Episode Title: Brady: Golden Retriever, Epilepsy Service Dog, and Pageant Winner

Episode Summary:

On the debut episode of Daily Paws Presents: Warm Fuzzies, host Karman Hotchkiss interviews Alison Appleby, a dynamic 18-year-old who made national news last year when she won the 2022 Miss Dallas Teen pageant with her service dog, Brady, by her side (he even got his own crown!). Alison was diagnosed with epilepsy at age 16, and soon after, joined forces with Brady, a now 2-year-old golden retriever, who alerts her to oncoming seizures, fetches her medication when needed, and calms her when she’s stressed. But as lovable as Brady is, having a service dog by your side 24/7 isn’t always easy. Alison shares what it’s really like when a guardian angel is a furry, four-legged friend.

Episode Type: Full
Episode Rating: Clean
Season Number: 1
Episode Number: 1
Episode Date: November 9, 2023

Episode Transcript:

Music: Daily Paws Theme Music begins

Karman Hotchkiss (VO): Hello there! Welcome to Warm Fuzzies, a new podcast from Daily Paws. I'm your host, Karman Hotchkiss (a certified cat lady, but don’t tell my dog) for the next 6 weeks, we’ll be sharing heartwarming stories that highlight the lives of some very special furry friends. You’ll hear tales of unlikely partnerships, miracle rescues, hero pets and more.

On today's show, we’re chatting with Miss Dallas Teen 2022, Alison Appleby, who joined us looking every bit like her winning title in her sparkling tiara and sash. Alison is 18 years old, and lives with epilepsy–she’ll tell us more about that later–she has some unique stories to share about her service dog, Brady, a two-year-old Golden Retriever.

Karman Hotchkiss: Welcome to Warm Fuzzies.

Alison Appleby: Thank you.

Karman Hotchkiss: Alison, would you like to introduce yourself to our audience?
Alison Appleby:
Hi, my name is Alison Appleby and I am Miss Dallas Teen 2022.

Karman Hotchkiss:
I feel like I'm in the presence of royalty here.

Alison Appleby:
(laughs)

Karman Hotchkiss:
Who is your, uh, your four-legged companion?

Alison Appleby:
Yeah. So my pet is actually a service dog. He is a two-year-old Golden Retriever named Brady and he's an epilepsy alert dog.

Karman Hotchkiss:
How did you and Brady come to be a pair?

Alison Appleby:
That's actually an interesting story. So I wasn't diagnosed with epilepsy until I was 16 and about seven months into my diagnosis, we found out that I was completely drug-resistant, so no medicines would work with my seizures. So the doctor actually looked at me and said, "I'm out of ideas. I think, at this point, you should just try a service dog and see what happens." So, about five months later, I got moved up on the waitlist and I was paired with Brady who, at the time, was an eight-week-old puppy.

Karman Hotchkiss:
Oh, my gosh.

Alison Appleby:
Uh, yeah, (laughs) he was a little fluff ball and we started training the day after I got him. We've been training ever since. He has been alerting seizures. He helps with all of my health issues. That's a slew of things (laughs) and he's been by my side since then. He really doesn't go anywhere or I don't go anywhere without him.

Karman Hotchkiss:
So he's really your partner in everyday life?

Alison Appleby:
Oh, yeah. (laughs)

Karman Hotchkiss:
What does the training look like for that? What's involved? I assume he had to learn, you know, the good manners things that all dogs-

Alison Appleby:  
Oh, yeah.

Karman Hotchkiss:  
... do and then the service dog aspects as well.

Alison Appleby:  
So it's really extensive training. It is hundreds of hours of working with the trainer and the dog. With epilepsy, usually it's called owner and trainer training, so it's joint training. So I keep Brady with me and then we go see the trainer together, and we work together with the trainer, because the dog needs to be able to understand your seizures and he needs to be exposed to them. So once a week or twice a week, we go talk to the trainer. She tests him. She sees what we need to work on and then we do Zoom calls or videos throughout the week just to make sure we're up-to-date in what we need to do. With my program, there's actually tests like little elementary school. There's lessons, there's levels and tests. I like to think of it like a video game, where you have to pass a level.

Karman Hotchkiss:  
(laughs)

Alison Appleby:  
It starts out with just basic manners, you know, your sit, stay, wait for people to walk by, and then it becomes personalized to the owner. So for me, Brady reads my blood sugar, my stress, my heart rate, and of course my seizures.

Karman Hotchkiss:  
Had you ever had a pet before?

Alison Appleby:  
Oh, yeah. I grew up on a ranch, so I've had tons of pets, but never did I imagine I would have to train a dog to go to Build-A-Bear. (laughs) So in that time of learning basic manners, they're also exposed to the world. So we took him on airplanes, we took him to little kids amusement parks, we took him to Build-A-Bear. He went everywhere with me. I even took him to a smaller concert in my town just to get a feel for, like, crowds, um, went to a high school football game. All those fun, chaotic things where we needed to see how he would react, and we need to train him through it.

Karman Hotchkiss:  
And he's obviously learning his stuff.

Alison Appleby:
Oh, yeah. (laughs)

**Karman Hotchkiss:**
Can you tell us about the first time that he alerted for you medically? What did that look like?

**Alison Appleby:**
So he was about four months old, um, four, five months. I can't remember exactly. I had had a pretty bad seizure and he didn't know what to do with it at the time. He wasn't trained to alert or anything like that, but he knew something was wrong. So he... We're still not sure how he did this, but from what I can tell, he crawled up my dresser drawers onto my bed and barked to get my mom to check on me. So that was his first alert and how the trainer knew, like, this would be a good dog, because he's figuring this out. He knew something was wrong, he just didn't know what. But his real, like, actual trained alert, he was about a year and a half when he started figuring out what he actually needs to do.

**Karman Hotchkiss:**
And so what does that look like if he needs to alert for you now? I assume it doesn't involve climbing up dresser drawers.

**Alison Appleby:**
No, not anymore.

**Karman Hotchkiss:**
(laughs)

**Alison Appleby:**
Although he would if he needed to. It looks like a couple different things depending on what's going on. If it's like blood sugar, he'll take his paw and hit me on my leg and then he can go grab me a snack out of my bag if I need it. He's trained kind of to be a menace until I listen to him. I have a weird tendency to get annoyed and not listen to him or think that I know more than him, so I push him aside and then he has to be a menace until I listen. If it's heart rate, he does something called deep pressure therapy, where he puts his weight on the inside of my thighs or on the inside of my arm. And what that does is it actually lowers your heart rate. So when my heart rate spikes before a seizure, he is able to lower it and to get me to realize I need that, he tugs on my shirt to get me to sit down so he can help me. And of course when I am going to have a seizure, he barks uncontrollably, very loud for everyone to hear. But, it's letting me know that I need to go figure out what I'm gonna do with the seizure. Usually, it's just sit down, get comfortable, um, get in a safe spot, text my mom, call someone. And, of course, there have been times that I don't listen or I ignore it, and then he really has to jump into action. One time, I was at practice in archery and I didn't listen to him, so he went and grabbed my coach and dragged him by the shirt to come get me and check on me.

**Karman Hotchkiss:**
Wow.
Alison Appleby:
Yeah. Not every alert looks the same. It's all a little different depending on the situation.

Karman Hotchkiss:
Right. I like that description, though, of, like, just, like, his job is to be annoying until somebody is paying attention and doing what needs to be done.

Alison Appleby:
Oh, yeah. And most of the time he tries to be quiet. We've trained him to just be silent and alert me quietly, but sometimes it's not the case. Sometimes he has to be annoying or loud or get my attention easily.

Karman Hotchkiss:
Persistent?

Alison Appleby:
Oh, yeah.

Music: Daily Paws Presents: Warm Fuzzies Theme Song Fades In

Karman Hotchkiss(VO): We’re taking a quick break, but when we come back, you’ll hear more from Alison about her passion for archery and what propelled her to compete for Miss Dallas Teen, her first ever pageant—and how Brady plays a key role in both. Plus, what to do—and not do—when you see a service dog like Brady.

Music: Daily Paws Presents: Warm Fuzzies Theme Song Fades Out

(AD)

Karman Hotchkiss(VO): Welcome back to Daily Paws Presents: Warm Fuzzies.

Karman Hotchkiss:
So tell us about archery.

Alison Appleby:
Oh, (laughs) okay. Yes. So I am an archer. I shoot for the Junior Olympic Archery Development Program. I have been doing that for about nine years now, so I'm heavily invested in it. I'm actually going to shoot collegiate now.

Karman Hotchkiss:
That's awesome.

Alison Appleby:
I take Brady to tournaments all over the country. He goes to practice with me. His first day of practice was the day I got him. I drove him out and we went to the range together.

**Karman Hotchkiss:**
Just right off the bat.

**Alison Appleby:**
Oh, yeah.

**Karman Hotchkiss:**
Did he get a lot of attention?

**Alison Appleby:**
Absolutely. At the time, he was tiny, just a little puppy, and everyone thought he was royalty. It took a lot for me to convince my teammates, "Hey, please don't pet him. Please ignore him. He's training." But they figured it out pretty fast that he is working. He can't be distracted. So now he just sits on a corner and checks on me every once in a while to make sure I'm okay during practice, and then he just stays all the way for the most part.

**Karman Hotchkiss:**
That does make me wonder for those of us who just, you know, love dogs, wanna pet every dog that we run into. Of course, a service dog is a, different situation-

**Alison Appleby:**
Yeah.

**Karman Hotchkiss:**
... and we need to learn how to respect that. What's the best way for somebody at an archery meet or in the grocery store or at Build-A-Bear? What's the best way for them to experience or encounter you and Brady or, or any- anybody with a service dog?

**Alison Appleby:**
As I like to explain it, Brady is a medical device. So although he's adorable, he is no different than an oxygen tank or a pacemaker, and you wouldn't really walk up to a wheelchair and pet it. So you kind of have to treat him like that; he is working and he is focusing on his job. So when people do come up, pet him, squeal, get excited, try to call him over, or even just whistle, it takes his focus off of me, my health, and puts focus on his surroundings. It's hard enough being a dog in public with smells and people and all of that, but as soon as people draw attention to him, it's a million times harder. I am always open to educating people on it. I am always willing to explain why they can't pet him; however, some service dog owners are not that way. Some of them just aren't comfortable sharing what the dog is for or why you can't pet them. It does become very... I get asked about it every time I go out in every store I go to probably about five times. After a while, it becomes a lot, so I personally have made business cards for Brady, just little cards that say what he does, the laws that support service dogs, and how you can act
around a service dog. That's kind of the big thing in the community so that you don't have to explain a million and three times what he's for. But if you encounter a service dog in public, just keep walking. Don't distract them, don't try to pet them. There's always a time to pet pets in public. If you wanna pet a dog, go to the animal shelter, but please don't pet the service dog.

**Karman Hotchkiss:**
I bet people ask a lot,

**Alison Appleby:**
Oh, yeah.

**Karman Hotchkiss:**
... "Why do you have him? So that's probably another piece of the advice I would guess is like, "Don't be so nosy. Just..."

**Alison Appleby:**
No. I get a lot of questions about it, which I am an open book. I am one of the few that if you wanna ask questions I have the answers, go for it. But some people are really uncomfortable asking, so some people's favorite response is just, "He's a medical dog. He alerts of medical situations. It's probably the most bland and open answer you can get. I will go in-depth if you want me to. If you wanna know my whole life history, I will tell you. Go for it, but it's nicer if you just don't."

**Karman Hotchkiss:**
So let's talk about Miss Dallas Teen a little bit.

**Alison Appleby:**
Mm-hmm.

**Karman Hotchkiss:**
What inspired you to jump into the pageant scene and what did Brady seem to think about that?

**Alison Appleby:**
It's a really funny story. I've always been an athlete, always been kind of happier in the gym or the archery range. Never imagined being a pageant girl, but I was at a luncheon for a charity and I was talking to a girl that was gonna compete for Miss Dallas. And she mentioned, she's like, "You should do it. It would be so fun. Like, sign up. We'll do it together." And a random stranger had walked past, heard the conversation, and loudly explained, "Oh, no, sweetie, you can't do that. Pageant girls aren't disabled." So I signed up. (laughs) Kind of forgot to ask my parents if I could, because I was so angry at the time. I just needed to do it and it was two weeks before the pageant. So, I had no time to prepare and no idea of what I was doing. I bought my dresses three days before it. I didn't know what a pageant dress was, didn't know what an interview was. I honestly didn't know what to expect. Walked in with my dog and our goal was
to have him backstage so I didn't draw attention to him. So he was going to wait backstage for me. And when I hopped off, he would alert, he would check on me, and I'd get back on stage. However, that was not the case. During rehearsal, he got out of his leash and ran to go check on me, on stage, in front of everyone. So we decided, "You know what? He has to be on stage with me. We'll make it work," Which we did, and he loved it. He thought it was a blast. He was really good, he stayed out of the way. He did his job. He did alert on stage once, but I don't think anyone noticed. His walk was impeccable. It was better than mine. (laughs) We were supported really well.

**Karman Hotchkiss:**
What happened after that?

**Alison Appleby:**
So I won and that was a Sunday night. And Monday morning at 7:00 AM, I had news anchors calling me. That week was insane. I was all over the press. Had to shut off my phone at one point, because it was so bad my phone was breaking from the notifications. But it was amazing, because that meant I could share my story, I could raise awareness, and I can educate about service dogs. There's really not much known about them and, unfortunately, there's not much education on what they do, how they help, what to do around them. So I made it my goal that day to do as much as I can to make the world know what a service dog is. I have gone to countless events. I've spoken for countless organizations. I have explained to a million and three people and I wouldn't have it any other way. It's been amazing.

**Karman Hotchkiss:**
Brady, became a bigger celebrity maybe there than you ever anticipated for him.

**Alison Appleby:**
Oh, yeah. I did not expect it to take off. I didn't realize that it would be that big of a deal, and my pageant director didn't either. I remember the day it got so big on the news that I was sitting in a restaurant and I saw my face on the TV in front of me. I texted the director and was like, "Is this normal? This is insane." She's like, "I've never experienced this in my life. So that's kind of when I realized that Brady was more than I ever would've imagined. (laughs)

**Karman Hotchkiss:**
Last thing for our listeners, what do you wish that people knew or understood better about service animals?

**Alison Appleby:**
That they're not as easy as the public makes it seem. There are insane amounts of work. I have put hundreds of hours into training Brady and I have to work on him every day. It's like raising a child. If I'm tired after I've had a seizure, it doesn't matter. Brady still has to go outside to go potty. If I've had a long day at school and I need to study, well, I have to take a break... Brady needs attention. He's not just a pet and he's not easy. You can't just put him in a kennel for the night and go out and don't worry about it. He's like a kid and kids are a lot of work just like him.
Karman Hotchkiss:
Well, thank you so much for being here today, Alison, for sharing your story and for sharing Brady with us. He’s clearly an amazing partner for you. And we wish you the best in all of your next adventures together.

Alison Appleby:
Thank you so much.

Alison Appleby:
Brady boo! (Whistles)

Karman Hotchkiss (VO): Thanks for joining us for the very first episode of Daily Paws Presents: Warm Fuzzies. Be sure to follow us on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or wherever you listen. And we’d love your feedback. If you could rate this podcast and leave us a review, we’d really appreciate it. You can also find us online at dailypaws.com/WarmFuzziesPodcast. We hope you’ll join us again next Thursday, for a touching tale about a rescue pit bull named Hansel who has a nose for crime—which he uses to solve cases of arson.