

# **Remarkable Maggie, my Life as a Service Dog!**

by  
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**Chapter 1   INTRO**

**My given name is officially Magpie, but it was decided that calling me Maggie would be acceptable. Shortly after my birth, July 6, 2008, I was selected from my litter of puppies to attend NEADS, located in Princeton, Ma, for training as a possible service dog. They noticed my small size and gentle personality and thought I would have a good chance of succeeding. This story shares my journey from puppy stages, training and eventually settling in with my life with my new owner that I was matched and have bonded with. I look forward to spending the rest of my life with her and helping her in any way I am able to.**

## **Chapter II                      Moving to NEADS**

**Upon my selection to the NEADS ( Dogs for Deaf and Disabled Americans) program, I was taken to my new home in Princeton, MA. I stayed there with my brother and the other puppies until the age of four months. I actually got to play in the backyard which even included a slide to go down! Trainers kept using the same commands so I became very familiar with them at an early age.**

## **Chapter III                      Off to Life in the Prison!**

**At four months, they matched me with two Gardiner prisoners that worked with training me Monday through Friday. These men were trained continually by the NEADS staff. They loved having me to care for since it provided them with special privileges such as more time outside, a special place to walk me and it gave them a purpose with their time they were serving. They felt wonderful that they were helping other people by training me and other dogs! Their time spent in prison took on new meaning.**

## **Chapter IV                      Weekends With My Volunteer Foster Mom**

**I don't know how I got so lucky, but I was placed with the nicest woman on the weekends that lived in Worcester, MA. She took me everywhere to prepare me for a life as a service dog. I went to the ocean, on busses, trains, subways and she even let me play in a backyard pool. I adored her and it was very hard to say goodbye to her. I am excited to hear that she will continue to be a foster mom for other puppies. She did such a great job with me – I am sure other puppies will fall in love with her like I have!**

**This is me with my brother Houdini, also returning to NEADS for the final training before we are matched with our soul mates!**

### **Chapter V Meeting and Bonding with My Match**

**Around the age of 18 months, I was returned to NEADS for my final training and match with an owner. I was confused for life seemed turned upside down. I went from living in the prison and my foster home on the weekends to being back in a kennel and intense training. It was a bit stressful.**

**I met my match, Ellen, in November. She seemed to be happy to meet me and was allowed to spend a lot of time with me, unlike the many trainers I had met, so something was different. We spent a lot of time trying to catch up to the commands I knew. It seemed to be overwhelming for her at first to learn and remember so much! She was in a wheelchair and seemed to have limited mobility. It was clear she needed help.**

**By the second day, she was instructed to take me back to the house she was living in with three others receiving a service dog like me. From this point on, we were to remain together at all times. For the first time in my life, I was invited up on a bed. Ellen and I snuggled together, sighed and both fell asleep until early in the morning. Something was very comforting about this moment and I know we started to bond! I could sense that my match needed me. She was mostly using a wheelchair, thin, and wore a huge leg brace. I knew that I wanted to please her for I had learned how to help others and it makes me proud when I do!**

**This is Ellen and me the first time we snuggled on the bed at NEADS. We both sighed and fell asleep. I had never slept with a person on their bed before – it was a great feeling!**

**We spent each day training together. I am trained to understand so many commands, that it was fun showing Ellen what I could do to help her. For instance, I can open doors, turn on lights, get the phone, open handicap doors, retrieve medication or food from the refrigerator, and bark on command. Ellen had to learn how to work with me and how to use these commands to help with her daily life.**

**Ellen couldn't believe I was able to put the light switch on and off for her. Ellen had a tough time learning to manipulate the wheelchair while I opened the door for her. This was one of our most difficult tasks to train together with.**

**Erin, one of trainers, is trying to distract me, but I knew I had to wait for my commands!**

**We practiced how to get around in the city with each other.**

**We even went to a restaurant to practice how to enter and exit along with where I should be located while there. Yes, I get put under the table, but I really don't mind. It's a time of peace and quiet for me while Ellen visits**

**I also had to practice with Ellen how to get on and off the handicap van, along with how I am to lie in a down position while we travel.**

**At the end of our two week training, my classmates and I had to go through testing to be sure we could stay together as partners.**

**Karin Boyce with Lucky; Wendy Foster with Allie, Eddie Vidro with my brother Houdini and Ellen with me, Maggie. We not only passed, we also became very close friends.**

## **Chapter VI Meeting my new housemates**

**After the first week of our training, we were allowed home for an overnight visit to our future homes. It's amazing, but when I had my first home visit with my match, Ellen, I realized that I would be allowed to be "a dog" at home too, along with helping Ellen. First, I met Stu, Ellen's husband. I could tell he and I would have a lot of fun together. Then, I was introduced to the family rescue dog, Bear, a handsome Rhodesian ridgeback mix. I also was delighted to discover I would soon live also with their three cats. We all hit it right off and had fun playing. My future life was also going to include a small farm to live at with a huge organic garden and lots of places to run and play.**

**The strangest thing they introduced me to was the barn that housed over 70 chickens. They were allowed to come out and free range.**

**Me meeting my new housemate, Bear.**

**This is me with Ellen meeting the chickens.**

**It took no time at all to be considered part of this family. This is me and Bear snuggling with Ellen's youngest son, Chris.**

## **Chapter VII MY DAILY ROUTINE**

**My new owner has many different needs that seem to change as quickly as the weather. Since she is coping with Ehlers Danlos, we never know when she may partially dislocate her joints ( called sublux) and return to the wheelchair or have to get to an appointment to correct the joint position. She had already endured 17 surgeries when we met, with more on the horizon.**

**Every morning and evening, I have been taught to open the refrigerator, get her medicine pack, hand it to her, and then close the door. My peanut butter treat after makes me so excited to do this for her that I sit by the refrigerator to remind her I am ready for the command.**

**I am also now trained to act as a bench for her when she gets up off the toilet. Their bathroom is so small and is not handicap accessible, so I can really keep her safe.**

**I also now know how to turn on and off her air mattress on her hospital bed. She use to forget to turn it on after taking her leg brace off and then have to put it on all over again to get to the end of the bed to put the switch on. She is so thrilled that I understand the command to put the button on and off.**

**When Ellen sleeps, she now has a BI-PAP St machine on. This machine forces her to breath if her body slows down too much. When I had only been home for six days with Ellen, I realized she wasn't breathing on Thanksgiving morning. I licked her face and neck over and over after jumping onto the bed**

**next to her. She eventually woke up, but clearly didn't feel very well. Since that incident, I was invited to sleep permanently next to her to keep her safe. I sure have an important job to do!**

**I go with her and her husband Stu, who has to drive us, almost daily to physical therapy. Ellen has both PT on her legs and also cranial therapy. Everyone is so nice to me there and I love the attention they give me. They are like extended family to us all. On some of those days, we also attend doctor appointments.**

**I go with Ellen to Healy Physical Therapy two times a week. I love going there. I get to open the door for her and then get treated like a queen. Below is a picture of Ellen's physical therapist Michael Healy and Nelia, his office assistant. They both spoil me!**

**Many days a week, we go to the pool so they can work out. I lay by the Hoyer lift that gets Ellen in and out of the water. I even go into the handicap shower with her and after she is showered and dressed, I have my turn of being combed and wiped down. I love that attention and it keeps me presentable to be in public.**

**This is where I wait in a "DOWN, STAY" position while Ellen works out. Sometimes, people come over and pet me. However, without my command "SAY HELLO" from Ellen, I just keep resting. Once she gives me the command, then I am allowed to respond to them. While Ellen showers, I just take another nap and wait for my turn to be groomed.**

**Now, it's my turn! With the command "JUMP", I get up on the bench for my grooming**

**I have been trained to deliver the pool cards behind the counter and then get them back when we are done. Ellen says, as she holds out the cards to me, “HOLD” and then “DELIVER”. I enjoy helping Ellen and love the praise people give me when I do this for her!**

**This is a picture of me returning my bowl to Ellen after eating. I came up with this idea on my own after noticing my brother doing it back at NEADS. As a legal service dog, I am allowed in all places except a personal home or military base, where I must get permission first. I am able to be with them to go food shopping, to Ellen’s hair appointments, and other adventures. Some of my experiences have been just amazing....**

### **VII SPECIAL ADVENTURES**

**This is a picture taken at the Scituate Reservoir where Bear and I played for the first time in the water!**

#### **TRIP TO DC:**

**Shortly after joining Ellen and her family, I took a train ride with them and visited DC for an Arthritis Summit. I carried my food for four days in my red backpack, along with a ball and my favorite chew toy. We lived in a fancy hotel for four nights, attended meetings, and visited the capital. We met with Senator Reed, Senator Whitehouse and Congressman Langevin. I was welcomed into each of their offices and even received a treat from the guards when first screening us.**

**Senator Whitehouse, Ellen and me during our visit in DC for the Arthritis Summit.**

#### **Trip to WI for surgery:**

**One week later, we went on a plane. I had never flown before. We went all the way from Rhode Island to Wisconsin. Ellen was to have her 18<sup>th</sup> surgery. The neat thing is that I was welcomed into the hospital. We lived together there for 15 days. I slept on her hospital bed, went to rehab in the hospital with her daily, and when she wasn’t well enough to take me out, many people helped out. I was able to adjust easily. It doesn’t seem to matter where they take me for I know what proper behavior should be and I am able to be flexible. We all still miss the wonderful people we met there.**

**This is me squished at Ellen's feet on the plane.**

**People were very kind to us and allowed me to stay with Ellen in the holding area until the last minute before the surgery started. I was pretty upset to be separated from her, but her husband Stu brought me up to her room after. I remained with her living in the hospital for fifteen days.**

**It was exciting to be reunited with Ellen in her room.**

**Ellen's goal was to walk out of the hospital after three years living in a wheelchair. She did it!**

**Ellen and Stu do a lot of testifying and advocacy work. This was taken after a meeting at the RI State House. My new family: Tim and Shaina with son Landon, Christopher, Ellen and Stu, Benjamin, Cathleen, Ryan with son Henry, Benjamin, Cathleen, Ryan and son Henry**

**BEST FRIENDS.....**