

Dear Ambassador Doc-Barker; my dearest little Brown dog,

I had been looking for months in hopes to find a puppy whom could be trained to become a mobility service dog for me. I already had Barker or should I say, Ambassador Barker who was my certified service dog, a registered therapy dog and canine ambassador with the Make-A-Wish® Foundation, but he was getting ready to retire from his service work and I needed another special canine to assist me once he retired.

I remember the day we first met so well. You were a bouncing little brown puppy full of curiosity and an endless amount energy yet gentleness, unlike any other puppy I'd ever seen. I can't fully describe what I witnessed that warm September day, but I recall how you ran straight towards daddy and me, circled around us in high speed once or twice in excitement, only to stop and sit next to my beloved Barker standing at my side. You sat quivering as puppies do in excitement, then calmly laid down at Barker's feet and looked up to him and then to daddy and me. Staring at us with your soft yellow eyes, it was as if you were asking us all, "please take me home and teach me all that you know". Your training began the minute daddy placed you in the truck next to Barker. As we headed home, I'm sure you recall how Barker seemed appalled to be sitting next to such a silly, rambunctious puppy and kept looking at daddy as if to say, "Can we take him back". At the time little did any of us know how our lives would evolve with you in it.

Once home you settled in very quickly to the demanding routines of "a puppy in training" and Barker, your mentor seemed to enjoy always keeping you in your place. Having Barker assist with training must have been difficult at best, but rewarding at the same time. I remember Barker would never allow you to break a sit-stay or down-stay command once given and when you did...you had to answer to Barker. I recall as we started thinking of a name for you. I wanted to keep the Barker name and daddy named you after Dr. Carl Becker DVM aka "Doc Becker", which is why we choose Doc-Barker. Daddy took it one step further and named you Ambassador Doc-Barker, I think he knew you would live up to your name. Through months of training I witnessed you grow from a silly puppy into my indispensable canine companion. I was so proud of you the day we passed our Pet Partners® therapy evaluation, it was the same week we celebrated your 1st Birthday. About that same time, Barker began to limp, as a mobility service dog he was retired immediately and you became my full-time in training mobility service dog and Barker continued his therapy work as long as he loved doing it. Looking back, somehow I think you knew Barker had limited time with us, which was why/how you seemed so driven and determined to excel at every challenge you encountered with your vigorous training, yet truly seemed to enjoy it, all the while keeping a close eye on Barker who wasn't feeling well. It was as if you shared your experiences of the day with him when we got home, wanting his approval that you did a good job helping me.

The day you, daddy and I had to say goodbye to our beloved Barker was a very sad day for our family and a day I thought my world had ended. We had a house full of Make-A-Wish staff that came over to comfort and support us in time of grief, we sat talking for hours reflecting all the great work Barker did for the kids and the love and kindness he shared with the staff. I know you laid there listening to every word that was spoken thinking of how you were going to continue the great work Barker had started, it was as if you had made a plan of your own that night and knew what you had to do next. I recall you coming over to me after everyone had left, put your head on my lap and again looked up at me with your soft yellow eyes as if to say this time, "How can I help you mama?" I remember looking back at you and said, "Barker was my life and now you will be stepping into his paw prints". Little did I realize at the time how much I underestimated you, Doc-Barker.

You stepped up the plate, so to speak the very next week. Our local Make-A-Wish Chapter had invited us (Barker and I) to attend "Make-A-Wish Night" at Anaheim Stadium, the Home of Angel's Baseball. I wasn't going to go, but when I looked at you, your eyes told me different so I grabbed Barker's blue Make-A-Wish vest and said, "Let's make Barker proud", and off we went to the ball park. We were greeted and embraced by so many wish kids and their families, staff members and even an Angel's Baseball Representative whom all said how much they loved our Barker. You took it all in stride with over 38,000 people at the Ball Park and when the fireworks went off you held steady as if you were enjoying the beauty of all the colors. I knew that night you weren't just filling a vest, you were your own "kind of special" dog. I watched you time and time again perform some amazing things that to this day I could not describe. Somehow you not only learned from Barker, but you developed your own "kind of magic" through your therapy work, assisting me as a service dog every step along the way.

Without hesitation, during the next several weeks you and I continued the legacy Barker had started. We provided pet therapy and represented the Make-A-Wish Chapters in Southern California and Arizona, just as Barker and I had done before, but with a little something different. Your hard work and captivating personality was recognized in 2010 when you became a canine ambassador and one of the faces for *Wishes Forever*®, an Endowment Campaign through Make-A-Wish America. Over the next three-years you lead our leash to places I only dreamed of seeing and through your own kind of magic, doors were opened to unbelievable opportunities. We met the most amazing people along the way. With you by my side we visited many places and attended several events as special guests; United States Capital thanks to Congressman Calvert, Truck Convoy for Wishes, Gettysburg, PA., several Make-A-Wish® Fundraising Galas representing the Arizona Make-A-Wish® Chapter, Orange County And the Inland Empire Chapter and Southern Nevada Chapter, Huntington Beach 4th of July Parade, Make-A-Wish® America, Hollywood Christmas Parade and numerous Children's Hospitals nationwide, to cite a few. Through each and every endeavor you always knew what to do and if someone needed a little extra kindness, you were there to deliver whether at a formal gala, meeting a wish family in a private room at a hospital or visiting with service men and women at the USO.

I am extremely proud of your accomplishments and titles others have bestowed upon you while working as a registered therapy dog; A Canine Ambassador with Make-A-Wish, representing several chapters throughout the U.S., Official Mascot for USO-Ontario Airport and a Team CANIDAE Member with CANIDAE Pet Foods. You have reached tens of thousands of people in less than four-years; bringing smiles to so many strangers. Your inner kindness and self-discipline has left a positive impression about therapy and service dogs everywhere you go.

As a service dog you have given me the independence and trust to be able to go and do things that I otherwise could never do. Whether it be something as simple as picking up an item I have dropped or bringing in the mail, or something more challenging like pulling the grocery cart at the store, pulling my wheelchair or scooter, turning on/off lights and opening doors for us along the way. I tell you every day how much I appreciate and love you, but I want you to know how much your being in my life has changed me forever. You have taught me to trust in you and never question your judgment because you know me better than I know myself. Since my recent stroke you have stepped up once again fine tuning your abilities to help me with things that I need assistance with, even without me asking you for help. When I work on physical therapy to regain strength of my right side, you are there with a toy to help me because you understand how important it is for my recovery. Also when my emotions are getting the better of me you are there with a wagging tail and your soft yellow eyes filled with strength, as if you are saying "trust me mama we'll get thru this."

I cherish every day we share and know someday our trail together will come to an end but you will always be at my side. I take comfort knowing that when that day comes you will once again be with our beloved Barker, no longer as a silly puppy but as his peer. Doc-Barker, You taught me that what I thought I wanted, a service dog, is so much more than just that. Thank you for showing me that when I thought my world had ended when Barker passed away, it was just the ending to a chapter in my life shared with Barker and the beginning of my next chapter shared with you. What I received from you is a life-lesson only few will ever learn. I'm the lucky one to hold the other end of your leash. Thank you for your trust, love and service.

I love you deeply little Brown dog,

~Mama