INTRODUCTION

The following transcript is the product of digitally recorded interviews with Wade Kammin, conducted by Gail Aper Rein on March 10, 2012, and again on March 24, 2012. The interviews were conducted at Wade’s store, Wild Birds Unlimited, after the store had closed on Saturday afternoons. The recording was transcribed and edited by Ms. Aper Rein. The original transcripts were reviewed, clarified, and edited by Mr. Kammin. This is the edited version of those interviews. Editing was for clarification purposes only and does not affect the substance of the interviews.

The purpose of these interviews was to fulfill requirements for a graduate course in Oral History Methods, thereby strengthening and sharpening the interview skills of the oral historian. The aim of the narrator was to draw out as much information as possible regarding the care and feeding of backyard birds and the raising of service dogs. Both of these are areas of expertise of the interviewee. He and I met initially one week before our first interview so that we could become acquainted with each other and talk about the proposed interview.

Wade Kammin owns and operates Wild Birds Unlimited, a nature store devoted to the care and feeding of our wild feathered friends. He has a long history as a bird-lover. His background in birding began when he was a small child, encouraged by his grandparents and a neighbor. He has had pet birds, including parrots, canaries, and cockatiels, and currently raises chickens on
his property in Springfield. He previously worked in a pet store and has worked at his current location for nearly twenty years. His store stocks items relating to the care and feeding of backyard birds, including bird feeders, bird seed, and bird baths. One can also find a myriad of items to glorify the garden, such as wind chimes and gazing balls. There are items for the home, such as stained glass, as well as more personal items like purses and jewelry.

Wade originally hails from Covington, Indiana, a small town on Illinois’ eastern border. He states that his transition to Springfield was seamless and that he was welcomed with open arms by this larger community. He embraces the life here by donating to his community and volunteering with various organizations, such as the Capitol Canine Training Club. Additionally, his store donates feeders and seeds to the Illinois Audubon Society, located on Clear Lake Avenue, and Lincoln Memorial Gardens, located by Lake Springfield.

In addition to being a business owner, Wade, age 40, trains puppies for Canine Companions for Independence, an organization devoted to breeding, raising, and training service dogs for the disabled. At this writing, he is raising his fifth puppy for CCI and has been with the organization since 2006. Each pup is in his keeping for nearly a year and a half and learns at least thirty-five commands while under his tutelage.

Wade’s history of training dogs is also a long one. He began with his own pet dog when he was young and went on to win titles and awards in various competitions as he continued to train his pets. While grieving the loss of a
beloved pet, Wade decided to foster a dog and through his research found Canine Companions for Independence. Subscribing to their philosophy of dog training, it was an easy match that he finds extremely rewarding. As well as the puppy he raises for CCI, Wade shares his home with a pet dog, several cats, and pet mice.

Gail Aper Rein is a life-long resident of central Illinois and is currently completing requirements for a Master of Arts degree in history at the University of Illinois, Springfield. Over the course of this interview, she discovered the delights of both the Illinois Audubon Society and the Lincoln Memorial Gardens. She shares her domicile with a spoiled cat and wishes to apologize to her own backyard birds for previously offering only sunflower seeds. She hopes to one day have a well-trained dog.
Interview with Wade Kammin  
Owner, Wild Birds Unlimited  
Trainer, Canine Companions for Independence  
1930 South MacArthur Boulevard  
Springfield, IL 62704  
Conducted by Gail Aper Rein


Wade, I know that you grew up in Indiana, so tell me how you made your way to Springfield.

WK: I was living in Indiana, in Covington, which is right on the border, and my partner took a job here in Springfield, teaching Latin at Sacred Heart Griffin. The job I had at the time wasn't a very important job, making it easier for me to uproot and move, so we moved here in 1994.

GR: So you've been here nine years.

WK: '94.

GR: '94. '94! Oh, my gosh, I don't do math well, obviously.

[both laughing]

WK: Yea. So we've been here a long time. [laughs]

GR: So how long have you been in this business?

WK: I've been in this business since 1995. So I've been here 17 years? 18 years?

GR: And you didn't start out as the owner of this business, you started out as an employee, right?

WK: Correct. Correct. When we first moved here, I actually took another job initially. I've always been a big nature lover and had birds myself for years - since I was little. I found this shop and really enjoyed it and saw they had a part time job available, so I took this part-time job in addition to my other job. One thing led to another and in short order I was working here full-time. Then, when the previous owners decided to retire, it gave me a good opportunity to take over the business and
purchase it from them. That was in 2001, so a little over 10 years ago and I've been enjoying it ever since.

**GR:** So do you still have birds at home?

**WK:** I don't have any birds at home. That was in my previous life, when I used to work in a pet shop.

**GR:** What kind of birds did you have?

**WK:** I had parrots, cockatiels, and canaries. I had one bird, the parrot, for 23 years. I like canaries a lot. Oh, I've raised just about all of them though, through the industry. Currently, I only have chickens. They're outdoors, so they don't usually fall into the, "Do you have birds category?" So, pet birds versus agricultural birds. Chickens fall somewhere in between for me.

**GR:** Well, I know you can't teach chickens to talk. [laughs]

**WK:** No.

**GR:** But can you teach cockatiels to talk?

**WK:** Yeah.

**GR:** Yeah? Do they have a big repertoire?

**WK:** It varies. Only the males generally talk and some can be more elaborate than others. They're not usually as clear in speech as what some of the parrots are, but the one I had for 23 years was a pretty good talker. He only had a limited number of things he said, but what he said, you could understand fairly well. As he aged it tended to get a little more garbled and he started running different phrases together.

**GR:** Were they appropriate to the situation?

**WK:** Sometimes, yes. The bigger birds tend to have a little more ability to relate exactly what they are saying and they can be very specific to the situation. The cockatiel was hit or miss. I mean, if he wanted a bite of something you were eating, I don't remember exactly what he said, but it was appropriate. Other things he would say were very random and just part of the repertoire of noise he made, really.

**GR:** And you had one for 23 years!

**WK:** Um-hm.
**GR:** Wow! I didn’t know they lived that long!

**WK:** With good care. Most don’t, but a lot of it’s on the care of the species.

**GR:** So now you just feed your birds outdoors at the store.

**WK:** Right, which is what the core of our store is - feeding outdoor birds. Sometimes, there is a misinterpretation of wild birds as pet birds. Well, we mean truly wild birds – birds out in the natural habitat out here in central Illinois. They’re the ones we’re going to attract to our backyards with our feeders, our bird baths, and other offerings.

**GR:** So tell me what kinds of things you have in your store.

**WK:** We’re pretty diverse. The name ‘Wild Birds Unlimited’ probably lacks some description for what all we do. The core of our business is feeding the backyard birds, so we have bird feeders, we have bird baths, we have bird houses, all sorts of seeds, and various foods that specialize in attracting different species of birds. But because feeding the birds ties directly into enjoying your time outside, we also have all sorts of things that are nature-related – items for your yard, decorations, lawn art, if you will, ways of decorating your yard so that while you’re enjoying your birds you’re also enjoying the statuary or the flags or an attractive door mat on your front porch - anything that helps makes your yard more attractive. We have a lot of gift items too, so if Mom or Dad needs a gift or a friend has a birthday we have all sorts of things that are more indoor gifts. Right now, the diversity is just extreme. We’ve got wine bottle holders, purses, hammock swings, clocks, thermometers. You name it. We’ve got a little diversity going on.

**GR:** You’d mentioned that Mother’s Day is a big holiday for you. So what types of things do people usually pick out for moms?

**WK:** Moms are diverse, so there are a lot of different things that people pick for Mom. The biggest, traditionally, with the nearly 20-year history of the store, is hummingbird feeders. Hummingbirds are one of the most popular birds we have. They’re so unique, they’re tiny, they’re fast, they’re pretty, there’s a lot to like about them. It happens to time well with Mothers’ Day, too. Hummingbirds are only with us during the summer time and their arrival date here in central Illinois is usually the very end of April or the first week of May, so right before Mother’s day is when a lot of moms are maybe seeing their first hummingbirds. They get excited, so maybe they’ve commented, or the kids just happen to think that a hummingbird feeder would be something that Mom would enjoy, so we do a lot of hummingbird feeders. Hummingbird feeders come in
many types. We have some that are core or what we call just functional feeders. They’re really well made and easy to clean, but then there are a lot of very pretty hummingbird feeders. So, for gift-giving a lot of people like to choose one that’s made of blown, recycled glass, or has iron work involved. There are lots of different types of hummingbird feeders that are very pretty, so you’re able to give Mom something that’s functional, it’s fun for the birds you’re trying to attract, and it looks pretty when it’s hanging in the yard.

**GR:** Now, I’ve looked around your store and I haven’t seen those, but I’m eyeballing those wind chimes and you have a huge variety and I’m just a real sucker for wind chimes.

**WK:** [laughter]

**GR:** I love them. So are those gold metal? [pointing] Those over there?

**WK:** Actually, I think those that you are looking at right now are bamboo.

**GR:** Ohhhhh....

**WK:** But they’ve had a wood burner taken to them and then some of them are stained, so you’re getting sort of a gold or bronzy effect. The sunlight is playing off it right now, making it look like that from here. We sell a lot of those. You know, it’s got a nice, tropical sound to it.

**GR:** mm-hm.

**WK:** The ones that we sell the most of though are the big hand-tuned wind chimes. We’ve got a company – an American-made company – that provides us with our wind chimes and each tube is tuned to an individual note, so if you hear the whole cord on the wind chime, you actually get a musical score, if you will, from the wind chimes. There are little ones, with tubes that are six inches long and a half inch in diameter and there are the big ones that are four feet long and a couple of inches in diameter.

**GR:** Yea, I played with those the last time I was in the store. [laughs]

**WK:** They give you a really nice resonance, and if you give one of those a gong, you can hear the resonance going on for several minutes afterwards.

**GR:** They’re beautiful.
WK: Yea, they’re nice and we have lots of decorative ones. Some may have different trinkets hanging from the end instead of a standard wind-catcher on the bottom giving you pretty things to look at in the garden.

GR: Just today, I read in the newspaper about a woman who feeds birds in the backyard and her neighbor had come over and complained about it saying that it was attracting vermin into his yard – mice, squirrels, and other unwanted pests. So do you have recommendations for how to deal with the unwanted creatures that you get along with the birds?

WK: We do. It’s a question that’s, thankfully, not terribly common, or not a lot of people suffer from, but it does happen occasionally. Most of the times when people are getting mice or other vermin attracted under a bird feeder or around a bird feeder, it’s due to improper bird feeding habits. Like any other hobby you do, there are right ways and wrong ways of doing it. When buying bird seed, there is good quality bird seed and there’s poor quality bird seed. Unfortunately, a lot of places will put things in their bird seed blends that are not technically bird seed – grain products that our local song birds won’t eat – but they’re cheap, so they put them in there so it makes the price look good. In the end the birds don’t eat those things and they kick them out on the ground. Mice, being less selective, will pick up on that and visit that area regularly, so if you use a better quality food, then you tend to have fewer problems. Now, that being said, sometimes birds, even with the good food, can be a little messy, so there are ways of minimizing that, too. There are trays you can put under the feeder to catch food so it doesn’t fall down. There are certain types of seed that the birds have to chip away at and they can’t knock it to the ground. There are literally probably a dozen different steps you can take to minimize that, but it’s actually quite easy to do, you just need to know what the steps are. We’ll walk through those steps with somebody who’s having those issues, see what they can do to alleviate the situation, and tell the neighbor what they’re doing and how they’re going to change their program to help make sure the mice aren’t a problem. Often times, though, there’s a secondary issue that’s habitat related. Yes, maybe there’s some food from the bird feeder, but there might also be that a really messy pile of rubbish that the mice are living in and breeding in, and finding places to raise their babies, so if that gets cleaned up too, that is helps a lot with the issue.

GR: It seems to me I’ve seen cracked corn in bird seed mixes. Is that right?

WK: Well, cracked corn is one of those foods that sometimes gets a bad rap, but the bad rap is only semi-justifiable. Cracked corn in a moderate amount is actually very good for some of our ground-feeding birds - the juncos, the doves.
GR: Cardinals?

WK: Cardinals will eat cracked corn, but it’s not their favorite. Where cracked corn’s bad reputation really comes from is that it’s a relatively inexpensive food and some of your discount store blends will put a lot of cracked corn in there to bring the cost down. Well, then you have an incorrect ratio of different types of seeds. You have too much cracked corn and not enough of something, like, say, sunflower, that appeals to a wider group of birds and so the birds who like sunflower are kicking the cracked corn out and there aren’t enough cracked corn eaters to clean it up off the ground. Therefore people say, “Oh, the birds didn’t like the cracked corn.” Well, it wasn’t that they didn’t like the cracked corn; it was just that it was there in the improper ratio. So it’s kind of like making a recipe.

GR: Wow.

WK: If you’re baking, all the ingredients are important, but if you put the wrong amounts of it in there, it’s no longer right and the recipe doesn’t turn out right. Well, bird feeding is kind of the same way. There are a variety of foods that we don’t ever really want to see in bird feed – milo, wheat, oats – there are virtually no song birds who like those, so we don’t ever really want to see those in a blend, but cracked corn is actually okay in a limited amount. With our blends we further break down the different blends by what group of birds we want to eat it, so cracked corn is only in our blends that we consider ground-feeding blends, which we want to end up on the ground. If someone is focusing more on woodpeckers, chickadees, and nuthatches, birds who virtually never go to the ground...

GR: Right.

WK: …we would never put corn in their blend, because they don’t really like that. So, it’s a matter of selecting the right blend for the birds that you’re trying to attract.

GR: What do those birds eat?

WK: Those birds prefer foods that are much higher in fat and protein, and not so much the carbs that corn has. They’re going for sunflower, both oil and striped, as well as some of our chips, which is the sunflower with the shell taken off of it, nuts of any sort – pecans, peanuts, almonds, cashews – maybe dried fruit, safflower, and suet. So those are things we’re going to put in a blend that’s catering towards that group of birds.
GR: Sometimes I have a downy or two and sometimes in the summer I'll see a nuthatch, but I've never tried to feed them. I've always just liked cardinals and their favorite is the sunflowers, right?

WK: Sunflower is one of their favorites, but there's a little bit of misconception with sunflower when it comes to cardinals. Do cardinals like sunflower? Sure they do, it's one of their favorite foods. They also like safflower a lot, but they'll also eat some of our chips. They'll also eat peanuts. We have a blend called “Springfield Supreme.” It's obviously for the Springfield area, but it would work fine in Peoria, too.

GR: [laughter]

WK: Or Morton. Anywhere in central Illinois, it's going to be a mixture of seeds that are going to cater specifically to the cardinals, the chickadees, the nuthatches, that whole group of birds, because there's cross-over between them. The cardinal may have his two favorite seeds, but he has three or four secondary or tertiary seeds that he also likes a lot, too. Giving them that rounded out diet helps a lot over just a single seed. Sometimes people think “Oh, you just want to feed sunflower.” Many, many years ago, when bird-feeding first got started, you either bought sunflower or you bought an all-purpose mix. Well, the all-purpose mixes tended to be not very good mixes so people kind of came up with the idea, “Oh, you shouldn't feed a mix. You should only feed sunflower because that's the best.” Well, while it's true that there are more species of birds who will eat sunflower than any other individual seed, it doesn't mean it's all those birds' favorite seed. So, what we found is that once we started blending better and better blends, if you make your blend correctly with a good assortment of really high quality of seeds, you end up getting a better variety of birds overall with less waste. So somebody who feeds a good quality blend will actually see more birds than somebody who feeds only sunflower.

GR: It sounds all so scientific.

WK: You know, it kind of is. There's been a lot of research done. A lot of it's informal research, but some of it is formal research. There are groups like Cornell Lab of Ornithology, that does a lot of research into what birds like what seeds.

GR: So it kind of begs the question – even though you had a background with birds as pet birds, how much education did you have to find yourself getting after you became store owner?

WK: My real background started with wild birds. When I was five, I got my first birdfeeder from my grandparents for my birthday. I always
stayed with my grandparents. I liked going out and helping grandpa fill the bird feeders and that was something I really enjoyed doing, so, wisely, my grandparents gave me a bird feeder and it was my feeder. I was the youngest of three children and my dad worked a lot. Mom was lucky enough to stay home with us kids, but there were two other kids and she was busy, and the feeding was really my thing I did. You know, they bought the food for me but I was the one who took care of the feeders when I was little. So that was really where I got started with birds, was with wild birds. When I went to a junior college, I did take classes in zoology and horticulture because I liked both and couldn’t decide. Ultimately, I guess I decided more on the zoology side. Some of my learning was also mentoring. There was a very dear gentleman who lived down the street from us. He’s now 90-ish, but when I was a kid I used to go down to his house all the time and he was retired at that point, so he would sit in his backyard and he fed the birds and he had all these feeders out and he would explain to me all the things he was doing. In hindsight, I wonder ‘Oh my gosh, I wonder how much I tormented this poor man?’ Everyday as I ran my paper route – and he was on my route – I would stop and talk to him for who knows how long? It was probably far longer than he really wanted me to, but he was very generous with his knowledge. He had a little set of woods behind his house and he didn’t care if I went back there and played in the woods. I built bird houses at home and I asked if I could put them in his woods because we didn’t have woods in our yard. So, I was able to do a lot and there was a lot of that mentoring and my own grandfather teaching me things. Some of those things were very good information, a little bit of it probably maybe not accurate, but it still worked in those particular locations. So a lot of it was that and then, of course, with the business side of it, once I got involved in the business there was a bit more formal training. We’re locally owned and independently owned, but we are part of a franchise, so our franchise does offer training. We do annual conventions every year and we always invite various speakers to come speak about birds and on various subjects, so in that sense, it’s ongoing. We have connection through email listservs with all of our stores throughout the country, so we have a lot of sharing back and forth with two hundred and seventy-some other store owners and we relay information back and forth. Obviously, talking to somebody in California, you may get good information – different species, so maybe it’s not always applicable – but you still learn from that.

GR: Um-hm.

WK: We’re fortunate here in Illinois that the species we have are species that are common to much of the eastern half of the U.S. So, it’s familiar ground for a lot of other store owners and we can share information about what works for somebody, what doesn’t work, and we get a lot of
feedback from our customers. We do listen to our customers, so when we consistently get really good information on a certain product, we know it's working great. If we bring something in that we think is really good – just based on reading the ad so to speak – when we first bring it out, we ask them, particularly our regular customers who are comfortable telling us the truth, “What do you think of it? Tell us. Let us know what it’s like.” If it turns out to be not all that we thought it was going to be, we take that into consideration and either continue to carry it with caveats – and those caveats are usually not that something doesn’t work at all, but that it’s only going to work in a particular habitat. You know, if you have these birds it’s going to work, but it’s not going to work in the new subdivision. It’ll work in the woodlands or it works out in the prairie, but it doesn’t work if you live in the deep woods. With bird feeding, most of it’s habitat-based, so we figure out a little bit, because there are some claims made by manufacturers that are probably a little bit over-zealous in their enthusiasm for the product. Here in Illinois, with all of our farm land, that changes the behavior of birds, too. We have some unique things that are the exact same product, that in, let’s say, Tennessee, where it’s mountains and lots of woods, will have a different reaction than what it does here in the farmland of Illinois.

GR: Now, you said something about programs. Did that pertain to programs that you have here in the store?

WK: I think I was referring to ones that we go to in conferences.

GR: Okay.

WK: And so we have guest speakers that are invited into programs for that.

GR: But, you don’t have programs in the store?

WK: We’ve only occasionally had programs in the store. I very much enjoy doing it, but the layout of our store isn’t very conducive to programs. We have to clear a lot of space to make room for chairs and just the way our store is built – there are lots of columns – it’s hard to get one spot that’s big enough for enough people to see appropriately. What we’ve found works better for us is partnering with the Illinois Audubon Society and the Adams Wildlife Sanctuary. A couple of years ago they did a complete remodel and put in a big conference room with viewing windows out over the property of the sanctuary and there they have the space, the tables, the chairs, the slide show projectors, all of that, and they often invite us to come do programs at their location. It really works better because they have the appropriate equipment and space for it, plus they’ve got all these
wonderful windows right there. We're very happy to provide all the bird feeders and seed for them. We keep them stocked in food, so we have all of our products right outside the windows, and as we're talking about various things we can demonstrate the birds and the products right out the window.

**GR:** I'm not familiar with the sanctuary. Where is it?

**WK:** It is on Clear Lake Avenue. I don't have the address off the top of my head, but on Clear Lake Avenue. It's named for Marjorie Adams who, many years ago – I don't have the dates all memorized – but she lived in the house and I believe was born and died at the house. When she passed away she left her entire property to the Illinois Audubon Society and so for many years it was a sanctuary. Basically, it was just an old house in a little disrepair because of her age. There were orchards there that had been let go and much of the property had reverted to natural habitat. When they did this remodel, they kept the house intact and made what repairs were necessary to keep it historically accurate, but then they added on modern facilities. It was done very, very well, and along with this was the conference room I was talking about that overlooks the property and it's just a really nice place out there.

**GR:** So, essentially it's a very large property in the middle of town?

**WK:** Correct, yes, and by very large – I don't know the acreage – but it is very large. There are woods. There's prairie attached to it, and they're restoring some of the natural prairie. They're currently under way ripping out the invasive species of plants and they're trying to clear that out to restore it to completely natural, native Illinois plants, which is a challenge but they're an admiral group of people who are volunteering and helping with that project.

**GR:** How nice to have something right in town...

**WK:** It is!

**GR:** ...that people can go to!

**WK:** Yea. It's a really nice place, and it's one of those that – when you drive by it and that road's kind of busy – a lot of people just don't really notice it. It's more noticeable now because they've cleared out just enough trees so that you can see the building and there's a nice, big, new sign there, so it looks really nice. For many years it was just kind of, well, you know, there was an old farm fence around it and the wild life doesn't care, so it's great for them, but people didn't really notice it or didn't feel comfortable because they weren't sure what it was. Now
they've made the building a bit more aesthetically pleasing and made it more functional for the Audubon Society. It's their state headquarters now, but you can go out there and walk the trails and it's a nice place. It's kind of a little hidden jewel on that side of town.

GR: That sounds interesting. I love walking trails.

WK: Yea.

GR: So, I might have to do that...

WK: Yea.

GR: ... when the weather gets a little better.

WK: Right. Lincoln Memorial Gardens, on the other side of town by the lake – we help support them, too, and provide all their feeders and their bird seed. They have beautiful trails out there, but sometimes the wind off the lake is crazy. So, like this time of year, it seems nice out, but you get by the lake and it gets really cold. So, if you stick in the woods, it's not too bad, but Adams is one of those if you want just a little quick walk, you know, you can spend 20 minutes or so out there and walk the trails. There’s a pair of nesting owls out there right now and there’s a lot to be seen at the feeders, so if you want a good demonstration of what woodpeckers, and chickadees, and nuthatches look like, that’s where you go.

GR: It sounds like you have really worked hard to build up a reputation here in the city.

WK: We have. Springfield is a really good community. You know, when I moved here I was fairly quickly embraced by it. Coming from a town with 2600 people in it to Springfield, I thought it was going to be overwhelming but it wasn’t at all. They were just still good, genuine, Midwestern folk with good values and friendly people and I quickly made a good set of friends. I got more involved in the business and knew more customers and found that everybody was very welcoming and I like to reciprocate that. I always joke, “We don’t make a lot of money selling birdseed and bird feeders. It’s not a highly lucrative business.” You know I still live in a tiny, little house that needs a lot of work on it, but I enjoy the town and one of the things we can do is help support some of the local places. Obviously, sticking with the nature theme, the Lincoln Memorial Gardens and Adams Wildlife Sanctuary are natural tie-ins, but we also support a lot of schools and things just through fund-raising events. I can’t tell you how many little donations we give out for silent auctions and cake walks, and all those little things that schools have and
the local animal shelter and all those things. We can’t do a lot, but if we can do a little bit for everybody we can, then...

**GR:** I’m still flabbergasted that you just kind of walked into this business and you didn’t have any business experience. Is that right?

**WK:** Correct. No formal business education.

**GR:** I admire that.

**WK:** [laughter]

**GR:** That gumption! That spunk!

**WK:** Yea, well, I had some really good mentors, though. I guess you could say I’ve always done retail, if a paper route’s retail. That was back in the day when you actually dealt with people door to door. You collected money from people, so when I was ten...

**GR:** Building skills.

**WK:** ...I was building skills and handling the money and doing those things. You deliver a service and you exchange money for it and when you’re ten you learn that skill. I worked in the grocery store in high school. I worked in a pet shop. I was out of high school, moved to Springfield, worked in a different pet shop, and then here.

**GR:** But owning a business is a new set of skills.

**WK:** It is a new skill.

**GR:** Because you have employees, you have pay roll, you have...

**WK:** Right.

**GR:** ... so many things that go along with it like ordering.

**WK:** Right. Where I feel really fortunate was that gradual introduction to all of it. When I worked in Danville, in a pet shop, the owner and the manager there were very, very good. It was a very small, independent store. Everybody who worked in it worked as a team and we were all kind of showed the ropes of most – not everything, obviously, you don’t show a 20-year-old all your business, you know – but, everything you need to do to run a business. A lot of the weekly orders, how we priced things, how we display things, a lot of that was learned there. Then, of course, when I moved here, Sue Mahoney, who was the previous owner
of this shop, very much took me under her wing. To this day we're very much like family and so it was really a lot of showing me the ropes. Part of it was because she cared and part of it was because she had a business to run and you can't run it unless you have help.

**GR:** Um-hm.

**WK:** You don't get good help if you don't show them how to do things, so a lot of it was learned through there. We'd go to shows together or to conventions together. We still do. Just along the way you pick up lots of those things. You know, there are things that I don't do well or I acknowledge that are not in my skill set, so I have those done. I use a payroll service. I don't want to deal with taxes. For me, it's money well-spent. It would take me hours to figure out how to do this tax or that tax, so I use a reputable service. I use good local accountants to do my taxes and I make sure all my books are in order. I dot my 'i's' and cross my 't's.' I believe in all that, but I'm not personally going to try to do that because I didn't go to school to do that. That's not my strong point. I'd rather pay somebody else to do that who can do it correctly for me and put my efforts to what I enjoy doing which is waiting on my customers, ordering my merchandise, and looking for new products to keep the store looking fresh. That's what I enjoy doing. The paper work is not anything I enjoy doing.

**GR:** I think there are people who enjoy that. [laughs]

**WK:** There are! I think they're crazy! [laughs] No offense to you if you're listening. But, yea.

**GR:** Yea.

**WK:** I mean, the people who crunch numbers, God bless you, and I'm grateful for you, but I'm not one of them.

**GR:** I do good to do my checkbook.

**WK:** Oh, yea, my checkbook's in order – both personal and business – but I'm going to let somebody else take care of all the governmental paper work that's involved.

**GR:** Well, then you can always point the finger at them and say...

**WK:** Right.

**GR:** [laughter]
WK: Right, hopefully it’s never an issue. Those things take a lot of time and if I were to try to do them myself, then I wouldn’t be able to spend the time on the floor with my customers, or ordering the new product, or doing those things. Those are the things that really matter. You know, if I can’t be out on the floor...

GR: Customer relations.

WK: ...talking to my customers and asking them about their birds and seeing what they’re enjoying in their yards, then I’m not helping them enjoy...

GR: And sharing your expertise.

WK: ... the hobby. Ultimately, it’s about making sure that everybody has fun doing that, myself included. If I were doing paperwork all the time I wouldn’t be having fun and what’s the point of owning your own business if you can’t enjoy owning your own business?

GR: Very true.

WK: So.

GR: Very true. Well, good for you.

WK: [laughter]

GR: I appreciate that. So, talking about family, there’s the little guy over there, who I’m sure is fully integrated into your family.

WK: The little guy being the dog. [laughs]

GR: The little guy being the dog, yes.

WK: Oh, yes. Yea. That’s Nifty. He’s the fifth puppy I’ve raised for Canine Companions for Independence.

GR: So, you’ve been at it a while.

WK: Been at it for a while – since 2006. Each pup is with us for close to a year and a half – not quite a year and a half. While we have them with us we do all the formative training that it takes to get a service dog ready for the next phase of their training. So we – from eight weeks, nine weeks – teach them all their house manners, all their social skills. We get them used to going out in public, going to restaurants, grocery stores, hardware stores, anywhere else where they may be expected to work one
day in their adult life. When they get used to these things at a younger age, it’s much easier for them – to mold them the way we want them to be, to reinforce good behaviors, and to make sure they don’t react negatively to novel stimuli.

GR: Um-hm.

WK: We want the dogs to know the core skills and have good obedience skills. We’re very, very strict about making sure the puppies were raised with rules and boundaries. We teach with lots of praise, lots of food treats and things, and we teach in a positive manner. We want them to enjoy doing what they’re doing, but there are certainly restrictions on what they can and can’t do, so about the time they’re about five months old we start taking them out into public places and working with them. That’s where it’s extremely important for them to show their good behavior.

GR: I should mention that you raise these puppies for Canine Companions and your regional base is in Ohio, is that right?

WK: That’s correct.

GR: And you get your puppies at, you said about eight ...

WK: Between eight and nine weeks, yes.

GR: And they come to you already knowing a few things, right?

WK: They do. Our organization has their own breeding program, so they carefully select the dogs from which the puppies are raised or born. Those puppies are born in the homes of volunteers who care for the adult dogs. Those people start this critical process of what we’ll refer to as socialization and basic training. So from the day the puppies are born, there’s a checklist of things they do – rubbing the puppy’s feet, rubbing their tummies, gently cradling them on their backs – so that the puppies are used to human handling of any sort from a very, very early age. They introduce them to all sorts of stimuli, so I’ve seen puppy pens that have all sorts of different toys and tunnels and blocks and slides and things that the puppies can climb on and over and interesting textures to stand on so that everything is just something that is fun to play with and they aren’t scared by various things. They also start some of the basic training skills. A puppy can learn to sit as soon as it can walk and eat, so they start teaching the puppies to sit. What we see as puppy raisers who are getting the eight- or nine-week old puppy is that when we pick up a food bowl, the puppies’ bottoms almost always hit the ground because one of our rules is, “You don’t get to eat until you’re told you can
eat.” One of the ways to reinforce that is to ask the puppy to sit. Well, he can’t be doing something else if he’s sitting so, therefore, we ask the puppy to sit and then we put the food down and release them to go eat. Well, the puppies learn very quickly the faster their rear ends get on the floor, the faster they get to eat. It’s a fun game for them but it results in an eight-week old puppy who already knows how to sit to get something it wants.

**GR:** That’s just fascinating to me.

**WK:** Yea.

**GR:** I don’t think I’ve ever seen very many dogs – oh! especially that little – that have any manners at all.

**WK:** Yea, it’s pretty fun and we can’t do it during an interview, but I’ll show you the YouTtube videos of him at nine weeks, the day he walked into the house, doing this already.

**GR:** No kidding?

**WK:** So, it’s fun. I enjoy it. I mean, for me, I just love seeing the puppies figure things out when we teach them new behaviors. We call it the light bulb moment, when you see it suddenly understand, “Oh! I can do that! I get that. I see what you’re asking me to do.”

**GR:** So, are there any that are eliminated that early in the ball game?

**WK:** No. With our program the puppies are all put through the same basic program with rare exceptions – unless there’s a medical issue that dictates the puppy be released early or some severe behavioral issue. You know, in the five, six years I’ve been involved, I know of only two puppies who had a couple of issues that were, one, medical, and one that was fear-based that they could tell by six or seven months that it wasn’t going to grow out of that. But no, the rest of the puppies are all put through the same program because a lot of times it’s kind of hard to tell. We can do temperament testing at a young age and get some general ideas about a puppy, but you track that puppy for two years and you’d be surprised. Sometimes a puppy who seems a little shy as a youngster really blossoms and is fine as an adult and vice versa. You have the puppy who’s really outgoing as a youngster and who sometimes becomes less outgoing as they get older and maybe isn’t as well-suited to the job as we’d have once thought. Sometimes it has to do with the dog, sometimes it has to do with the handling, not that anybody is necessarily doing anything wrong, but sometimes the puppy’s with a particular handler and the person maybe just lets the puppy stretch the boundaries
further than they should and so the puppy appears to have certain behaviors. Well, we put him with a different handler back in the advanced training program and he gets a little more structure and suddenly he becomes the dog we really want him to be, not the dog we were seeing six months before. So, it's kind of hard to evaluate at a young age what exactly the dog's going to be.

GR: You mentioned, what did you say? Temper ...

WK: Temperament testing?

GR: Yes. What is that?

WK: Well, temperament testing is for many puppies, and this is not speaking of our group necessarily, but just of dogs in general. A lot of times breeders will do a temperament test on a puppy when they're about seven weeks old. There are a couple of standardized puppy temperament tests that anybody can Google and find, but it's usually a method of determining a puppy's general reaction to the world. So, they will usually involve taking a puppy at seven weeks to a novel room, a room that they've never been to before or out in the yard - some place they've never been to before with a person they've never been with before - to see what their reaction is. Then that person will run through a series of tests. They can be popping an umbrella open nearby. Does the puppy go check it out? Find that interesting? Does the puppy shrink back in fear and go hide in a corner? Well, if it goes and checks it out, you've probably got a fairly confident puppy. If a puppy runs and hides in the corner, then that's not really a good thing, but it lets you know that you have a puppy who has some fear issues that need to be worked on. And then you have what we call the normal puppy who flinches, backs away, but then looks at it and goes to investigate. That's completely normal - people do that, we all startle, but then we recover - and that's just one example. There are usually a dozen or so different parts to this test that all involve things that are kind of similar to that, testing a puppy's reaction to different situations.

GR: Well, you were telling me earlier how many commands you teach the puppy in training.

WK: Correct.

GR: How many was that?

WK: There are about 35 that we teach. A lot of them are the standard commands - 'sit,' 'down,' 'wait' - things that you might use with a pet dog, but then some of them are specific to the fact that the dog's going to
work with somebody with a disability later on. So we teach a lot of commands that I call 'maneuvering commands.' For example, I want the dog on the left side of my body or I want him to be sitting on the right side of my body, so 'heel' or 'side.' That means if I say one word or the other, the dog will automatically move to that position and then sit next to me. I might need the dog to move forward through a door ahead of me, so there's an 'out' command. Telling the dog to 'turn' because maybe we're in a tight spot somewhere and the dog needs to literally just turn around face the other direction.

GR: Um-hm.

WK: 'Under' means "I want you to crawl under whatever object we're standing in front of" – usually a table or a bench – "and lay down immediately." It's an implied 'lay down,' so when I say 'under,' it means "Crawl under there, turn around, and lay down." So, we work through a number of these different commands and we practice them all on a regular basis so that they're reliable in any situation.

GR: How much time does that take on a daily basis?

WK: Overall training it's hard to tell because in some ways we're training the dog continuously. We're always doing something. A lot of the commands we practice are quick and subtle. You know, we're getting ready to go out the back door, the dog wants to go outside, I ask for a quick 'sit,' or a quick 'down,' or a quick something, just to have the dog comply. It helps build a bond that the dog knows it only gets to do something it wants to do if it does something that I ask it to do first. It doesn't take two seconds to ask the dog to lay down and then open the door and say, "Release," so he can go through. When they're really little, I spend maybe five to ten minutes at a time two or three times a day with formal training sessions.

GR: That doesn't seem like a lot of time.

WK: No, it's not a lot because we're also doing little things in between. The older they get, though, the less those training sessions become, because you're just starting to proof skills, or polish skills, rather than teach them. I currently spend maybe five minutes a day kind of doing a run-through of everything. You know, my general policy is that I have my checklist of commands and I will – oh, maybe two or three times a week – run through all of them. A lot of times I just hit like half of them and we just run through them. I ask him to do those two or three times to make sure they look clean and then we move on. If there's something that he's having difficulty with that day, then we will spend some extra time with that particular one and then and work on that to clean it up a
little bit. You know, especially the younger the puppy is, the less reliable they're going to be, but they're not so different than people. They have bad days, they have good days, and sometimes it all comes out really nice and some days he's really wound up for whatever reason. They don't always think before they do and sometimes you might ask for one thing and they offer something different. They're doing something for you, they're just not doing what you asked them to do, so you work to get consistent on what they're doing.

GR: Very much like little children.


GR: So, Nifty is now seven months.

WK: Yea, seven months old.

GR: How many commands does he know?

WK: Thirty-five.

GR: That's really a lot.

WK: Yea. And I'm very much a trainer who likes to train all of it as early as possible. Dogs or puppies are just little sponges, so if you teach them lots of things from the very beginning they'll learn it correctly. If you wait to teach new skills later - there's no time when a dog can't learn new skills - but the longer you take to teach them the harder it is for them to switch from one thing to another. Anybody who's had a pet dog will often teach the dog to sit first. It gets really good at 'sit.' If you then start trying to teach it 'down,' it just keeps wanting to sit because it got rewarded for sitting so many times that it became a default behavior. Whereas, if I teach 'sit,' and 'down,' and 'stand,' all at the same time it'll take slightly longer to learn each one, but once it's got all three of them, they'll all three be much more reliable.

GR: So, did I hear you just say that you can teach an old dog new tricks? [laughter]

WK: Yes, there's never an age at which you can't teach a dog something new. It's harder. You may be undoing habits. I have a new dog at my house that I've had for two weeks. He's a nine-year-old. He's my own pet dog I adopted from a rescue group and his bad habit is rushing through doors. If you start to open a door, he throws the door open with his head and runs the rest of the way out. Well, as I discovered, he's also a fence-jumper and that's something that he can't do at my house.
He has to wait until the leash is put on him and wait until I open the door and not yank my arm off. So, in two weeks he has learned that he has to wait until I say he can go through the door. So, he’s now starting to allow me to open the door, and then look to me for a release, so that he can move forward through the door.

GR: How’d you teach him that?

WK: It’s really pretty easy. The reward is going through the door, so I start to open the door. I tell him to wait. If he starts to force forward, then the door slams shut. When I say ‘slams shut,’ I’m not slamming it on his face, but if his nose gets a little bump because he was too forceful, well okay, that’s a learning curve. You learn to keep your nose back a little bit further. Then I start to open it and if he moves, the door shuts. He starts to make a connection pretty fast, that if he’s moving, the door is not opening. The door only opens when he stays put. The second part is I don’t want him just staring at the door. I want him to look to me for the recognition that he’s going to get permission.

GR: Yea, I saw Nifty do that last week.

WK: Yea, so I wait and I just stand there. Most dogs will eventually – when you don’t open the door – they get confused, “Okay why isn’t the door opening?” So, they eventually look to you to see what’s happening. When he looks to me, then I quickly open the door, and say “Release” and let him through. So, he figures that connection of “Okay, if I stop and look at you, then I get to go through the door.”

GR: So it doesn’t require a treat.

WK: It doesn’t require, no.

GR: But do you ...

WK: We do use treats, yes. In dog training we also often refer to something like the door situation as a real-life reward. We can teach a ‘sit’ in our living room with a treat and we do because why else would a dog sit in your living room? Dogs don’t ever sit down on their own accord, never. I mean, if you watch a dog, when they walk in a room, they lay down somewhere, they don’t just walk in and sit. That’s a trained behavior. For whatever reason, we want our dogs to sit, so we teach them how to do it. So food is a good motivator to do that. We can use food to teach them to sit, we can use food to teach them any number of different behaviors, and we often do. When you have something like the door situation, they really want to go through the door, so let’s have the opening of the door be their reward. It’s the same thing when the dog
wants to go for a ride in the car. Most dogs love going for a ride so, have your dog sit beside the car, but the door doesn’t open until he sits and then he’s allowed to get in. Whose dog doesn’t jump up and down and get excited when it sees the leash?

GR: Yea.

WK: Right. Well, my rule is, “You can get excited, but the leash isn’t getting attached to your collar until you’re standing there calmly. You can sit, you can stand, and you can lie down. I don’t care what you’re doing, but you can’t be moving all over the place because I’m not going to fight you at this, getting this collar on, or getting this leash on.” I don’t want to sound negative, it’s not like it’s a big control issue, but it’s ‘Why make my life difficult and constantly chase the dog down when I’d rather reward calm behavior?’

GR: Um-hm.

WK: So, it doesn’t take long for the dogs to figure out that if you reach down to put the leash on their collar and they’re moving back and forth, but you quickly pull your hand away, and you just stand there, most dogs will think, “Okay. What happened?” They’ll stop moving. You start to reach and they move. You do that half a dozen times and most dogs will figure out, “Okay this is only happening if I’m staying still.”

GR: So, it’s not his age that dictates that it’s not a treat, it’s just the circumstance.

WK: It’s the circumstance.

GR: Sorry. I don’t know anything about dog training, never had a dog, so it’s really fascinating to me.

WK: No, it’s the circumstance.

GR: So how did you learn how to train dogs?

WK: Wow. Gosh, it’s not so different than my bird-feeding story.

[both laugh]

WK: I was just an animal nut when I was a kid. I guess I am as an adult, too! When I was kid and we had a family dog, I was the one who wanted to try to teach it things and when I was ten, I checked books out of the library to read how to train a dog. I don’t know if that was terribly successful but I tried and I did things that, for a ten year old teaching
myself, I probably had some success. I got involved in 4-H solely because I wanted to do the dog training course. When I was 16, I entered a dog-training course through 4-H and so for a spring and summer, practiced with them and competed at the local county fair. I’m happy to say I took grand champion at the county fair with obedience with my...

GR: Awesome!!

WK: ... my coonhound/beagle mix. Now anybody who knows anything about dog training and competing knows you don’t try to compete with a beagle or a coonhound. They are trainable, but they’re not the top choice of breeds. So people tend to go for labs, and golden retrievers, and shelties, and other dogs who are bred to work with people, alongside people, not with hounds who are bred to run out ahead of people and sniff out vermin. So, that was probably a challenge. Mom often jokes that I wore a path in the grass that year in the backyard working patterns with the dog. Repeating the same pattern all the time wore a bald spot in the grass. That’s probably true, but it paid off, and I got my foot wet in the world of competing with dogs and teaching obedience. I was grateful again that we had somebody who was taking their time to volunteer and teach us kids how to work with our dogs. So, that’s how I got started and then a number of years went by and I had dogs of my own and always kept them up to snuff on training. Then, once I was here in Springfield and there was a local dog-training club, I got involved with that and continued doing training and competing and was fortunate to earn a few titles and enjoy it a lot.

GR: So, do you still train dogs other than ...

WK: Well, the only dog I train in that term is the new dog that I have, so I’m working with him, but I’m a volunteer and I help teach classes. We teach classes multiple times throughout the year. The dog training club, which is Capital Canine Training Club, is a not-for-profit organization also, so basically we teach public obedience and agility classes as a way to fund the club and pay for the building that we use. Everybody pitches in and I volunteer to teach classes. A good friend of mine and I – we tend to teach classes together because we have a similar training style and training philosophies. We just wrapped up another course last week.

GR: I said it before and I’ll say it again. I’m going to have you train me before I get a dog ...

WK: [laughs]

GR: ...because I don’t know anything about dogs, really.
WK: It’s what I enjoy doing.

GR: So what led you then, to Canine Companions?

WK: Canine Companions. I got started with them shortly after I had lost a dog I’d had for 16 years – the dog that I got when I got my first apartment. When I lost that dog – when she passed away – I went to an animal shelter and walked a puppy out and she saw me through a lot of life changes and moves, and so as she aged, I kind of told myself that she was kind of one of those very, very special dogs that you only get once in a lifetime. I said, “You know, I’m not really ready to get another dog for myself, but I really like training dogs.” You know, I’d been involved in the training club long enough to know what I was doing and I thought, “You know, I’ve seen these organizations who train dogs for people with disabilities.” I knew they used puppy-raisers to help raise these pups and I thought, “Well, that’d be kind of fun. I’ll check into that and see what groups are out there.” So, I started looking for the groups online and you know there are groups who raise guide dogs for the blind and then groups that do other disabilities. CCI does other disabilities. I was looking and there are a number of groups around, many of them reputable. A lot of them have requirements – you have to live within half an hour or an hour of the organization. I’m too far away for any of those. Canine Companions happened be one that you could live anywhere, because they have regional facilities throughout the country. Also, the more I started reading about them, learning, and researching, the more I agreed with their philosophies. I liked the approach they took. They’re also the oldest group in the country to work with disabilities other than blindness, so they have a long history of working with these disabilities, which, of course, the longer the history is, the longer they’ve been around. Generally speaking, that means they’re doing something right if they’re still around. So, I liked their approach, I filled out an online application, and then got sent a printed application. One thing led to another – interviews – and I was accepted to be a puppy-raiser.

GR: So, Wade, you’ve had .. Nifty is your fifth, or sixth?

WK: The fifth.

GR: The fifth. So, of the four dogs that you’ve raised, do you know where they went or what disability they are serving?

WK: I do. That’s one nice thing about Canine Companions for Independence. We do get regular updates on our dogs. Once they’re placed with an individual, it’s up to that person whether they want to continue a relationship with the puppy raiser. Most people do to some degree. If something happens where a dog is released from the program
for whatever reason, the puppy raiser always has first dibs on taking the puppy back. As it was, my very first puppy was released from the program. She proved to not have a very good work ethic. I kind of knew that was the case. You know some dogs don't. Some dogs are just the happy, "I want to do it because I want to be with you" type. Some dogs do it because they have to do it. Well, she was one of those, "Okay, I'll do it if I have to do it, but I don't really love doing this kind of work." So, she was released and I was given first choice. At the time, I didn't necessarily want her back, but a good friend of mine who had her own dog, and with whom Bev had grown up, wanted her. I called my friend and said, "Would you happen to ..." Well, I didn't even get the sentence out and she said "Yes."

GR: [laughter]

WK: So that particular dog happens to still live in the area. She lives over in Jacksonville. I see her all the time. She's at my house probably two or three times a week, which is kind of fun. Five years later the dog still has her bed in my house, she still has rules that apply in my house that don't apply in her house. Yet, true to a dog, she's flexible. She goes back and forth and can flip on and off rules and she knows which rules are allowed in which house and she's very bright.

GR: Wow.

WK: So, she's still around. That's Bev. The next dog, Easton, was a fantastic working dog. He very much wanted to do what you wanted. He hung on every word you said. Anything you asked him to do, he'd do instantly. He's placed with a lady down in St Louis. It's lucky that he's close and I've been able to see him a few times since he's been placed. He's doing a great job for her. One of the reasons they were matched is because she has a very, very soft voice and isn't always easy to understand. The way he does hang on his handler's words, he was the only dog in the class who could continually follow all her commands because he was paying enough attention continually to be able to do that. So, that was great. The next was Lilly, who's a golden retriever. She lives in Iowa and she is what they call a facility dog. Rather than living with a person with a disability, she works with an able-bodied person who works with a variety of people, either with disabilities or in other more-therapeutic situations. She happens to work with a lady who owns or started a center for family grief counseling. I don't know all the details of what they do, but I know a lot of what she does is work with children who've had some very bad things happen in their life – parents die or they've been victims of some sort. So, the dog helps them do therapy that helps them build a rapport and get over some of these traumas. She's also the first dog in the state of Iowa to be certified as a
The courthouse dog program is a little bit newer program and there are - I don’t remember how many - but there are maybe a half dozen or a dozen states that are using courthouse dogs. They’re licensed and they have to be certified service dogs. They need that level of training, but they’re licensed to go into the courtrooms and work with children who have to testify. It helps build the confidence of the children. You know, a lot of time the kids are scared to say something to adults but they’ll talk to a dog, so the dog acts as a comforting agent. The dogs are so highly trained that a five-year-old can take the leash and give them direction and they’ll do it. Lilly just started this work last summer and I heard recently about a case – one of her first cases on the stand – where she actually got up on the stand with the little girl who had been a victim of sexual abuse and had to point out her...

GR: Oh, dear. Oh, my gosh.

WK: ... her abuser. So, at the tough point of the testimony, when it came time to do that and she was not doing particularly well, the judge or the counselor or somebody said, “Would she like to take a minute and talk to the dog?” She got down off the chair and put her face in the dog, and talked to her, and gave her a hug and was able to collect herself and get back up on the stand and do what she needed to do. So ...

GR: That’s incredible.

[Both getting tears in their eyes.]

WK: That’s incredible. Always makes me a little shaky telling that story, but that’s the kind of skill that we need to build in a dog – a dog who’s confident enough through any situation and particularly in a courthouse. I mean a courthouse sounds relatively quiet, but apparently some of these domestic cases can get quite loud and spouses yell at each other, et cetera. So, the dog needs to – regardless of what happens – the dog stays rock solid in the position they’re told and sits there by a child and does what they need it to do. The beauty is the dog loves it. We kind of laughed when she was growing up. Lilly really was a very good, very easy dog. She was a puppy who had less than five accidents in the house. She didn’t chew anything, she was very laid back, just laid around a lot, but she didn’t have a lot of motivation. She would do all of her commands, but it was kind of like, “Okay if I have to.” She wasn’t really highly food motivated, so using treats wasn’t a really big deal. The one thing that she consistently enjoyed doing was interacting with other people. So all along I said, “Boy, if this dog’s going to make it, it’s going to be as a facility dog where she gets to work with new people every day
because that’s what she enjoys doing.” So, as luck would have it, that’s exactly what she got to do.

**GR:** And with children.

**WK:** And with children. Yea.

**GR:** I bet it’s a big motivator.

**WK:** Yea, big motivator. Kids are always fun so, dogs and kids go hand-in-hand. She has that very calm demeanor that works well with kids and then she’s a beautiful golden retriever. I mean, there’s no such thing as an ugly golden retriever, but she is particularly pretty. It’s hard to resist getting your hands on her and giving her a little bit of lovin.’

**GR:** And then you had one more?

**WK:** Oh, and then we had Sly. Sly is currently in the advanced training program, which is where the puppies go when they leave us. They go on to Canine Companion’s advanced training program for between six and nine months of skills training. That’s where they teach them to actually flip light switches on and off and do all the other very specific commands like pulling the wheel chairs and everything they might be expected to do. He’s still in the advanced program.

**GR:** The advanced program is where they actually determine what specific disability the dog will help out, right?

**WK:** Right. The dogs are all – for the most part – trained in all the skills, but as time goes on they start to see the personality of the dogs and what the dogs do best and enjoy doing best. So, by the end of their training, they will be able to match that dog and its personality to the pool of applicants who are requesting a dog. They can help pair the dog who you know is very, very attentive to its handler versus the one who has to go see everybody, but has good skills. They can then make those placements based on the skills of the dog. Ultimately, you want a dog who really likes doing what it’s doing. It’s not going to be a very good working dog if it has to be forced to do what it’s doing. It’s not going to be reliable.

**GR:** Right.

**WK:** So, matching and, of course, the person who receives the dog is going to be happy if the dog is happy, so that’s when they make that determination.
**GR**: And advanced training lasts six months?

**WK**: At least six months. Sometimes it’s nine months. They do three-month semesters, so it’s always two semesters. Sometimes there’s a third semester if a dog doesn’t get placed at the end of the six months. Then they may be held over for a placement at the end of another semester. That’s usually based on the – well, backing up a little bit – when they invite a group of people for team training, they always want to make sure that everybody goes home with a dog, and because you have to match personalities...

**GR**: Um-hm.

**WK**: ... they always have more dogs available than what they have people at that given point. So, if they have ten people in a class, they’re going to make sure they have thirteen, fifteen dogs. I don’t know what their exact number is, but they’ve always got some extra dogs. So, what that means is when the ten people leave, you still have three leftover dogs who are great dogs, they just didn’t happen to match just right with somebody at that time. So, they’ll hold them over for one more semester, hoping that then they’ll match in the following training session.

**GR**: And if they don’t?

**WK**: If they don’t then they’re released from the program. I don’t think they believe in keeping a dog in the kennels and training indefinitely.

**GR**: Right.

**WK**: So, at that point they’re released and can go back to the person who raised them, who has first dibs on them. Or, they or any other dog who is released from the program, can be put up for just general adoption to the public if their puppy-raisers or friends don’t take them back. So, then somebody ends up getting a fully-trained service dog just because a match wasn’t made.

**GR**: And so are they in homes when they’re at advanced training?

**WK**: No. Advanced training is a training kennel situation, if you can imagine like a boarding kennel. They’ve got big training rooms and offices and that’s where they do all their administrative work. They’ve got training rooms where they’re teaching the skills, so there are cabinets set up like a kitchen cabinet. There are refrigerators, there are lots of things to simulate a home environment that they’d be doing, but they also do a lot of the field trips. They go out to the malls, and the go to the grocery store, and they go other places. They go to zoos, they do all sorts
of things with the dog to make sure that they’re able to do their skills just as well out in public as at home. Dogs don’t generalize well, we say in the training world, and by generalization it means, you can teach them to sit in your living room, you can teach them to sit with the TV on, or the vacuum running nearby, but if that’s the only place you teach the dog to sit, you may take them out to the park, with a squirrel running by, and the dog can’t sit.

**GR:** Um-hm.

**WK:** As a trainer or an instructor, I often hear, “Well, he knows how to sit.” Well, he knows how to sit in your living room. He doesn’t know how to sit at another location, so he doesn’t truly understand the meaning of ‘sit’ if he can’t do it anytime, anywhere. So, for our service dogs, any time, anywhere, is the important part.

**GR:** And you do this out of the goodness of your heart, right? You are not remunerated.

**WK:** Right. There’s no financial gain for me, only financial loss.

*[both laugh]*

**WK:** I do it because I enjoy it. I could be all wishy-washy and say I do it because I want to help everybody – and I truly enjoy the fact that the dogs are going to people who really benefit from the dogs and the dogs are getting great homes – but I do it because I love dogs, I love working with the dogs, I love watching the dogs learn, it’s a very good organization, and I’m happy to be associated with them. The trainers are really nice people. They’ve all been with them forever, which says a lot about the group. They don’t have a high turnover at all. In the five years, six years I’ve been with the group, they’ve added one person, but they’ve not lost anybody. So, that says a lot, and I’m happy to be with that group of people, but ultimately I do it because I enjoy doing it. The distance is a factor. The group is in Ohio, so it’s not like I’m there all the time. I make it over twice a year and with Facebook and email we kind of chat that way all the time, but ultimately, I enjoy watching the puppies growing and I love watching them learn. It’s a lot of fun! It’s something that I can do with my work schedule. I can bring the puppy to work with me. It’s a perk of the business. I can bring a dog with me if I want, but it doesn’t interfere with my work. The person they’re placed with may be working for a full day, so therefore the dog needs to be able to lay quietly in an office, or wherever that person is working, and lay on their bed or lay in their crate and just be on call, but basically, not do a lot during the day. Well, bringing the puppies with me to work helps teach them that. They learn that this is a work environment and they get their play
times and they get their potty breaks, but for the most part they kind of have to just hang out with us during the day. There’s not a whole lot of interaction. They also learn to ignore the public who comes up and talks to them all the time. So, they learn in this environment that people can come up and talk to them but they can remain calm.

GR: Um-hm.

WK: So, for me it works with my schedule. It’s something I can do. I’m busy when I’m outside of work. I’m teaching dog classes, I’m running errands, I’m taking care of my mother-in-law, I’m doing all these various things, and the service dogs work for me because I can take them with me to most of those locations. If we’re going to the grocery store, then I can take the dog with me and I work with the dog. I practice with the dog. I don’t have to worry about it being a hundred degrees outside because I can take the dog in the grocery store with me at the same time.

GR: Yea.

WK: So, it’s kind of a win-win. I couldn’t do that with a pet dog. The reason I adopted a nine-year-old dog is because he’s laid-back and he’s happy to stay home and sleep on the couch. I can’t have a young, active dog myself because my lifestyle doesn’t allow it.

GR: Right, and generally places recognize when your dog is wearing his vest that he’s working, right?

WK: Correct. Right. He’s wearing his vest, and he’s very well-mannered and I expect – I hate to say perfection – but I expect as close to perfection as I can get out of them. I don’t want him behaving quote, “like a dog” in public. I want him to be very well-behaved. The biggest compliment we can get is when we leave a restaurant or someplace and I hear somebody say, “I didn’t know there was a dog under the table.” Exactly! That’s our point. Most businesses recognize what a service dog is, and when we come in and we tell them we’re training, they’re very good with that.

GR: Now you mentioned that Lilly was a golden retriever and Nifty is...

WK: Nifty is half golden retriever, half Labrador retriever. Obviously, he took more after the Lab.

GR: Um-hm.

WK: People who know the breeds well can see the golden – he’s got longer ears than a Lab does, and his face and his build is more like a golden than a Lab – but the first impression is that it’s a Lab.
And your organization specifically breeds dogs for their program.

Correct. Right. They breed their own dogs because they want to have control over the health issues that the dogs may have, as well as the temperament of the dogs. So, they breed from their own pool of dogs. When they bring new bloodlines in, they’re researched thoroughly to make sure they’re good. That helps improve the overall success rate of the program – by having dogs for whom they know the background. Labs and Goldens are chosen because they’re both breeds that are fairly happy-go-lucky and dogs that generally enjoy working with people.

Nifty looks like he’s getting a little tired of being in the crate.

Yea, we’re wrapping up the end of the day for him. He’ll be anxious to go home and play with the other dogs for a few minutes.

We’ll wrap up, too, because I’m anxious to let him have his play time before you have to go off and do what you need to do.

You just want to see if you can get your hands on him.

[laughs] Well, that’s true, too.

[both laughing]

Now, the secret’s out. You mentioned that there is a special word that you say to him to tell him that he’s off duty. Can you say the word?

In this situation, I can. “Release” is the word we use.

Oh. Okay.

He’s good enough to pick out when it’s being directed at him versus when it’s just being said casually. Also, dogs learn things situationally. When he’s in his crate and the door is shut...

Yea.

... saying ‘release’ doesn’t do anything, so he’s learned long ago that doesn’t work.

Okay, well. We’ll wrap it up for today and talk again another time.

Okay. Sounds good.

Thanks, Wade.
GR: I'm Gail Rein. I'm here at Wild Birds Unlimited with Wade Kammin, store owner. It's Saturday, March 24, 2012. Wade last time we left off and we were talking about your training service dogs and I wanted to ask you how you get your next dog after you've taken a dog to advanced training? When and how do you get your next dog?

WK: When we get them is kind of up to us. We can get them right away, we can sometimes overlap one puppy, we may take one puppy in before we even return the first puppy, or we may take a break of any length of time in between. Some of that, of course, is depending on when the puppies themselves are born and when they're available. I have always gotten mine fairly close together. I've taken in a new puppy literally the day I turned one in. I put one in one kennel and walked around the corner and pulled a brand new puppy out of the next kennel. I've taken a two week break and that was really just because I was waiting for a particular puppy out of a particular litter to be ready. I've a couple of times overlapped by a few weeks. There are advantages and disadvantages of each way. It's left up to us puppy raisers. Since we're volunteers, the group works with us really well as far as how long, or at what stage, we want to take each puppy. Stage for us, not stage for the puppy. We take them all pretty much the same – at eight or nine weeks.

GR: Um-hm.

WK: Some people are braver than me and they'll overlap for a longer period of time. The rule is they don't want two puppies under a year of age in the house at the same time. When you get two pups that are too young together, the training job just becomes a lot more difficult. You want one puppy really solid before adding the second one. There are some people who will overlap by three, four, or five months.

GR: Now, I know that you puppy trainers can live anywhere in the United States...

WK: Correct.

GR: ...but the breeders, are they more local to the particular region?

WK: Correct. The breeders are all local to Santa Rosa, California – within 90 miles, I believe, of Santa Rosa. That's where the national headquarters is and where all the breeding takes place under the supervision of the staff and the veterinarians who oversee all that. They do all the tracking of all the heredity and the blood lines of all the dogs – the pedigrees, so to speak. That all takes place in Santa Rosa. Then those volunteers who house and care for the breeding dogs have to live within 90 miles just for the practicality of...

GR: Um-hm.
**WK:** ...that and of course those people who have the males have to live the same distance. I assume the closer, the better because the males are called on pretty frequently.

**GR:** So, how do the puppies get to the regional destination?

**WK:** Oh, when the puppies leave the breeder-caretakers homes, they’re taken to the puppy park at the national. They’re fully vetted, checked in, given their initial vaccines, and processed so to speak. Then after a couple of days there, they’re flown throughout the country to each of the various regions.

**GR:** I see.

**WK:** So, all puppies are air-borne at eight weeks, nine weeks.

**GR:** That’s impressive.

**WK:** Then from there, to those regions – our region is in Columbus, Ohio. So, we can get our puppies by driving, or we can have them flown to us. If we happen to be there, we can pick them up ourselves. The group of volunteers is so wide, though, that a lot of times somebody else is headed the general direction and you get a sort of puppy train going. Somebody carries it so far and hands it off to somebody else and so on, until it ends up where it needs to go. With the five puppies I’ve had, I’ve done all of the above.

**GR:** Is there somebody in this area who also trains?

**WK:** There are a couple other people. There’s one gal here in town that just raised her first puppy. Literally, first puppy – she’d never had a dog before. She just turned in her first puppy and she’s taking at least a year break because there are some other things she wants to do. Then there’s a lady in Peoria. There are a couple of ladies down in the Jerseyville area who have raised for quite some time, also. We all get together once in a while, when we can. Lot of times they’ll come to Springfield, just because it’s a good central location and there’s more to do here than there is in Jerseyville. So, they’ll come for outings or we meet up at our dog training club and they’ve been very good mentors to me since a lot of them have been in there longer. In turn, I’ve tried to be a good mentor for the gal who just raised her first puppy here in town.

**GR:** Well, now that’s a little surprising to me that her first puppy would not even be a pet, but a service dog. I wouldn’t think that would be the easiest thing.

**WK:** Probably not the easiest and she did have some challenges having never had a dog before, but she got involved in the program because a good friend of
hers in another state has a service dog. This friend has a disability and has a service dog from Canine Companions for Independence and so that’s how she knew and found out about it. She thought it would be a good way to kind of give back and so that’s how she got involved with it.

**GR:** So, do you have a favorite gender? I know when we talked about your previous dogs you said you’ve had two girl dogs and now Nifty is your third boy dog, right?

**WK:** Say, you know, it’s a good question. It’s funny because most of my pet dogs were all females and it does seem that people tend to gravitate towards one or the other for various reasons. I’d always had females partially out of just chance, but had kind of stuck on females and so when we got the first puppy, I kind of requested a female, thinking to myself that if it didn’t pan out and I wanted to end up keeping this dog as a pet – if she didn’t become a service dog – then female was my preference. As it turned out, she didn’t make it, but she had some quirks and I ultimately knew that she wasn’t really the right dog for me and she would do better in somebody else’s household because of her quirks. Some of the things that she did would just be better suited to somebody else and as it turned out, that’s true. She’s great in the home she’s in, they love her for all of her quirks and she’s happiest there.

**GR:** Well, now I have to ask what her quirks were.

**WK:** Her quirks. Well, as a young dog, when she was still in training, she had issues with shutting down. This we saw fairly early on. She could work very well in public, but in certain circumstances, she would shut down and so she would not continue to work well. Who knows exactly why this is?

**GR:** I’m just not quite understanding what you mean by that. Do you mean she’d just get overwhelmed?

**WK:** Get a little overwhelmed and she would literally, like at home, if something caused her to shut down, she would just stop doing what she was doing and literally just run off and get in her crate, which is her safe place. She’d curl up in the back and then didn’t want to interact with anybody or anything, so she’d literally just sort of shut down. You could call her, you could use treats, and she just wasn’t interested in anything. Then she’d come back out of it again, but the older she got the more this became the norm rather than the exception. Not that she was doing it all the time, but we were seeing it consistently. A lot of times dogs will do things like that, but then they grow out of it.

**GR:** Um-hm.
**WK:** She was being fairly consistent, and so when you would have her out in public, she would work nicely and she never showed that in public, but sometimes you could tell that you were making her work. Well, you can’t expect a service dog to work well if you’re forcing them to work.

**GR:** Um-hm.

**WK:** They need to want to do it, and so, it started showing any place that she got really comfortable – like at our dog training club. She was there every week and she’d start to shut down there. Now, the novelty of a new place – like you were at the grocery store or restaurant – that seemed to keep her interested enough that she wouldn’t totally shut down, but you would know it was only a matter of time that if she’s shutting down in certain locations, it may start to bleed over into someplace else. So, again, that’s not a good candidate for a service dog. Ultimately, when she went into the advanced training program, she was there all of ten days, which is probably five days longer than I expected her to make it. She was released not because she was showing the shut down behaviors, but she was showing the other behaviors that are sort of related. She knew all of her skills and she knew them very well and if she was motivated she could do them beautifully and happily. She also would just as soon not do them, and so what they saw in the kennels was – you know, for the first week the dogs are there they don’t really ask anything of them other than just bare basics, they just want the dogs to settle in.

**GR:** Um-hm.

**WK:** The bare basics meaning, ‘Don’t bolt out of your crate. Don’t eat without being given permission to do so,’ those sort of things. Well, they’d open the door, she’d push out, she was jumping on people – things that she shouldn’t be doing. So, they thought, ‘Okay, this dog doesn’t have great manners.’ They probably thought it was me – a first time puppy-raiser.

**GR:** [laughter] Yea.

**WK:** That I didn’t do a great job. Well, then they started their real evaluations and training and so somebody put her on a leash and started actually working with her and they realized immediately that, ‘Oh, no, she knows it all, she can do it all, and she can do it very well, but she’s choosing not to.’ So, I got a phone call that said, ‘Uh, not so great. We’re going to hold her for four more days. We’re going to have her work with a couple of other people in the office.’ They want to know whether she’ll do it for a lay person.

**GR:** Um-hm.
WK: So, they put her with a couple lay people. She tried to pull the wool over everybody’s eyes and everybody who handled her. So, they can’t have a dog who is so smart that they try to outsmart the system.

GR: [laughing] It’s kind of funny, though.

WK: Yea. Right. It is kind of funny, but she was released. She lives with a friend of mine. Her quirks have continued to actually increase. She shuts down in more locations. My friend does a lot of dog sports with her – agility and other things – and typically dogs really enjoy that. With Bev it’s real hit or miss. She’ll have a great week, she’ll do fantastic, she’s running around, she’s having fun, she’s doing well. The next week, you start off with her, she takes off at the starting line does one jump and then just stops, looks around, and sort of slinks around like someone’s been beating her and none of that has ever happened. It’s just – there’s something there that’s not right.

GR: Um-hm.

WK: I don’t know that animals can be autistic, so to speak, but if you were to make a correlation, those are some of the behaviors you see out of her – especially the shutting down things in certain situations – that are just overwhelming to her.

GR: Interesting that it would be familiar situations, though, rather than novel situations.

WK: This is an uneducated analogy, but I think that it’s when she’s in a comfortable enough situation, she starts to ponder whatever it is she ponders in these situations, where if she’s out totally in public the novelty of so much other stuff going on keeps her mind elsewhere and so she can focus better on what you’re asking from her. If she’s comfortable in these places that she’s at – at home – then that’s when she has trouble. Even with other dogs, she’s sort of socially inept. She likes all of the dogs, she’s never been aggressive with dogs, she loves all the dogs, but she has a very low confidence and so she will display behaviors that other dogs don’t always understand. She’ll sometimes act like she wants to play, then start to play, and most dogs will rough and tumble and they play with each other. Well, if another dog starts to rough house with her a little bit, suddenly she shuts down, hangs her head, hangs her tail like they’re beating her up, and then sometimes they don’t know what she’s doing. Then she runs and she wants to hide in her crate. So, like at home with the other dogs, if someone starts playing and she runs and hides, well, then she kind of gets to where other dogs will start to bully her because she’s giving off some signal that the other dogs read and they’ll pester her and it’s fun to pester her, so we do a lot of management when she’s around. We let her be in her crate by herself with the door shut, with the other dogs separated. If she’s outside it’s better. There’s more room and she can run and
she'll chase and romp, but inside she gets kind of weird. At my house – even though she hasn't lived in my house for four-plus, five years – she still has her own crate in my house, because she's there probably once or twice a week. No one else has ever wanted to be in that crate. I think that's just incidental because there's lots of other crates for other dogs, but that's been her crate. It's never moved. Her whole life that's been her crate and so if she's upset that's where she goes and hangs out and for the most part the other dogs respect that and will leave her alone in there. So, there the crate remains.

[laughs] So, that's a rather long explanation for Bev and her quirks.

GR: But, very interesting.

WK: Yea.

GR: I've never known a dog like that, but then I haven't known that many dogs in my life.

WK: Yea. She's a nice dog, she's a good dog, she's friendly, like I said, no aggression, or anything like that, but she just gives off lots of mixed signals and, sometimes you have to sympathize with her because you really just don't know what's going through her little head that is making her feel sort of upset or whatever it is.

GR: So, we got on this topic because you were going to tell me whether you preferred boy ...

WK: Oh! Oh, yes, yes.

GR: ... boy dogs or girl dogs.

WK: I have the attention span of a gnat.

GR: No, that's okay.

WK: Anyway, I've always had females and then the next dog came and I said, 'Okay, just for sake of variety I want a – Bev was yellow – a black one would be my preference, just so I'm not comparing the two dogs as much.' The black one they had was a male so I thought, 'Okay, I'll take a male.' Well, great dog, loved the dog. That was Easton. He was one of my favorites – quick learner, great fun, very enthusiastic about everything he did, and probably the hardest one to send back. He was just that good of a dog. So, right or wrong, it rolls around, 'Oh, the boy – you know, the boy's pretty good.' I think maybe I was like a lot of people who don't want boys because they don't want them lifting their legs on things in the yard or they're worried about them having problems in the house. I certainly have came to the conclusion that most of that is training issues and I've never had any males lift a leg in my house and now I've
had lots of males in my house. Let me rephrase that. I’ve never had any males lift their leg in my house that have started out in my house. Now, there have been some rescue dogs who I’ve fostered who have tried that, but they were raised with who knows what rules elsewhere. So it was like, ‘Wow, a boy’s kind of nice so, I’d take another boy.’ So next time around I wanted a golden retriever. The only golden was a girl, so I got a girl again.

GR: Um-hm.

WK: Very nice dog. Gender made no difference to anybody. She was a very, very nice dog. But the next one was a boy again. Liked it. I don’t know, I’m just kind of stuck on a roll of boys now. So, it doesn’t mean I won’t do a female again, but I’ll just say that my original opinion of preferring females for many, many years has certainly changed and now I think the boys are...

GR: As far as the training goes, do you see any difference?

WK: ... just as fine. As far as training goes, no, I haven’t seen any difference. They’ve all had really good things about them and they’ve all had some quirks. None quite like Bev’s, but they all have quirks. I mean they’re living beings. They’re going to have things that are maybe not perfect. You know, they’re not robots. So, each one has been a little different. The two prior boys I had did happen to both be from the same sire – different mothers, but they had the same father – so a lot of what they showed in similarity that I really liked in both of those boys, I think was attributable to heritage. This particular sire is a rather popular sire in the group and a lot of these things do seem similar, but genetics are interesting because the golden retriever, the pure golden retriever, and Sly - who was half golden, half lab – they share the same mother. So, two of my dogs shared the same mother, two shared the same father.

GR: Um-hm.

WK: But the mother – at least in these two dogs – played no part in their personalities, because those dogs were as different as night and day in personality.

GR: And the pure golden was Lilly?

WK: The pure golden was Lilly, who went on to be a facility dog.

GR: Um-hm.

WK: Lilly, the slug.

GR: [laughter]
WK: She was and is a fantastic dog, but as a puppy she had very low motivation and a very low energy level – almost to the point where I was like, ‘Is there something wrong with this dog?’ You know, what golden retriever doesn’t like to eat? What golden retriever – or retriever of any sort – walks away from a bowl of food after eating four or five pieces and then goes and lays down? That’s not right. Well, there was nothing wrong with her – that was just her. She’d play with a toy for five or ten minutes and just go lay down.

GR: Sounds like a dream dog to me. [laughter]

WK: She was a dream dog, you know? For the average pet owner, she was the dream dog. If you wanted to go for a walk, she was happy to go for a walk for as long or as short as you wanted to go. She didn’t like heavy exercise, so when you got home, she’d go get a drink of water and immediately just lay down in the living room. When I got up to go to work in the morning, she’d get up, she’d go outside, she’d come back inside and play a little bit, lay down. I’d say, ‘Come on, let’s go.’ She’d look at me with a ‘Eh, I’m good. You go.’

GR: [laughter]

WK: You know, with one of those looks. So, very, very easy to live with. The easiest dog of all of them I had to live with.

GR: I want one just like her.

WK: Yea. I mean house broken almost from day one. The first day I had her she went to the back door. I thought, “That’s just coincidence.” I took her out. She went, but of course, puppies go constantly. She only had five accidents before she was completely housebroken and most of those were my fault for not really believing her when she was standing at the door. Just extremely easy. The challenging part with her was her low motivation, since she wasn’t food-motivated. It’s really hard to encourage them to try new behaviors if there is no desire to do it. You know, normally we teach dogs to do things by using treats and kibble and things to motivate them to learn these behaviors and when there’s no motivation it’s really hard to teach them things. So she took two to three times as long to learn new behaviors as any of the other dogs. There was never a ‘light bulb moment.’ I think I mentioned ‘light bulb moments’ before.

GR: Yes, you did.

WK: When you suddenly see, ‘Oh, yea. Oh, yea. I get that. I’ll do that.’ With her? No. You could kind of lure her into the behaviors and you tried to wean off of luring. And then one day you just realize, “You know, she does get this. She just doesn’t do it with any gusto that makes you realize ‘Oh, she’s got it.’ But you’d ask her and she could do it all, so eventually it came around – just a very different learning style which, for me as a trainer, keeps me on my toes.
and keeps me learning. It was different and, approaching her advanced training, my thought was, 'If this dog is going to make it all, it's going to be as a facility dog, because there's no way this dog is ever going to have the motivation to be picking up dropped items and flipping light switches on and all that. I just don't see it. You know, I could be wrong, because they tell us all the time, 'The trainer will different things than we see.' I think I'm a fairly good judge of what their personalities are like and sure enough, she went into the training program and she did fine. She learned everything. Her rate was moderate, not high, but they fairly early on saw that her track was going to be facility dog and eventually that is what she became. I think I told you the story of her being used in the courtrooms and everything. What kind of dog do you want around children in a courtroom? You want a very, very laid-back, mellow dog – one that is not reactive to anything and one that can just put up with anything without being overexcited and knocking children down. So, for her that was perfect.

**GR:** That was what she was supposed to be.

**WK:** Yea! Yea.

**GR:** That's pretty cool.

**WK:** It was very interesting.

**GR:** Well, you mentioned that you had said something to the trainers, the advanced trainers, that she was pretty laid back and all ...

**WK:** Um-hm.

**GR:** ... which also brought to mind – are you expected to give some kind of little report card or say what you think this dog is capable of?

**WK:** We have a report card – a form we fill out every month. We fill out a checklist of things. The checklist involves medical things, making sure that we're doing all the things we should do – heartworm, flea-prevention – if there's any medical notes, if anything has occurred that needs special note. There's a checklist of all the commands that the dogs need to know. There are about thirty-five different commands that we're supposed to teach the dogs so there's a checklist of all those and we mark which ones we're working on and the dog's performing. There's a comment section if we're having trouble with any those, what kind of trouble we're having and what we're doing to help that, and then if we need further assistance from them directly. Then a checklist of places we've taken the dogs, things we've socialized them to. So, every month I write down what kind of outings we do – whether on this date we went to the grocery store or the doctor's office, this week we went to the park or worked by the soccer field, and so on. What kind of things we've done to expose the dog to different
situations will create diversity for the dogs. A lot of those are broken down by their age. We have a binder full of information and in there is a list of different things that we can and can’t expose dogs to. There are certain things that are inappropriate for a young puppy that might be appropriate for a ten-month-old, but it's not for a three-month-old to expose them to.

GR: For example?

WK: Some things based on their training, like whether they’re housebroken or not. We don’t take any puppies under five months of age out into any place public – so we don’t take young puppies into any grocery stores or the mall, or any place else like that because under five months old you realistically can’t expect them to have a solid enough set of skills to do that. At that age we want to take them to the park near the playground to listen to children, to be around children. We want to walk them down the sidewalks when there are Halloween decorations out so that they aren’t scared of this, that, or the other thing. We don’t want our dogs to be scared of anything. So, we work early but appropriately. We try not to take young puppies into truly urban areas like downtown Chicago, because there’s just too much noise, too much commotion, and that’s overwhelming. Puppies go through a couple of fear periods in their life where things that they’re exposed to during that particular time period – if it’s deemed very fearful to the puppy – it can have a life-long imprint on the puppy. So, if a nine week old puppy is scared by a garbage truck, he may be scared of a garbage truck for life. You take a four-month-old puppy and he hears a garbage truck and he gets a little spooked by it, he’ll come around and it won’t necessarily mean he’s scared of it forever. You just work through it and he’s okay. So, we try to avoid things that would be detrimental to the rest of their life.

GR: Mmm.

WK: There are a couple of ages when puppies have these fear periods where we want to keep that sort of thing from happening.

GR: That’s interesting. I didn’t know that.

WK: Yea.

GR: But, kids kind of go through that same thing.

WK: Yea.

GR: Around two-ish, I think.

WK: Right. There’s a lot of that. Parades are another one. Parades are a no-no. There are too many biggies at parades. You name it, there are the fire
engines, the marching bands, the list goes on of loud, noisy, visually distracting things that we don’t do at any age.

**GR:** Really?

**WK:** Yea, because how you handle that is very specific and again, a young puppy could be damaged for life if something goes wrong. An older dog, probably not, but the group would just as soon we not take any chances with that. They’ll wait and when the dog is fully trained – around two years old – the group will deal with those really high distraction situations, with the professional trainers who can evaluate each dog on its own merits.

**GR:** Well, I can certainly understand how there would be – I mean just the smells alone ...

**WK:** Right.

**GR:** ... and so many people.

**WK:** Fireworks displays are another one. We never go to fireworks displays. Now, we work towards them being around – not being around fireworks, per se – but we all know that on the Fourth of July weekend, fireworks happen randomly in the neighborhoods, so we want our dogs to get used to those. I make a big point on New Year’s Eve and on Fourth of July, or any other occasion when we know there’s going to be fireworks, we’ll work. If I start to hear someone in the neighborhood putting off little fireworks, I will work quickly with the puppy to make sure the puppy is with me and I will start giving lots of treats. Every time a boom goes off, he gets a treat. So, he starts to make a positive association with that sound. Now, your neighborhood fireworks are clearly not as loud as what the big, public displays are. Where I live it’s close enough to one of the public displays – it’s three or four blocks away – so we can certainly hear on the Fourth when they go off, so we spend that evening with every puppy sitting there working on it for 20 minutes, a half hour, however long it lasts we work on it. By half way through, I want the dog looking at me happily every time he hears a boom and goes, “Hey, where’s the cookie?” So, that’s a good thing.

**GR:** [laughs] That’s great.

**WK:** So, it takes the startle factor out for the dog.

**GR:** Yea, yea.

**WK:** So, that some day if they’re out in public with a graduate and they’re a working service dog and they happen to find themselves too near fireworks, hopefully, the dog’s reaction will be minimal to that sound.
GR: Well, there are sounds that are similar like a car backfiring.

WK: A car back-firing. Yea, we've dealt with that a lot and so you quickly jolly the dog out of it and hope it's okay. There's another thing - things people don't even think about - farm animals. You know, the first time you take a dog near a cow or a horse.

GR: Oh, yea.

WK: They have no idea what it is unless they were raised on a farm around them. A lot of dogs at first are like, 'Wow, that's a cool, big dog.' Then they get closer and realize it's not. I had one of the pups at Star West Stable, which is a local dressage stable. They've always graciously welcomed us with any puppies, to come out to the barn to work with them. So, with one of the pups we head out there and the pup was relatively young. Farm animals are okay at any age. He was fairly young, maybe ten weeks, twelve weeks, and he was watching the horse and we were getting closer and closer to the pen the horse was in. Finally, he leaned down and put his nose through the fence and the puppy went up to sniff it just like they would another dog and the puppy was very happy. Well, the horse snorted. Poor puppy shot to the end of his leash. You know, he thought he'd been had, but thankfully we were able to very quickly get some treats out and we just kind of ran around in little circles, made a game, and he very quickly got over that. Had that been handled differently, it could have had a different outcome. We could have scared him for life of horses had we picked him up and coddled him and said, 'Oh, it's okay.' You kind of make him think, 'Okay, there's something to be afraid of.' No, we just quickly said, 'Oh, here's food, that's a good thing.' Then we ran around and by having him chase me around the yard for a second he forgot about the horse and he played a different game and then we went up to the horse again, and by that time the horse had gotten his curiosity out of his system and so the horse was indifferent to the dog and so it all worked out.

GR: I'd imagine it's a sort of a reciprocal relationship there, horses need to be...

WK: Right.

GR: ... cool around dogs, too.

WK: Right. They need to be cool around the dogs. You know, having a place in Chicago, we are in Chicago a lot, and so there are all of the carriage horses, so I'll make sure we spend a lot of time, if we see the carriage horses, depending on the age of the dog. We will either walk across the street so that the puppy can see the horse, but from a distance or we walk closer and work on whatever. Those horses are all pretty bomb-proof, not much makes those horses worry, so we can get relatively close to them without causing the horse any problem and that's been really good practice with the puppies.
GR: That’s cool. Well, you told me last time that Nifty knows thirty-five commands and you said that’s how many you’re expected to teach them, right? So, how long has he known that many? That seems like a lot.

WK: You know, it’s a good question.

GR: And you say that you tend to teach multiple commands...

WK: Right, right.

GR: ....at the same time.

WK: I tend to teach a lot of commands all at once. The way our little check sheets we were talking about are set up, they do break them into commands you definitely want to introduce between this age, say two months and six months. Another set of commands that are labeled between six and ten months and then like at ten months to turn-in. That doesn’t mean we can’t teach them earlier, but for some puppy raisers, like maybe the gal who was a first-time puppy raiser, doing them all at once would be overwhelming. So they break them into things they find would be most useful by certain ages. By six months, you definitely want to have these skills down, you can introduce these other skills later, they’re not as necessary in day-to-day living.

GR: For example?

WK: Um, there’s a ‘bed’ command. ‘Bed’ means literally, just, ‘Go lay on your bed.’ A bed or a towel or anything else that would be called ‘the bed.’

GR: Um-hm.

WK: So, what that does is wherever we go, if we need to have him lay down for a long time – he should be able to do it just on the floor, too – but for his comfort, say you’re working in an office or something like that, you’re probably going to give the dog a proper bed, and so you say ‘bed.’ The dog just automatically goes, walks over, lays down, and stays there until he’s told he can move. He should be able to do that from a variety of distances. You don’t have to be right standing by it, the dog should be able to walk across the room to go get on his bed. So, that’s not something we need to have for going out in public, and truthfully, we as puppy-raisers don’t use that command out in public very often, so we can wait and teach that at a later date. Whereas the command to ‘sit’ or ‘lay down’ - we need that from the get-go. The first time we’re out in public, the dog needs to be able to sit or lay down reliably while they’re waiting for us to do something else. There are other commands like the ‘car’ command, which means ‘Jump up into the car.’ Well, that’s slated at like a middle age, because a young puppy, physically can’t do it, they’re too small to do that.
GR: Yea.

WK: So, we put that at a later age. Personally though, I tend to teach them all fairly early. I mean by the time they’re five or six months old, I want all thirty-five down. Puppies learn to distinguish different commands better if they haven’t ingrained another command too solidly in their head. Most people who have a pet dog know that if they’re using treats or biscuits, the dog has probably learned to sit. That’s probably the first command they taught the dog. They probably taught the dog to do it pretty well and the dog probably does it pretty reliably, so any time you pull out the dog biscuits, the dog probably sits automatically, which is great, there’s nothing wrong with that. If the dog’s been sitting for three months real solidly, when it’s time to teach it to lay down, then it’s really hard for him to change that behavior. He’s ingrained in just sitting, so you can teach him to lay down, but it will actually take longer and in the future, he will probably continue to offer the ‘sit’ first before laying down. If we teach the ‘sit’ and the ‘down’ simultaneously, it’ll take slightly longer to learn each of the two, but he’ll learn to distinguish the two better and in the long run will be a better performer of those. So, I prefer to teach lots of commands up front. Now, I don’t teach all thirty-five starting the first week ...

GR: Sure.

WK: ... but I’ll teach the ‘sit’, the ‘down’, the ‘stand’ all at the same time. Those three are all stationery commands.

GR: That makes sense.

WK: And then I’ll teach ‘up,’ which is putting his front feet up on a counter or a wall and holding that position without moving until told otherwise. Then the ‘jump’ command which is putting your whole body up on something, so jumping up onto a table or onto a platform of some sort. Those two are hard for the dogs to distinguish because both involve the upward, forward motion – one halting with only the front feet, one putting the whole body up. So, if you teach one really solid first, it’ll be hard to teach the other, so I teach both of those simultaneously. I introduce them kind of in groups of things that are similar and that seems to help.

GR: This is all like common sense, but on the other hand if you’ve never done it before it’s ...

WK: Right. It’s tough.

GR: ... yea.

WK: “Under.” We teach ‘under’ with that group, too. ‘Under’ is when a dog crawls under a bench or a table and lays down. Dogs are extremely visual. It’s
much easier for them to learn from visual cues than it is from audible cues, and so if we're standing in front of a table or a bench, the dog knows it has three options – to crawl under it, to jump on it, or to put his front feet on it. Which of the three is he going to do? That's why we also throw the 'under' into that category. It's not unusual in the learning phase for me to say, 'up,' and the dog crawls under instead. He's been conditioned to think – 'Okay, if we're standing in front of this sort of object, I'm going to do one of those things. Which is it?'

**GR:** So, are there any dogs then that are taught hand commands without verbal commands?

**WK:** We teach all of our dogs verbal first because again, it's much, much easier for a dog to learn a hand signal than it is to learn a verbal signal. A lot of people don't realize that, because most people ...

**GR:** I didn't know that.

**WK:** ... yea, most people – we say our command, we say 'sit,' but we're giving some visual cue without even realizing it. So, when people teach the dog a hand signal they think that's awesome – which it's great they're teaching the dog anything – but the hand signal would have been a whole lot easier for the dog to learn in the first place because they watch our bodies constantly. All these subtle cues that we perform – that's what they're honing in on. You know, dogs don't talk to each other, they watch each other's body language. You may get the occasional bark or play growl, but for the most part, their communication is body. The tail wag, the head high in the air for confidence, the head hung low for submission, et cetera. That all indicates speech to a dog, so when we teach a dog, we as puppy raisers are encouraged to eliminate all physical cues as quickly as possible, because dogs become very dependent on them. So, if we teach them verbal only as early as possible, they'll be very reliable with verbal only. If somebody has need to add a visual cue later, that's extremely easy to add. The dog will pick up on a visual cue very, very quickly.

**GR:** Really? That's very interesting.

**WK:** Yea.

**GR:** Because I've seen videos of people using both at the same time, like ...

**WK:** Right.

**GR:** .... You know those kind of gestures [gesturing].

**WK:** Right. Yea, and there are things for competitive obedience work or field work when you're at a distance. Audio can be very hard for a dog to hear
amongst other noises and because they’re so visual anyway, the big hand signals are much easier for them to use, so we’re working to the dog’s advantage by using hand signals. It’s the voice that helps us. If we say a voice while giving the hand signal, it’s easier for us.

**GR:** So, but that brings to mind Border Collies ...

**WK:** Um-hm.

**GR:** ...who are trained by whistles.

**WK:** Um-hm. Which speaks to the brilliance of Border Collies.

**GR:** Pretty cool.

**WK:** Yea. But the whistles are very consistent, and why do they use whistles and not speech? Both because it carries better distance, but also a whistle’s much easier to be consistent with. Human speech is very hard to be consistent with.

**GR:** Yea, I guess.

**WK:** You know, if you tell a dog to ‘sit’ [in high-pitched voice] versus ‘sit’ [in loud, commanding voice] ...

**GR:** Oh, sure.

**WK:** ... it sounds totally different. You know, one’s harsh, one’s uplifting. Dogs will almost always work better for the uplifting sound, the high-pitched sound.

**GR:** Um-hm.

**WK:** You’ll get a happier sit. Now a lot of dogs will learn to sit with the deep voice, because people who are frustrated will yell at them and maybe do some punitive correction. The dog learns to do it, but if you watch the dogs, the dogs who are doing it with those people are usually not working as happily as the dogs who are offering the behavior for a happy voice.

**GR:** Okay. Now, we’re talking about voices, so I need to ask the question about barking because I’ve never heard a service animal even make a noise.

**WK:** Right.

**GR:** You know, there’s usually nothing, any sound, that comes out of them at all.
WK: Right. Right.

GR: How do they learn that? How do they learn to be quiet and not bark?

WK: There’s two parts to that. First of all, we never reward barking or any noise of any sort that we don’t want, that we aren’t asking for. So, when they’re little and they’re in their crate and they’re barking because they don’t really want to be in there at that particular moment, you never, ever, ever talk to the dog. You never let it out of its crate. When the dog stops barking and is quiet for ten seconds, you let it out. Dogs only do what works. If barking works, then they’ll keep barking. If barking never gives them the reward they’re looking for, they generally won’t bark as much. So, at least as far as demand barking, if the dog is barking at a door, again, we don’t allow that. Most of it is desensitization. Nifty is the only one who has ever even tried to bark at a doorbell, no one else even tried because – difference of personalities, but also just some dogs take to certain training differently. Well, the first time he did kind of try to bark at a doorbell – usually the bark at a doorbell is an alert – they’ve triggered, ‘Okay, something’s going to happen.’ Socially, a stranger’s going to come in or something like that. Well, because they’re service dogs, we try to socialize them to everybody. Lots of treats, everybody comes in, they get treats. They generally perceive it as a happy thing, well there’s no need to bark at a happy thing.

GR: Right.

WK: So, dogs usually bark because they’re slightly nervous of what’s going to happen or they see a stranger and they’re not well-socialized, those sorts of things. If we get an odd ‘alert’ bark, I immediately just call the dog back to me, give him a treat for coming to me, and then we reapproach that whole situation and I’ll immediately start working, having somebody else ring the doorbell, we give treats and we start to impress, ‘Okay, you’re getting rewarded for not barking.’ If they bark, I’ll ask them to do another behavior that’s less compatible. I’ll ask them to lay down or ask them to do something else that if they’re focused on doing that, it’s harder for them to bark. So, he’s never left outside unattended, he never has a chance to bark at a squirrel or a cat or somebody walking on the street. Most dogs who perform those behaviors do it when they’re left alone and it becomes a self-reinforcing bark. Why do dogs hate the mailman? Not because they hate the mailman, the mailman has never done anything to him. It’s because every day the mailman comes, they bark, the mailman goes away, so in their way of thinking, their barking is driving the mailman away. So, first it starts out little, and it gets progressively worse because every day it continues to work. Every day their barking makes the mailman go away. So, with the service dogs we socialize them and we don’t ever allow them to do any of those things in the first place. So, it’s prevention management.
GR: So, he doesn’t ... Nifty, for example, doesn’t even bark when he’s outside having fun, playing?

WK: Um, that’s a good question. Um, I would like to say no, but that is something we’re actually working on with him right now. He’s the first of the five who’s been a little too enthusiastic in his play, and so he does sometimes bark with the other dogs when they’re playing with each other. So, that’s something that we’re working on and what we do then is, we remove him from the situation. Right now at home, he’s been dragging a light leash around the house or the back yard, so if he’s playing and he starts to bark, I immediately just walk over, take the leash, and he essentially gets a time out. I take him into another room for about thirty seconds and then I let him start playing again. If he starts barking again usually his barks aren’t consistent. He’s not just barking his head off, he gets just really revved up and then he’ll let out a play bark. There’s nothing really wrong with that if you’re a pet dog, there’s no harm in that whatsoever, he’s just having fun. We don’t really want to encourage barking of any sort in the service dogs unless we’re specifically asking for it. I said at the beginning there were two parts to that? The second part is we do also teach them to bark on command. Then we use another command to tell them to stop barking. So, if you put them on command, you can start it and stop it, and you can also help stop an erroneous bark that occurs when you don’t really want it to. One of the challenges with most of my puppies is that when they’re young I teach them to bark fairly early and when not to bark, so I really haven’t had to use the ‘quiet’ command very often. So, I don’t know that my dogs really know the ‘quiet’ command that well, because none of them bark often enough to use the quiet command, which I guess is a good problem to have. We’ll teach them when they’re young to – oh, we can teach them at any age to bark on command – and we do that by taking advantage of the same thing I was talking about with him playing with other dogs. We will get them frustrated and dogs usually bark out of frustration, so we’ll take a toy or food, and we essentially tease them with it, kind of start to play with them but then hold it up in the air where they can’t reach it and do things to frustrate them. Then usually when they bark once, we will say, ‘speak,’ and hand them the toy real fast so they get a reward for that bark. It doesn’t take too long for most of the dogs to catch on how to do that, so we can capture that behavior. Then, once they learn, ‘Oh, I can bark to get something I want,’ then we have to start teaching, ‘Okay, but only when I give the command.’ So, most of the puppies have been in an area where they’re quiet, we teach them to bark, they get a little noisy when we don’t really want them to, and so we have to really work on teaching them, ‘Okay it’s only when I give you ...’ so then, then ....

GR: [laughter]
WK: ...then we’re consistent with never giving them anything when they’re barking without us asking, but most puppies have figured that out pretty quickly because the whole sequence happens in like, say, a week.

GR: Um-hm.

WK: You teach them and then they try randomly to get the extra goodies, so to speak, and then when you don’t reward they give up on the extras. You asked me earlier about the behaviors for different ages on the checklist. Speaking is one of those behaviors that’s a little bit later on the checklist. With my first two puppies, I waited to teach that at a later age and found it extremely difficult to teach at a later age, because we had spent six, eight months telling them to never bark ...

GR: Oh ...

WK: ... so we had also taught them that when we wave a toy around, don’t jump at it. By that time, we had some really good ground rules, and so for them, they had no idea of what I was trying to get them to do and it took a really long time. The first dog never did get it – Bev – never did get it. I never did teach her to speak. Never. At this day and age, she’s almost six and we’ve heard her bark – maybe three times in her entire life because we ingrained so early that barking was not something we wanted. Second dog, we started a little bit earlier and took us about a month to get him to speak. It was hard work. Third dog, I started to get wise. Okay, maybe I should teach this earlier. As a new puppy raiser, in fairness, it wasn’t on their list till later and I didn’t realize, but my friend who’s also a trainer, we started to brainstorm. ‘Maybe we should start teaching this really early.’ So, we started teaching it at 12 weeks, so the next two dogs were much more reliable, much better. Nifty maybe backfired. We started him from like the first week and now he’s the first one who’s starting to do some barking that’s not really what I want, so maybe I started too early, or maybe it’s just him, I don’t know. Maybe the next dog I’ll wait a couple extra weeks and see, but there are definitely advantages to starting earlier because a young puppy does offer a bark more easily whether you want it or not. They’re willing to bark.

GR: [laughs] ‘They’re willing to bark.’ That’s sort of a natural behavior.

WK: [laughs] It’s a natural behavior, but there’s not that many times when anybody really wants to hear a dog bark. If your dog is barking to go outside, well, that’s okay. Our service dogs aren’t allowed to do that either, but most of our pet dogs, do they bark to go outside, okay, good. We want to know they need to go outside.

GR: Right.
**WK:** That's about the only time that anyone really wants their dogs to bark or anything.

**GR:** Okay, well, let's talk a little bit about your website which I think is just fantastic.

**WK:** Thank you.

**GR:** It's easy to find your way around and I love that you have a link there to Canine Companions that takes you to a new window ...

**WK:** Yea.

**GR:** ... and tells about that program. So are you the genius behind that website?

**WK:** Not a hundred percent. Since we are a franchise, our franchise does provide the - I don't know what the computer term is - but, the platform or the template for our website. So, some of what's there, the general layout is a template, but what's on the website is all mine. There's nothing there that I didn't either write or tweak or do something to. I spend a lot of time on the computer myself on other websites and I know what I like and what I don't like. For the most part I try to keep it as easy to follow as possible. I try to make sure that the links are up to date. I try to make sure that there's enough information to fulfill the basics, but not so much that people get lost in the website. I think we've all been on a website when you're trying to find information and there's just so much stuff you don't know where to start. I try to make sure that the headlines or the tabs are descriptive of what's within that tab. There are a few limitations that the website provider or whatever you call them - create some obstacles that I personally don't like a whole lot, but I haven't figured out a way to work around those. I try to make do with what we can there, but I do try to make sure that the basics of the seasonal information are there. So, like a few weeks ago, I updated the things for the hummingbirds, since they'll be arriving soon. I do like - you mentioned the links opening in a new window - I do want them to open a new window. I hate going to a website where you think, 'Okay, I want to go back to this page,' but you click on the link and then suddenly that page is gone and you don't remember where it was. I try to make sure they always open into a new window and ...

**GR:** I, too, appreciate that, Wade...

**WK:** Yea.

**GR:** ... that's probably why I noticed it.
WK: Right. So...

GR: And I noticed that you have a link up there for how to attract bluebirds, which is just awesome. We don't get that many around here, actually.

WK: We don't have as many as other parts of the country. We do have more than what people realize there are. They're a true rural bird, so very few people, if any, who live in town will get them.

GR: And they stay here? I always thought they just passed through.

WK: No, they are here year 'round, unless you're confusing bluebirds for indigo buntings. For many people indigo buntings are here as a summer resident ...

Flynn The Cat: Meeecoooww.

WK: ... and even some of those people...

Flynn: Meeooow.

WK: ...some of the people who have... get those...

Flynn: Meeooww.

WK: ...um, will only get them during a certain portion of the year.

Flynn: Meeoww. Meeoww.

WK: Some people have them all summer. Um...

Flynn: Mrrooww.

WK: But, the bluebirds are here year 'round. They'll winter in the more wooded areas and then they like to summer...

Flynn: Mmmeeoooww.

WK: ... in the more open pastures and meadows and...

Flynn: Mmeeceeoowww.

WK: ... and sorts of open, grassy areas. Uh.....

Flynn: Meeowwowowow
[laughter from both amid Flynn’s oratorical debut]

WK: That’s going to sound good on the tape.

GR: He’s so cute!

WK: Um, yea, don’t reward demand barking! Um, but the bluebirds...

[both laughing]

GR: [laughter] Or does it work that way [meowing] with cats.

WK: It does work that way.

GR: Oh, really?

WK: It does work that way and I shook my head, which no one sees, because the cat almost never begs for me because I won’t ever put up with it. A couple of my wonderful employees, my otherwise wonderful employees, will cave in to his whining and give him extra treats, and ...

Flynn: [right into the mic] MEOW.

WK: So he’s, he’s not ...

Flynn: pphhhhttt.

WK: ... not averse to trying to...

[Interviewer is totally cracking up now, while narrator tries to remove Flynn from the vicinity of the recorder.]

WK: ... to try that on different people and since you’re a different person sitting here, he got up behind you and thought, ‘Hmm, maybe she’ll give me some extra treats.’ So ...

GR: That’s great. He’s so cute.

WK: So, I just rewarded that by picking him up and loving on him.

GR: And if I’m not mistaken, he’s like an old kitty.

WK: Eighteen. Yup, eighteen.

GR: Eighteen, yes, I thought so.
WK: Born in the fall of 1993.

GR: He's got his own little picture on the website.

WK: Yep.

GR: That’s awesome!

WK: Yep, yep. He’s a fan favorite. So, yep, he’s in the pet section of our website. He’s got his photo there.

GR: Yea, that’s the other thing that I really loved about the website. It’s so personal to you and your store and ...

WK: Well, yea, we want it to be, I mean, there are so many big corporate businesses out there that we want people to know that we’re local. We are a franchise and a lot of people don’t know the difference between a chain and a franchise and there are franchises that are corporate-owned, et cetera, et cetera. But, we’re one hundred percent local. You know we own this shop, we run everything about it. We happen to have the support of our franchise for some resources as far as advertising pictures, and things like that, but for the most part, it’s us. I mean, this is the people you’re talking to when you walk in – the people who are giving back to the community and having the pictures of the animals and our staff and that on there. I think it helps to reinforce to people that we are locally owned. If someone just ‘Gogles’ Wild Birds Unlimited online, they’re going to see that there are 270-plus stores and that if they click on the wrong one, they’re not going to get the Springfield store. This way when people find our store they know, ‘Okay, these are the local people I talked to.’ They know that it’s us and when I write the articles that are in there, or write an email or send out a newsletter, I write those myself, unless I find an article that is just so well-written that I don’t think it needs tweaked or something like that. Generally, I write them myself from scratch. You know, one of the best compliments I had was a lady one time, who told me that when I did happen to share a really good article that I didn’t write myself, she said, “You know it was a nice article, but I could tell you didn’t write it, because you always write just how you speak.” I took that as a compliment, although I joked, “You mean I was kind of rambling all over the place?” She saw the humor in that, but no, it was a compliment that she appreciated it and that’s what I want. I want my people to get the same feel in the advertising we’re doing and the information we’re providing online or through our emails that they might get in the store. Hopefully, it will invite them to come on in to the store and visit us.

GR: I think it makes it very personal and a very, very warm feeling.
WK: Yea. It’s tough. The websites – trying to figure out what people do and don't want to read. People are busy, you don’t want to get too long, but yet, bird feeding is – as simple as it can be – if people are having any problems say from the grackles or from the squirrels, or any other little issues that may come up, there’s usually lots of little details in solving those and so creating an article or a web page that gives them the information they really need to know but without overwhelming them ...

GR: Um-hm.

WK: ....is a challenge. The same thing when I send out my emails, it’s like, okay, give them enough birding information along with just a few fun new products, but without the email becoming a book, is very challenging.

GR: So, you send out like a newsletter?

WK: Yes, twice a month we send out a newsletter – an email that’s kind of a combination. It depends a lot on what’s happening. So, like this weeks’ had information about the hummingbirds. Are they going to be early this year or not? This year is different, so giving some tips on that. New product information – we did an article about the gentleman who’s making our bird houses for us locally. We put that in there for people who didn’t see it in the paper. Then just highlighting some of the fun, new things that have come in so somebody who wants to decorate the yard for spring knows some of the fresh, new items we have. Like we mentioned earlier, the name is misleading. A lot of people have no idea that we have all these other things and so we have a few people who come in, maybe the husband just comes in and buys a birdfeeder and birdseed, his wife’s never been in, she has no clue and she’s the one who decorates the yard. Well, hopefully, if she sees that email or that flyer, she’ll realize, “Oh, you mean they have other stuff in there?” It’ll encourage her to come in and see the rest of what we have to offer.

GR: You have tons of stuff. Tons of stuff that’s really cool. And you know, I’ve been here three times now, and every time I’m here I see something new.

WK: Yea, well, that’s our goal and I hope that every time you come in it looks a little bit different. We don’t want people to get bored. I know that, looking down the center aisle, it’s different, because we sold out of everything that was in the middle aisle last week.

GR: YAY! [laugher]

WK: So, I know there’s different stuff there, which is good. It’s great! I mean, that’s what we want to do. I joke that selling stuff is what keeps the doors open. I’ll never be rich selling primarily bird seed, but I enjoy what I do, and I
want other people to enjoy it, and if I can sell some of it, it does keep the business going.  [laughter]

**GR:** And so I hope it does. I think we'll wrap it up then. You've been hugely, hugely informative for me and it's enough to make me want to train a service dog.

**WK:** Well, thank you. Thank you.

**GR:** And I've learned tons about the birds, too.

**WK:** Yea.

**GR:** Because I always just fed sunflower seeds to my cardinals.

**WK:** Yea.

**GR:** Now I know there is more to offer them.

**WK:** Now you know there is more to offer.

**GR:** Actually, yes.

**WK:** That's right. So did you get to see the feeders out at Adams Wildlife Sanctuary?

**GR:** I did, yes, yes.

**WK:** And was there seed in there?

**GR:** There was, yes ... 

**WK:** I mean, beings that it's the end of a Saturday.

**GR:** ... and suet, as well.

**WK:** If they filled them yesterday morning, I didn't know how much would be left in there. Any birds? Did they show up while you were there?

**GR:** No, hm-mh, no.

**WK:** Yea. When you were there it was actually kind of a slow time of day for bird feeding and so, I should have warned you of that. Birds have cycles throughout the day and that mid-afternoon is a slower time period.

**GR:** Yea, dawn and dusk?
WK: Dawn and dusk are the heaviest and then spurts throughout, but mid-afternoon is a siesta time, a slow time, so ...

GR: [laughs; inaudible comment]

WK: ... you might not see any. Or there could have been a hawk hanging out in the tree, too, that'll kind of put the birds off the feeders, too.

GR: Okay, so thanks much, Wade.

WK: Thank you very much.
Bibliography


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