

A PRESENTATION TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON VETERAN'S AFFAIRS ON: THE CANADIAN VETERAN SERVICE DOG UNIT

BY: Rev. Dr. (Maj Ret'd) R.M.A. "Sandy" Scott MSM CD1

Secretary to the Board CVSDU

Over the last twenty-five years society's understanding of the effects of trauma have changed dramatically and so has the way we help people struggling with the effects of trauma. Whether the trauma was experienced on the battlefield or during various military operations, or at a crime scene, an accident scene, a building fire, a disaster or terrorist event, military members, police officers, firefighters, paramedics and first responders are more prone to experience extreme trauma than an average person. That is why when the effects of trauma manifest itself in a condition like Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), these heroes who have served our community, province and country deserve our support. One of the ways those who struggle with PTSD have been able to recover and gain control over their lives again has been with the assistance of a service dog.

THE CANADIAN VETERAN SERVICE DOG UNIT (CVSDU) is a registered Canadian charity (Charity Number 839865797RR0001) that exists to provide trained service dogs to those who have served and are suffering from PTSD. The CVSDU was initially founded by a group of dog trainers who wanted to help injured veterans by providing them, free of charge with a trained service dog. Today three of those dog trainers still work with and serve the CVSDU, training puppies and dogs to be service dogs, training dogs and injured veterans to become qualified teams and advising the Board of Directors on training and programs for the Unit. The Board, which is annually elected by the members of the Unit is made up of six veterans from the Unit and one other members from beyond the Unit who was recruited for her expertise and compassion (she is a clinical psychologist who works with injured veterans and she is a dog trainer). The moto of the CVSDU has been "Veterans helping Veterans." We are making a difference, one veteran at a time.

To help you understand the effects of trauma I will tell you some of my own story of how PTSD has affected me and my family and the difference a service dog has made in my life and the life of spouse and family.

In the few years that followed my tour in Afghanistan it took me a long time, and a lot of pain and wreckage before I would admit I was falling apart. Denial and drinking were a mainstay in my survival strategy. My strategy did not work well. This is a list the affects PTSD has had on me. Most people do not realize PTSD is more than a mental health disorder it is also a disorder of the central nervous system. When extreme amounts of adrenaline are running through your body on a daily or hourly basis your health

declines. While this list of effects is specifically mine it generally applies to a lot of people with severe chronic PTSD like I have.

- Social isolation – avoid people and situations that trigger intrusive thoughts, flash backs or high levels of anxiety.
- Chronic joint and muscle pain.
- Denial.
- Broken relationships (mostly due to anger management issues).
- PTSD affects family systems and causes damage to relationships that can be irreparable.
- High levels of anxiety.
- High blood pressure.
- Explosive Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS).
- Tinnitus (a constant buzz in my ears).
- Loss of the ability to concentrate.
- Disassociation/intrusive thoughts.
- Suicidal ideation.
- Substance abuse.

I was having so much trouble in public settings that my therapist recommended I get a service dog. I said why would I want a service dog when I cannot even take care of myself. When my wife Rae-Ann heard the idea, she researched it and was able to make contact with Serge Lemieux at the CVSDU. We met Serge and then we met Mandy and we started a journey that has helped save my life and raise the quality of life for our family.

This is a list of the things Mandy does for me:

- She gives routine and order to my day.
- She lowers my anxiety levels by grounding me mentally and helping me when I am in trouble.
- She wakes me if I am having a nightmare.
- Caring for her has helped open my range of emotions.
- She is constantly with me watching over me and taking care of me.

- She has been a key part of my stabilization and because of her I was able to take part in treatment.

This is a list of the effects that Mandy's work and service have had on me:

- Mandy has relieved my wife, of the burden of having to constantly care for me emotionally and she does not worry about me being in public anymore.
- When Mandy and I first teamed up I lost 20 pounds and she lost ten (walking).
- I take less medication.
- I am more physically and mentally fit.
- I sleep better.
- I feel hope and joy.
- I go into public spaces regularly and I am less anxious about interacting with others.
- Mandy has increased and strengthened our family's quality of life.
- With the support of my wife and the help of Mandy my stabilization process has led me to a place where I have been able to do treatment and find healing, which I thought would never happen.

What Mandy has done for me has saved me and made the quality of my family's life much better than it was. I am indebted to the CVSDU for what it has done on my behalf.

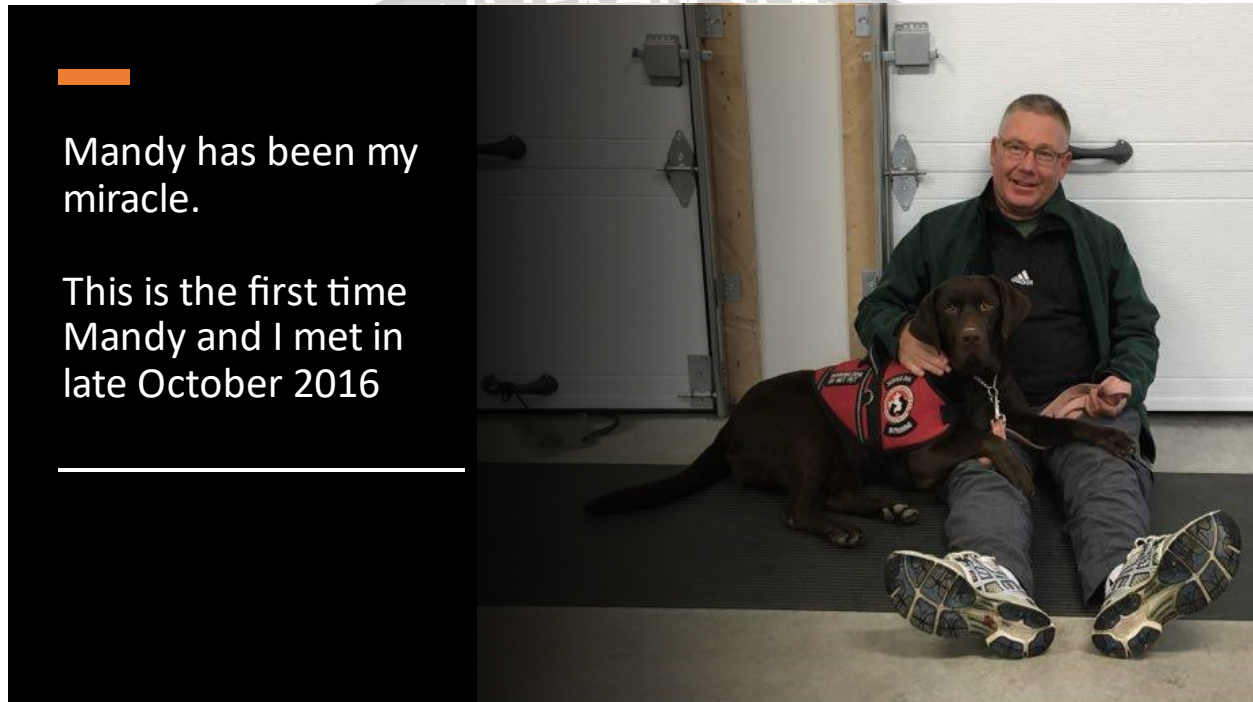
The CVSDU is a charity and as such it relies on the public for donations. Before the pandemic because of the work of volunteers it would cost the CVSDU about six thousand dollars to purchase, raise and train a service dog. Then it would cost approximately five thousand dollars to train an injured veteran and service dog to be a team. Since the start of the pandemic the costs related to buying, raising and training a service dog have doubled.

After a person has been paired with a dog and they complete their training and are a qualified team they continue to be part of the CVSDU family. Our members conduct monthly training events in person (when pandemic restrictions allow for it). During the pandemic, our members took part in weekly virtual meetings checking in with each other and our trainers and supporting each other. The CVSDU works with its members and their service dogs to maintain a high standard of conduct and to help each other along the way. When you become a member of the CVSDU you are a member for life.

We presently have a waiting list of about twenty people who need service dogs. As the restrictions caused by the pandemic ease, we want to address our waiting list and get

more people service dogs but we need financial assistance. There is no doubt in our minds service dogs save lives, save families, and dramatically increase an injured veteran's quality of life. We believe Veterans Affairs Canada should support injured veterans by helping them obtain a service dog and the necessary training so they can be a good, qualified team. Please consider supporting injured veterans by providing service dogs.

Thank-you for your support. We included some slides.



EST 2012



Chief Petty Officer (Ret'd) Serge Lemieux brought Mandy and I together and trained us to be a team.

This is what Mandy does for me!

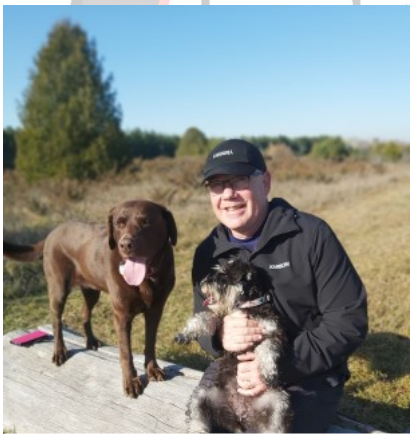
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- She is constantly with me watching over me and taking care of me.
- She has been a key part of my stabilization and treatment process.





The affects of the miracle Mandy has brought

- Mandy has relieved RaeAnn, my wife, of the burden of having to constantly care for me emotionally and RaeAnn does not worry about me being in public anymore.
- When Mandy and I first teamed up I lost 20 pounds and she lost ten.
- I take less medication.
- I am more physically and mentally fit.
- I sleep better.
- I feel hope and joy.
- I go into public spaces regularly and I am less anxious about interacting with others.
- Mandy has increased and strengthened our family's quality of life.
- With the support of Rae-Ann and the help of Mandy my stabilization process has led me to a place where I have been able to do treatment.



Last June Mandy got a little sister named Missy adding to our happy family.



Thank-you for listening
to our story.

