

Here Finally... is our story. Moose our Australian Labradoodle is my Husbands Medical Alert Service dog!

In about 2012 we noticed some slight cognitive changes in my husband. He had experienced several years of joint issues involving his knees, hips, back and shoulders all requiring surgical intervention. We thought he was aging quickly from a hard physical life. But we never saw or worried about his neurological health. He's always been a brilliant, patient, problem solver, a hard worker and the best husband and father on the planet!

The neurological changes in 2012 just seemed like an additional health issue. We knew most of his injuries were the results of a long history of playing aggressive football as an offensive lineman from the time he was in JR HS (he was 6 feet tall and 200 lbs by the time he was 12 yo). He was actually recruited to a high profile HS football program followed by a brief season in a renowned Southern California University where he suffered a career ending knee injury. He loved football, it was everything and he paid a huge price in countless injuries.

We knew during his football adventure he had experienced 5 known concussions all resulting in varying lengths of complete loss of consciousness. These don't even begin to number the countless "dazed" events. Since he played in the late 70s concussion protocols were weak or nonexistent and players immediately returned to the game even if they could not perform simple cognitive tests. He remembers many times looking to his teammates to clarify a play after a hard hit that left him "dazed".

Fast forward 30 years and we were both very worried about these cognitive changes. It was so unexpected, he was only 50 years old, it was so difficult. Early on we recognized stress was often a trigger for visible changes in his normally meek manner. He had a hard time managing multiple projects, completing tasks and he easily became frustrated. We found him often confused, sometimes unresponsive and once he drove to a nearby neighborhood, parked his car and began to weed a strangers garden. The police were called who notified me. His speech was slurred, he could not explain why he was there. The police assumed he had Alzheimer's and suggested a watch with a GPS to track him. We were in shock.

This elevated our concern and our commitment to find answers. Over SIX years of neurologists, cardiologists, neurosurgeons, one false diagnosis after another. Multiple hospitalizations and ER trips. "Diagnosis" with "analgesic" migraines, idiopathic seizures, early onset dementia.... Tests after tests....There were multiple CAT scans, EEGs lasting days, sleep studies, inpatient monitoring, testing our home and environment for "exposure sensitivity", heavy metal testing, trans-esophageal echos ... trials with multiple migraine medicines and seizure medications. No one seemed to have an answer. I hated the repeat testing, constant questions and again and again, no answers. EIGHT neurologist in SIX years Nothing.

He became isolated. I traveled for work and had to arrange family and friends to stay

with him. He was unpredictable, seemed “foggy” and of course became depressed and despondent. Nothing worked. Not therapy, western medicine, eastern medicine, handfuls of pharmaceuticals or diet changes and supplements. We found he began to self medicate with OTC products like pain relievers and OTC sleeping medication. Anything to help him deny his reality. He had given up. I was beyond sad, frustrated and hopeless..... He was just 56.

Finally a neurologist told us he suspected my husband had CTE (chronic traumatic encephalopathy) from years of repeated football related head injuries. No treatment, but the disease was expected to progress, frustration would turn to depression or anger, but no definitive diagnosis without autopsy... obviously that was not a choice!

Then a miracle happened. I was returning to Denver from LA on a plane sitting next to Liz Ferris. She had two service dogs with her and the gate agent was giving her a hard time about transporting two dogs. I offered my leg space (although I ended up holding the beautiful dog the whole trip). Liz shared with me her conviction to the sensitivity of these remarkable dogs, sharing many stories of success. I began to reluctantly share with her my husband’s journey and the most recent diagnosis. She was convinced a service dog could help him.

I took her information and presented the idea to my husband. He had one significant pet as a boy and swore he would never become that attached to a dog again. But things continued to progress slowly. I learned to hear the change in the cadence of his voice and knew when I needed to reach out during work trips for help from family and friends. I was to MY end and we discussed in home care.... Only then did he agree to speak to Liz and learn more.

We heard amazing stories from Liz about a potential “chemical” release from a person prior to an event (seizure, migraine, stress, etc). After much discussion and debate, we decided there was room in our hearts to love a dog and perhaps, just maybe, the dog could help us.

I am a medical professional. I was extremely skeptical. My husband dreaded the idea of taking a dog everywhere. But we worked with Liz and within a year we were the parents to Moose. An amazing Australia Labradoodle. Liz had personally selected Moose with my husband in mind. He was beautiful! We fell in love instantly.

Then a fascinating thing happened. We noticed the longer we had him the more we recognized a “pattern”. Moose never would leave my husband even while working outside or in his shop. Moose would walk the yard but routinely “checked” on my husband. We noticed Moose would on occasion go and sit next to my husband. With time we discovered if my husband, once “alerted”, would walk away from the project he was involved in, rest, or change his mental focus, the incidence of cognitive impairment lessened!

We started paying attention! My husband watched for the cues from Moose and

improved his reaction to the alert. He acted on the alerts, stopped doing mathematics or projects and picked up a book or turned on the TV. He rested more often and let go of some of his stress, relying more and more on the "signals" from Moose.

We have had Moose eight years now. Our lives are completely different. We don't rely on family and friends to monitor my husband. I can travel for work without fear or panic. My husband's independence is restored. Although we still see occasional signs of some cognitive impairment we no longer find him confused, wandering , or unresponsive. We can live without fear!

Moose has changed both of our lives. I will be forever grateful for that chance encounter with Liz. It had been a hard fought journey but now a happy one. And yes... I even let Moose sleep in bed with us. He is an answer to prayer and a medical miracle!

Thank you Liz. Miracles do happen!

Jan and Wade
Denver, CO