

## Irish Wolfhounds: Gentle Giants

**[Lisa]** Dia Dhuit (Hello)! This is Podcrawl Podchroal, the podcast from the McClelland Library. I am your host Lisa, the Librarian. Today's guest is Bill Nothnagel, one of the board directors and founding members of the Desert Irish Wolfhound Association. That means that this episode is all about Irish Wolfhounds! I am a dog lover, so this is a real treat for me, and I hope it is for you too, listeners!

Thank you so much for joining us today, Bill and Benny. First thing I think we need to chat about is the size. How tall is Benny? And how much does he weigh? I have a dachshund at home where I have to bend so far down to pet him—this is a nice change!

**[Bill]** Benny is 36 inches high at the shoulder! I took Benny to Petsmart this afternoon, and he weighs 150 pounds! As noted, the breed standard in males should be at least 32 inches tall at the shoulder and at least 120 pounds; and females should be at least 30 inches and 105 pounds. The minimum height and weights apply only to adult hounds over 18 months of age because when they're two, they're usually about full grown.

**[Lisa]** Because of their size, are there any health complications?

**[Bill]** Well, many will tell you that the life expectancy is six to eight years. But, I'll tell you in my experience I had two that lived to be just short of ten years old and one that passed away early at like two and a half years old. But I think she had heart problems, which I account to breeding. Health concerns would include heart issues like cardiomyopathy, hip and elbow dysplasia, bloat which is a gastric torsion when their stomachs get twisted up. Another thing is pneumonia, cancer and a liver shunt which is usually in puppies where their liver doesn't develop correctly. Hygromas which is, actually two of my Wolfhounds got these from tile floors at home. So getting up and down with a large dog like that, it's hard on their elbows sometimes, and they'll get these sacks of fluid on their elbow, and it looks horrible. The best advice is, everybody told me, just leave it alone, they go away and they do.

**[Lisa]** Is it painful for them?

**[Bill]** No, it's just, you know, it feels like a sack of fluid on their elbow. On their front elbows due to getting up and down on the hard floor. And that's just to protect the elbow there. Now the Irish Wolfhound Club of America has a longevity recognition program that you can apply to have your wolfhound listed on if they have attained the age of eight years old or older. Another good thing of advice, you know, as far as health is to find a veterinarian who has specific experience with wolfhounds that might be beneficial to you.

**[Lisa]** How old is Benny?

**[Bill]** He will be three on May the 4th.

[Lisa] Okay, so he's still young.

[Bill] Oh yeah.

[Lisa] What kind of family would be a good fit for this breed?

[Bill] Any family that can tolerate a large dog. But if you have little kids, I'll tell you, that tail is just the right height to whack them upside the head. And they could. Yeah, little kids could fall, potentially get hurt, just playing around, but they're very good with children.

[Lisa] Is there another breed that's similar to this one?

[Bill] The Scottish Deerhound is very much alike, a little smaller, and I've only seen some in person once, someone brought them to the, they had like three of them, they brought to the Scottish Games. And yeah, up close, you can tell the difference. They're a little, don't weigh as much, more agile, but another breed of the hound group for hunting.

[Lisa] What is Benny's personality like? Any stories you would like to share with listeners?

[Bill] Well Benny is my fourth Wolfhound and he's got the best personality. He's like the perfect gentleman. He's good with people as well as other dogs who are strange to him. He's very nonchalant.

Whereas my, I could tell you this about the time I, uh, first Wolfhound Wolfgang was attacked by another dog and how he just turned into a raging beast and luckily I had him on the leash. The other dog was off-leash running around. It was a big, black lab, but oh my gosh, I didn't know he had it in him.

So the saying about Irish Wolfhounds is indeed true: Gentle when stroked, but fierce when provoked. And I'll tell you, that was the only time I saw Wolfgang like that. The other 99.9% he was always chill. But he was a little standoffish when another dog would, you know, run up in his face-he wouldn't be sure about that.

[Lisa] What can you tell us about the history of Irish Wolfhounds?

[Bill] Well, they're an ancient breed. They've been seen in ancient wood carvings as far as 273 B.C. The Irish Wolfhound has been a part of Irish culture for a long time. Often used in ancient battles, and it was said that Julius Caesar and all of Rome viewed them with wonder. In addition to fighting and hunting, the wolfhounds used to guard homes and livestock. They were trained to pull soldiers off their horses and chariots. They are of the hound group and were used to hunt big game like wild boar, deer, elk, and of course wolves.

Apparently, wolves were a big problem back in Ireland back in the day. I should mention here how their numbers were dwindling back in the 1800s, but this breed was brought back by Captain George Augustus Graham. He began his program in 1862 and saved the breed.

[Lisa] Are there any ancient stories involving Irish Wolfhounds?

[Bill] Well, I like the one about Gelert. There's even a monument in the village of Beddgelert dedicated to him. The legend has it, and it's the legend associated with the village of Beddgelert-the village name means Gelert's Grave, and it's in Northwest Wales. In the legend, Llewelyn the Great returns from hunting to find his baby missing, the cradle overturned and Gelert with a blood smeared mouth. Believing his dog had devoured the child, Llewelyn draws his sword and kills Gelert. After the dog's dying yelp, Llewelyn hears the cries of the baby unharmed under the cradle. Along with a dead wolf, which he attacked, which the wolf had attacked the child and been killed by Gelert. Llewelyn is so overcome with remorse and buries the hound with a great ceremony. Then leading to the town name, but can still hear his dying yelp. After that day, Llewelyn never smiles again. So, I am thinking that this is actually a true story since there is a monument to Gelert in the village of Beddgelert.

[Lisa] What makes this breed so special? What do you think makes this breed so special?

[Bill] Hey, they are Irish, right?! They're loyal. They're courageous, and they're just noble, you know? Right, Benny?

[Lisa] Benny has been on the floor, sleeping, and as soon as Bill mentioned that they're loyal, he stood up right next to Bill.

How did you become involved with Irish Wolfhounds, and the founder of the Desert Irish Wolfhound Association?

[Bill] Well, I love a lot of dog breeds, but you can't have them all, so you gotta pick one. I thought a breed that coincided with my own ancestry would be a good match. The Irish Wolfhound is one I always liked, but you really should have a big yard before you own one.

So, as soon as we moved into a one acre lot, in Mesa back in 1998, I started looking around and uh, when I got my first wolfhound, I named him Wolfgang, and I didn't know anyone else that had one. Then I was at PetSmart and I was so excited to see a lady with her Irish wolfhound. I had to talk to her.

Her name was Sally Kent. I asked if there was a Wolfhound Club, but she said no, just a loosely knit group of us that know each other. Sometimes we get together at my house in Gilbert for a barbecue and doggy playdate. So, uh, not long after that, we proposed to become an official club, if you will. I should mention here that Audrey Rajak was one of the original, um, members. She was like the resident expert, and she passed away in 2019. And Sally Kent moved to Montana. And so that's, that's how it all started.

[Lisa] At what events does the association educate people about this dog?

[Bill] Oh, we go to the Scottish Games, the Phoenix Scottish Games. Prescott and Flagstaff and Tucson. Um, we were at the Irish Fair in Tucson, which was right after the, uh, St. Patrick's

day parade. Um, you know, we attended the parade and have been attending the parade for, for years in Phoenix. And they also, um, do the parade in Sedona and the St. Patrick's day in Tucson. Um, there's, there's one, uh, event coming up that I'm kind of excited about. I'll probably go. It's called the Dog Days of Tombstone.

And, uh, it will be highlighting the careers of working dogs, including service dogs, uh, Working with law enforcement and, uh, military canines. I may also bring my Belgian Tervuren, which is like the long haired version of the Belgian Malinois. Yeah, I'm looking forward to that event.

**[Lisa]** Yeah, that sounds like a lot of fun. I've never heard of that one, that event before.

**[Bill]** I think it might be fairly new. Some members have therapy dogs that they take to the hospital and the airport and different events for children.

**[Lisa]** Are there questions people ask you when you are at events?

**[Bill]** Oh yeah, some are funny and some are, some are serious. Like, like a lot of times I get, do they shed a lot? And my answer is always compared to what? Because we used to have a wolfdog, 32 percent wolf. We had her DNA tested and the rest was Husky, Malamute, Siberian, and Samoyed. And she shed like a snowstorm, especially in the springtime. So, um, Irish Wolfhounds, not so much, but they do. They have a dual coat, like a hair, uh, a wiry outer coat and a softer undercoat. And they do shed year round, but they don't, you know, what they say, blow coat, as do longer coated breeds. Um, weekly or bi weekly brushing and combing will keep the coat in good shape.

**[Lisa]** Is there anything else you would like to mention about the Desert Irish Wolfhound Association?

**[Bill]** Well, like I said, that was like maybe in 2020 when we decided to become an official club or organization and we've come a long way. I remember back in the day we didn't have a dime and we would have like yard sales to help raise money for the group. And there was a time when interest in the group was waning, and there was even talk about dissolving, um, the group, but I and a few others wouldn't let that happen.

The Irish Wolfhound is too amazing of a breed to not have an association representing them. And, uh, now look at us. We have resources and many fine members. Um, yeah, we have business cards, t shirts, signs, banners, matching our pop up canopies when we go to different events and, uh, it's, it's real professional now, um, we have a new logo and we have a website that you can check out at [www.desertirishwolfhounds.org](http://www.desertirishwolfhounds.org). Yeah, that's uh, the Desert Irish Wolfhound Association has grown into the club I always, I always dreamed it would be.

**[Lisa]** Was there anything else that you'd like to tell us about the Irish Wolfhound?

**[Bill]** I don't know. Benny seems to have fallen asleep here.

[Lisa] Thank you for joining us today, Bill and Benny! It has been such a pleasure to learn more about this gentle giant! Thank you so much for listening, we hope to see you at McClelland Library! Slan! (Bye!)

## Resources

Beddgelert: The Legend of Gelert

<https://www.beddgelerttourism.com/Gelert/>

Desert Irish Wolfhound Association

[www.desertirishwolfhounds.org](http://www.desertirishwolfhounds.org)

Irish Wolfhound Club of America

<https://www.iwclubofamerica.org/health-overview-krowzack>

The Irish in Cincinnati

<https://libapps.libraries.uc.edu/exhibits/irish-cincinnati/2017/02/22/the-big-dogs-of-ireland/>

The Tombstone News

<https://thetombstonenews.com/first-annual-dog-days-of-tombstone-coming-in-may-p7469-1.htm>