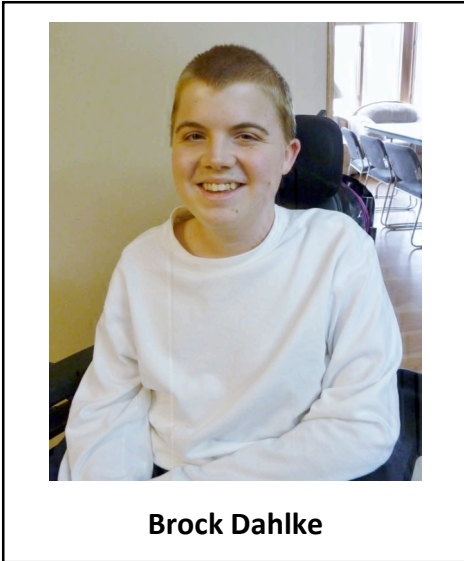


Good Boy!

By Anne Ingvoldstad



Brock Dahlke

Brock Dahlke of Shakopee, Minn. enjoys doing the things most other twenty-year-olds do: hanging out with friends and playing video games. But he has an unfair advantage – the ability to double team his opponents. The name of his secret weapon is Quincy, a 2½-year-old Mobility Assist Dog who has been trained to retrieve objects for Brock. When Brock’s friends come over to play, Quincy will sometimes take their game controller and deliver it to Brock. Good Boy!

Brock has Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy, and gets around with the help of a power wheelchair. In addition to retrieving items and opening doors for Brock, Quincy was specially trained to nudge Brock’s arm back into place when it falls off the wheelchair, and then push Brock’s elbow forward so his arm will stay put.

Brock had an assistance dog previous to Quincy, so he was confident in his ability to work with dogs and communicate what he wants the dog to do. Even so, he says, “I was impressed by how quickly Quincy and I worked together as a team, and how well Quincy learned the specialized commands unique to my situation.”

Bev DeChon, the field-trainer that worked with Quincy and Brock, says, “The team bonded with each other almost immediately, and were very easy to work with. Quincy has a real drive to see that Brock gets whatever he needs.” Apparently even helping outfox the competition.



Brock Dahlke and Quincy



Deb Swenson and Cyrus

Enjoying Life Again

by Laurie Carlson

Six years ago, Debra Swenson of Winona, Minn., ruptured a disk in her lower back. Little did she know how it would affect her life. The injury resulted in cauda equina syndrome and a spinal cord injury. Deb has very little feeling in her legs and feet, and she experiences spasms in

her back and both legs. As a result, Deb says it's difficult for her to know where she's putting her feet as she walks; that, in turn, causes her to stumble and fall. She now uses a brace, canes, a walker or a motorized wheelchair to help her balance.

Before her injury, Deb says, she walked three to five miles a day, enjoyed being outside, and visited museums and art galleries. After the injury, her days were spent reading, watching TV and sitting at her computer. "I was lonely all the time," she says. "I fell four to five times a month and sometimes had to crawl to furniture to get myself back up. I avoided my downstairs because I couldn't get up the stairs on my own. I felt like a prisoner in my own home."

Her daughter Kelly adopted a puppy and learned that its littermate had been donated to an organization training dogs for the blind. After some research, Kelly learned about the work of dogs trained for people who have mobility issues, and she encouraged Deb to look into getting a Mobility Assist Dog. Deb says, "The stories were so uplifting and full of encouragement! I knew that, with the support of my doctors, therapist and family, I could do this. I made the decision to apply with Can Do Canines."

After applying and completing a home interview, Deb was accepted into the program and awaited her match. It was not long in coming. Soon she met her dog, Cyrus, a handsome 2-year-old Smooth Coat Collie.

Training began right away, and Deb was delighted with her teammate. “For me, the biggest challenge in the beginning was overcoming my fear of falling,” she says. “I wanted to keep my hand on Cyrus's back or the handle on his harness with every step I took. He kept looking at me as if to say, ‘I am here for you, quit worrying so much.’ His can-do attitude made me loosen up and I now enjoy our walks.” Deb says she is pleased with Cyrus’ willingness to work. “He is always there and has learned new tasks on his own to help me out,” she explains. Cyrus pulls the laundry basket up the stairs and sometimes even gives the house cat a ride!

Cyrus also helps Deb by picking up dropped items, getting an emergency phone and going to another person in the home for help if Deb asks. He also helps her balance while walking and climbing the stairs.

Now that Deb and Cyrus have finished training, she says, “Whenever I get up and move, he is right there next to me. I can be more mobile and attempt things that have scared me since my injury. I was a shut-in, afraid of falling when I walked outside. With Cyrus I have been going out for walks every day, and I am feeling more secure.” She adds that doing daily tasks is no longer daunting. “I’m getting out of the house and going to more than just doctor appointments and therapy,” she explains. “I am enjoying my life again.”

Deb says she appreciates the puppy raisers, trainers and donors who help support Can Do Canines’ work – “It’s hard to put into words the admiration I feel for these people in giving me and others such a valuable gift,” she says. “You’ve opened my world in ways you cannot imagine and given me the gift of a friend. I can never thank you enough. Cyrus is the center of attention whenever we go out, and everyone comments on what a beautiful dog he is. Thank you so very much for your outstanding gifts to Can Do Canines and especially to me.”

A Reason to Get Up In The Morning

by Allison Schildknecht

Kent Plumley grew up with dogs and raised a hunting dog from puppyhood, but none were quite like his Mobility

Assist Dog, Kashi. Kashi's tail wags nonstop as she places a piece of paper, a chew toy, and a set of keys in Kent's lap. "What else can we clean up? Get the cane, Kashi!" Kent says. The 2 ½-year-old black Labrador carefully maneuvers a long cane over to Kent's wheelchair.

Kent lives with his wife, Barbara, in Ostego, Minn. His family includes three grown children and 12 grandchildren. A snowmobile accident years ago left him with a partially fused spinal column and limited mobility. Because of degenerative arthritis, he uses a wheelchair and a cane. Helping around the house and even putting on socks and shoes is now a challenge.

Kent applied for an assistance dog with another organization, but was frustrated by the long wait and was eventually dropped from the waiting list altogether. Knowing he needed a Mobility Assist Dog, he applied with Can Do Canines and was matched with Kashi, a compact black Labrador Retriever with a great work ethic. Kashi was raised by Lions Darell and Julie Carlblom, and her assistance dog skills were given an additional polish in the Can Do Canines prison program at Faribault Correctional Facility.

"You hit the nail on the head with her," Kent says of Kashi. Watching the dog tug open the front door with vigor, Kent tells her, "You don't mess around." In addition to opening and closing doors and retrieving dropped items, Kashi can get Barb, who is hard of hearing, from another room if Kent needs help, or retrieve a



Kent Plumley and Mobility Assist Dog Kashi

phone if Barb, who works seven days a week as a personal care attendant, isn't home. Kashi can even gently pull off a sock; "Watch those toes, now," Kent says.



Barb says Kashi brings the couple peace of mind. "It helps not having to worry about him tipping over while trying to pick something up from the floor," she explains. "I've seen him almost tip the wheelchair trying to pick up the paper. Now Kashi gets his paper. I know I won't be getting a call at work saying, 'Hon, I'm on the floor.'"

Kent and Barb agree that one of Kashi's most essential duties is simply being a friend. "She's a real companion." Kent says. "She's so loyal; she just wants to be by me all the time. Wherever I go in the house, she *has* to be right on my foot." Kashi loves her work, Kent says. "She can't do enough, and she never does anything partway. She's still young enough to be funny, but she puts her all into everything I ask her to do. We get a real kick out of her attitude."

When Kent is home during the day, he and Kashi keep their training sharp with exercises, walks, or playing with a ball. "She does all kinds of crazy stuff," Kent says. "She'll balance a ball on your knee and let it roll off, carefully balance it up there again, let it roll off, and the fifth time she'll look at you like, 'Don't you know you're supposed to throw that?'" In their short time together, Kent says he's been amazed at how they've grown as a team. "It's incredible, what dogs like this can learn and what they can do," he adds. "Just today, she's done things that confound me."

When asked what advice he'd give to people who are thinking of getting an assistance dog, Kent doesn't hesitate. "Make your mind up and do it right away. I

know there are a lot of people like me out there who need dogs," he says.
"Before, there wasn't really a reason to get up in the morning. She's changed that."