In “You Needed Me”, PAWS® Assistance Dog ARCHER shares his journey from birth to being placed with his partner, Jill.

With PAWS® Service Dog SAWYER on her team, she doesn’t have to worry.
YOU LIBERATE ME

“PEOPLE AREN’T LOOKING AT ME AND SAYING, ‘AWW.’ INSTEAD THEY ARE LOOKING AT SAWYER AND SAYING, ‘WOW.’ HE MAKES MY DISABILITY INVISIBLE.”  

At 27 years old, Linda’s life was full. She had two young children, a full-time job and was always on the go. She was quick to laugh and hopeful for what the future had to bring. One evening after cleaning the house, she felt a burning sensation on the bottom of her feet. When the sensation didn’t go away, Linda made an appointment with her doctor who couldn’t find a cause. The next morning she awoke to feelings of numbness from her chest down and in that moment she knew something was seriously wrong.

Her diagnosis? Multiple Sclerosis (MS).

According to Ron, his wife has always been a “strong-willed and determined redhead,” so she wasn’t going to let MS slow her down. But as hard as she tried to outrun it, more symptoms caught up with her. She started experiencing sharp eye pain, fatigue, and walking became increasingly challenging. Even as her strength waned, Linda stayed active swimming 5-6 days a week. When she was in the pool, she could walk again without difficulty, giving her a feeling of freedom that was becoming harder to experience. As her disease progressed, she went from a cane to crutches to a wheelchair. She lost much of her upper body strength, making things like opening the refrigerator door nearly impossible.

The idea of applying for a Service Dog was first planted while she and Ron were attending church with a PAWS Foster Puppy Raiser. Initially, Linda was hesitant to apply for a Service Dog. She believed there were other people with disabilities who needed the help more than she did. But as Linda’s symptoms worsened and Ron became increasingly uncomfortable leaving her alone, they made the decision to complete the application for a PAWS Service Dog.

In 2013, Linda received a life-changing phone call from PAWS. They wanted her to meet her potential Service Dog. A beautiful Golden Retriever named SAWYER was brought out to a small group of people including Linda and Ron. SAWYER walked around, greeting each person and then he walked over to Linda and placed his head in her lap. “It was love at first sight,” Linda shared. “She was smitten,” said Ron. In that moment, any hesitation Linda had about getting a PAWS Service Dog vanished.

As Linda’s teammate, SAWYER takes his job very seriously and doesn’t let her down. He opens doors and picks things up when she needs it. Most importantly, he doesn’t give up. During a trip to the mall, Linda dropped a credit card on the slippery tile floor. SAWYER struggled to pick it up until he realized that he could push the credit card to the grout and gain enough traction to pick it up. Every time SAWYER completes a task, tail wagging, he looks to Linda as she gives him praise.

When they go out in public, SAWYER provides Linda with a new found confidence. She said, “People aren’t looking at me and saying, ‘Aww.’ Instead they are looking at him and saying, ‘Wow.’ Children don’t point at me and say, ‘Look, she is in a wheelchair.’ The wheelchair is no longer visible. SAWYER makes my disability invisible.”

Time and time again, we see the ways a PAWS Dog’s impact goes way beyond a client. Ron worries less knowing his wife has SAWYER by her side. He said, “I don’t worry about SAWYER’s capabilities. I know that if Linda needed to get out of the house for any reason, he would get her out.” Now Ron has started volunteering because he feels confident leaving Linda alone. He said, “SAWYER has liberated Linda in many ways, but he has also liberated me.”

SAWYER has made a tremendous impact in Linda and Ron’s lives in ways they never believed possible. With SAWYER, Linda is even more determined to live a life full of hope and possibilities.

Your continued support makes teams like Linda and SAWYER possible. Thank you!
"I’ll be able to see how what I’ve done has changed someone’s life and given them an independence that they never would have had, if not for what I do.”
- Crystal, PAWS Apprentice Trainer

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here are not many careers that give people a chance to combine their desire to help others with their love of animals, but a PAWS Apprenticeship is one of those rare opportunities. And even more rare are the people who fill each apprenticeship. Each person is intelligent, creative and truly cares about the people whom they are serving. Which is exactly why PAWS developed this apprenticeship program — so we can meet the needs of even more people waiting for a PAWS Dog!

In order to help more clients, we need skilled people who have experience training Service Dogs, Hearing Dogs, Seizure Response Dogs and Service Dogs for Children with Autism. This three-year program allows apprentices to become part of the PAWS Training Team. Under guidance from our PAWS Dog Trainers, apprentices work hands-on to custom-train Assistance Dogs for clients with disabilities.

By the time their apprenticeship is complete, each apprentice trainer will have refined their skills by working with hundreds of dogs. Our apprentices also receive a Journeyperson certificate for Animal Training-Assistance Dogs. In fact, PAWS is the only Assistance Dog organization to offer an apprenticeship program that is standardized through the U.S. Department of Labor! This means that whether our apprentices become trainers at PAWS or go on to another organization, we are placing highly-skilled Assistance Dog Trainers into the field.

For each apprentice, being a part of this program is life changing. PAWS Apprentice Trainer Emily shared, “Finding out that I could help people and be around animals every day is very special for me. I get to hand over this dog — that I am extremely proud of — to this client to whom the dog is going to change their life.”

Our apprentices bring new energy to PAWS that impacts the whole team. Barb, a long-time PAWS Trainer, said this program “adds a new spark [to training]. As each apprentice works through the program, each trainer will get the opportunity to work with them, mentor them and take pride in watching them develop confidence and see them grow as trainers. It is very rewarding to see that process and be involved in it.”

We are proud to be investing in both PAWS and the Assistance Dog industry through our apprentice trainers. Because of your support, we are able to train the future leaders of our industry through the PAWS Apprenticeship Program.
**MAKING 6 TEAMS POSSIBLE**

ORDER OF THE EASTERN STAR (OES) is a worldwide organization that works together for good. They are dedicated to charity, truth and loving kindness, and in our experience OES lives this mission every day. PAWS is proud to have OES as a long-time supporter.

Since 2010, The OES Michigan Grand Chapter has been a supporter of Paws With A Cause. In five years, the chapter has raised more than $100,000 for PAWS through their grassroot fundraising efforts! They have helped sponsor six PAWS Dog Teams, the most recent one being Linda and SAWYER.

Internationally, the General Grand Chapter of the OES raised $1.2 million dollars for Service Dog groups in three years. And we’re excited to announce that the General Grand Chapter voted to make The Service Dog Project a main charity.

With partners like OES, PAWS can continue custom-training Assistance Dogs for people with disabilities. PAWS Co-Founder and CEO Mike Sapp said, “The Order of the Eastern Star and other service groups are extremely important to our success. We depend on them not only for financial support, but also to help raise awareness of PAWS and to educate people about the Assistance Dog industry. We are proud to be one of the Assistance Dog organizations that OES has partnered with over the years and we look forward to being a part of the positive impact that they are going to continue to make in the lives of people with disabilities.”

Are you a member of the Order of the Eastern Star? You can help make Assistance Dog Teams like Linda and SAWYER possible by encouraging your Grand Chapter to raise money for Paws With A Cause.

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**PAWS FACTS**

2015 was a big year! PAWS had:

- 466 active PAWS Teams
- 198 puppies born
- 250+ PAWS Dog Volunteers
- 15 states in which PAWS Dogs were placed
- 18.5% new donors
Paws With A Cause® enhances the independence and quality of life for people with disabilities nationally through custom-trained Assistance Dogs. PAWS® increases awareness of the rights and roles of Assistance Dog Teams through education and advocacy.

OUR MISSION

To receive PAWS communications electronically, email your request and name to: gogreen@pawswithacause.org

GO GREEN

MEET Krzysztof

Krzysztof has epilepsy and is waiting for a PAWS Dog to:
- Alert others when he is having a seizure
- Wake him when he has a seizure
- Comfort him as he comes out of a seizure

THERE ARE 122 CLIENTS, LIKE KRZYSZTOF, WAITING FOR A PAWS ASSISTANCE DOG.

Make a life-changing gift today: pawswithacause.org/donate

Photo by Dana Marshall Photography