

Carolyn Bardwell Wheeler

May 2023

It is not the TI but what Wolf meant and still means to me. I credit what has been an extraordinary career first to God and then to Wolf. It has been extraordinary not because of fame, fortune or recognition but because of the depth, richness and connection I have with people with whom I worked as well as those I have now worked with in Kentucky for over 30 years. What I learned at such an early age has shaped and influenced all that I have done for the past 45 years both in my work and personal life.

I was able to figure out funding to have SRV/PASSING training for a number of years in Kentucky. While that has not continued on any state wide scale, the investment in the work and lives of two people, Hope Leet Dittmeier and Milt Tyree, has immeasurable impact.

[This year] 2021 is my 41st year of being a citizen advocate or acting personally on a voluntary basis in a legal, “instrumental-expressive” role on behalf of an adult with an intellectual disability who has no one else to act in this role. I attribute this commitment on my behalf, because of what I learned from Wolf, to have informed my work in a deep and authentic way. I have done what I encourage many others to do – to cast vision for a good life where valued social roles are cultivated and supported. And fidelity – I have been faithful in each of these relationships even though it has cost me a lot of time, energy, and money while still maintaining my many roles at any given point in time as mother, wife, sister-in-law, daughter, granddaughter, sister, aunt, friend, employee, etc.

I assisted the second man for whom I took on this role to move from a terrible place to an agency supported residential arrangement, to a house I rented on his behalf, to figuring out how he could buy his own home. I figured out the services to assist him to obtain a full-time job and I learned about work incentives so he could legitimately maintain his Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) benefit AND work full-time. He died unexpectedly in 2003 and I took on the role of guardian for his sister Linda. She lives in Louisville and I live in Lexington. I am still in that role although now I am Linda’s Power of Attorney (much less onerous than guardianship) and have been in that role for the last 17 years. She has had SIGNIFICANT health issues since April of 2020 when she fell and broke her pelvis. She could not walk and had to go to rehab after being admitted to a local hospital with congestive heart failure. She tested positive for COVID while at the nursing home for rehab but amazingly did not become very ill.

I honestly do not think I would have persevered through all she has had occur this past year without Wolf's influence (and God's help) in my life. I am the only person who would have picked her up as I did from a COVID unit at a nursing home in Louisville where she had to stay for five weeks waiting for two negative tests. No paid person in her life, understandably, would have taken that risk. I brought her back to my house very unconditioned where she stayed for three weeks and I essentially got her back on her feet. She was able to return to her own apartment after being gone for three months with additional support as I successfully accessed additional staff support for her. She also had surgery in January for invasive melanoma in her scalp. She has staff who love her and provide excellent assistance to her to remain in her own place with her rabbit "Midnight."

[Memories of the TI and WW are] Christmas parties at the Wolfensberger home; I helped organize a surprise 50th birthday celebration for Wolf; Nancy and Wolf sitting in my bedroom a week after our first daughter Carrie was born and Nancy bringing a handmade quilt Carrie still has at age 38; visiting Wolf and Nancy at a Hampton Inn in downtown Louisville after Wolf had been released from the hospital (they had been visiting in IN and something happened); visiting Wolf and Susan at the Syracuse Developmental Center where they moved for a period of time and seeing the vast amount of items they had collected from what people had thrown away; wonder what happened to it all.