



AUTUMN 2006

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The Courier

the national newsletter of Canine Companions for Independence® — enhancing the lives of people with disabilities since 1975

Puppies with a Purpose

It was a crisp morning in January 1989 when Emily Williams picked up the telephone in her home, one mile from Canine Companions for Independence (CCI) headquarters in Santa Rosa, CA. "I was answering an ad in the local newspaper," she recalled. A few days later, Emily became a first-time, official breeder caretaker for an 8-week old pup named Maizie. "She started off as Kendra. We changed her name. But really we called her Grace, for her heart and her progeny," Emily said.

In the summer of 2005, over 14 years and six litters later, Maizie died from natural causes. The loss, like all losses, was great. But Maizie was far from the last dog in Emily's life. "Let's see, there was Tawny, Thyme, Barbara, Bonnie, Lyric, Emaleen, Quintara, Kaya," Emily begins to list — over 200 puppies, 24 litters, and seven breeders, to be exact. "And, of course, there was Miss Beth," beams Emily, pointing to a calendar. "Beth was the CCI centerfold girl in 2005."

Being a caretaker of newborn puppies requires

a hefty amount of task mastering. "In a typical day, I'll feed, clean up poop, check weight gain, smile and giggle, clean up pee, feed, cuddle, and clean up more poop," she laughs. "Most of all, I feed, watch, and listen — and love, love, love the puppies." At night, when Emily peeks into the kitchen, she knows the "snuggling puppies sleeping on the floor is a pile of promise, and someone somewhere is waiting for each and every one."

In addition to assisting with births and caring for mother dogs and their newborns, Emily often spends 14 to 18 months at a time raising a single puppy, preparing to send him or her off to CCI for final training. Every departure is trying. "The hardest part of puppy raising is when you watch the pup you raised walk away," she says. "The dogs — who are so socialized and secure — usually never look back, and they leave with a bounce in their step, tails swinging with cheer and willingness."

To fend off the tears, Emily often wears sunglasses and breathes deeply.

After saying goodbye,

(Continued on page 3)

Emily Williams and CCI puppy Kaya enjoy some playful fun.



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Nose-to-Nose

Pluto visits with CCI Graduate Jason Gackstetter's Skilled Companion Dog, Marisa. See Disney® story on page 3. Photo by kensergi.com