them.

It's also a thrill to feature Vi Wesel. I just love her! She's got an amazing spirit. I was sad to hear, when I called her to interview her for the newsletter, that her cat Baby died at a young age from complications of diabetes. My heart hurts for her. Although that kitty lived a short life, you betcha he was spoiled and loved.

Well, this year marks our 15 years in business. It's hard to believe. I ran into one of my first clients, Ricki Kaplan. She told me both Tiffany (a miniature poodle) and Chelsea (a collie) passed away. I have so many fond memories of them, from the early days, I got choked up. Probably all the pets I first pet sat for our gone now. Time does move on. They're not with us long enough but the time they do give us is so condensed with love that it's so worth it.

Have a great spring and summer.

Sandy Kamen Wisniewski

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### Should You Tip Your Sitter?

We have been asked this question on occasion and the answer is YES, of course you can! Just like getting your hair cut, going to a restaurant or using a house cleaning service, tipping is a wonderful way of telling someone you appreciated their service.

Holidays are always a busy time for our staff. Even though they are working on the holidays they never complain because they are fully aware that it is part of their job. But I know they do appreciate a little something extra for their effort.

The average tip is 10% to 25% of the cost of the service. Of course, it is not a requirement.

## Lessons Our Pets Teach Us

by Shari Brady

My Timneh African Grey "Pookie" and I were best friends. I never thought there would come a day when our lives would part. But after my second child was born, it became evident that the love I had for Pookie would be tested. Pookie was not happy living with me anymore. He did not know that -- and I could not face it. But now it was time for me to be strong and unselfish and do what was best for Pookie.

Pookie needed other birds to bond with. He was desperately lonely and I needed to find a home where he would be happy. I found the Parrot Society of Illinois/Midwest. Their Bird Adoption Program helped me locate the perfect home for Pookie. The minute I met Chris, the girl who adopted Pookie, I knew Pookie would be happy with her.

A few weeks later I phoned Chris to see how Pookie was doing. I have to admit I was terrified to make the call. What if he's not happy? What if I failed my best friend? What if I took his life into my hands and made the wrong decision for him?

But soon, all those ifs vanished. Pookie was living "La Vida Loca," as they say! Chris said Pookie's personality and speaking abilities were blossoming daily! Every morning he would say to her, "Pookie's hungry, Pookie wants a grape." And he would sit on a perch with Fiesta (a green Amazon) and sing, "Pookie and Fiesta, Pookie and Fiesta!" Chris said she felt as though Pookie's destiny was with her and her "bird family." That made me cry. But they were tears of happiness.

Just as parents have to let their children go and find their own love and happiness, so was the case with Pookie. Sometimes love is difficult. It challenges us -- and it teaches us. My best friend Pookie taught me two valuable lessons in life.

A true and honest love of someone or something is not selfish and is not always easy. And secondly -- humans and creatures alike -- we must be happy and our souls at peace, before our real full potential can be realized.

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Pookie

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### Weather Precautions

During the summer when the weather is hot sitters will use their best judgement as to how long your dog should be outside. Your sitter will never take a chance that your pet will get overheated and will make sure that your pet has easy access to fresh water.

Also, remember never leave your pet in a car. **Cars can heat up like an oven and cause heat exhaustion or heat stroke.**

## § Why Hire P.S.A?



- § We have an excellent reputation, having served clients since 1987.
- § To insure quality individuals working for us, we have a four-step process of hiring sitters.
- § All our sitters are trained in First Aid for Pets.
- § Our sitters are mature, all 21 or older.
- § We have numerous sitters so if your sitter is unavailable or has an emergency, we can still service your pets.
- § All our sitters attend regular company meetings and follow standard company rules and regulations.
- § We have a full service office available to you Monday through Friday from 9:00 A.M. to 3:00 P.M.
- § We check messages twice daily on weekends for emergencies.
- § We are recommended by dozens of veterinarians.
- § We are a member of Pet Sitters International.
- § We are insured and bonded.



### **Business Hours:**

**Monday through Friday from 9:00 A.M. to 3:00 P.M.**



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