

THE AUTHORS SHOW – Inspirational/Motivational/Self Help

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As a young child I found great pleasure in teaching my toy poodle, Muffin, various tricks to perform in front of any audience. I have been amused, my whole life, by tricks performed by circus dogs who happened to be poodles. As an eight year old, I would play like I was a circus trainer with my toy poodle.

After college graduation, I got Bailey an incredibly smart yellow lab. I was able to train her to do two-step commands like, get the ski rope and swim it out to the Jet Ski, or take a named item to a specific person located in another room.

Following the Oklahoma City bombing, our families' business of recycling concrete proved to be a practice ground for search and rescue dogs. We hosted several search and rescue dog teams out on our site because the rubble is very similar to explosion sites. This gave me the opportunity to observe techniques of professional working dog trainers, which grew my passion to work with dogs.

When I first heard that a dog could possibly be used to mitigate anaphylactic allergens my ears perked up. Dogs have been detecting food allergens for about 10 years. I have one child with intense food intolerances related to Irritable Bowel Disease and another child who has an anaphylactic allergy to raw egg whites. Having an allergen detection dog might be a viable option for my family. My daughter adores dogs and had been begging for a puppy for two years.

Fortuitously, we bid on and won a Labradoodle puppy, Stella, at a charity auction, just two weeks before my son was diagnosed with I.B.D. Stella was bred to be a pet therapy dog. I wondered if I could train Stella to alert to food intolerances and allergies for my children. It would be helpful to have a service dog alert to unlabeled trace ingredients in foods while grocery shopping or eating out. During the initial training I was cautioned that what I was hoping to train Stella to do, (alert to Starch), has never been done. I read multiple books, talked to different dog trainers in the drug detection/search and rescue fields, and reached out via the

internet to trainers who had recently started training gluten detection dogs. Utilizing various techniques, I developed a way to train Stella to detect multiple sets of food allergens.

During the training process, our family friend Jennifer whom has two daughters suffering from life threatening illnesses requiring frequent hospitalization asked if my dog could come and visit her daughters in the hospital. Since Jennifer's husband is a Chaplain in the military and is traveling often for work she felt having a dog visit in the hospital or at home might possibly lift up the family's spirits. Once Stella was certified as a service dog I readily agreed. The visit made such a significant emotional impact in the life of one daughter, Karis, that I wanted to get another dog and train it for Karis as a task specific service dog with the benefit of providing emotional support to the rest of the family. Stella's breeder had a new litter by the same parents 6 weeks prior. In my mind new possibilities opened up. Having Stella model much of the desired behavior required by service dogs might allow for a faster learning time. As these thoughts raced through my mind, I became determined to take all of my skillsets and combine them to be of maximum service to this family and the community.

Having already won an award for writing, "Gut Feeling; Gut Healing," under the pseudonym Shannon Eavenson, I decided it would be a worthy cause to chronicle this journey so that others may benefit. I wanted to write about how I trained the dogs, Stella and Mazie, her younger dog sibling, while including a 360 degree perspective of what all goes into the making of a service dog, and at the same time answering pertinent questions of the difference between a service dog and an emotional support dog. Karis Ladewig, Mazie's owner, added to the book writing from a dog's perspective, and Victor Fadool, wrote about life with an emotional support dog, Malachi.

The proceeds from the book now fund Mazie's care and needs for life. The story encompasses the training and raising of Stella and Mazie, my children's views on the responsibilities and joys of owning and fostering service dogs, several of the recipient Ladewig family members give varying perspectives, the breeder's motivation for breeding therapy/service dogs, and Victor's tale with Malachi, his emotional support animal.

The dogs achieved all the goals we set for them. Stella detects over 13 grains and starch as well as raw egg whites and alerts to their presence in food. Maize detects dangerous changes in body chemistry for Karis. We are training dog number three to alert to multiple allergens to prove that other dogs can be trained for this as well. As a team, it gives us great joy knowing that we are leading the way, making life better for others. Not only did we fulfill our dream of working with animals, we also are educating and inspiring others by sharing our stories. We want the public to understand the benefits of owner trained service dogs, the possibility of training an allergen detection/medical alert dog, and to set the standard for emotional support animals. We're eager to share our story and host speaking engagements to spread awareness!

I want to leave you with an excerpt from the book that resonates with our whole team:

When we took her (Stella) to visit Karis in the hospital, we found the time they spent together to be incredibly successful for both Stella and Karis. We could just see the positive energy exchange between the two and both instinctively knew their roles. It was as if Stella knew she was there to lift Karis's spirits, which was evident by the smile that beamed across her face and the lilt in her voice. Apparently, dogs are very good at reading nonverbal mannerisms.

Karis knew she was helping Stella feel important and needed, as well. Both just basked in each other's affections for the duration of the visit. It was such a beautiful site to witness. Healing, at least of the spirit, was taking place before our very eyes. Stella was asked to come back to visit three more times.

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