

my retriever



Endal and Allen: return to a life fully-lived

by Alessandra Franchi

The press room of Crufts 2009 on Saturday 7 March was crowded with many celebrities, but one in particular attracted the attention of everyone present: an elderly yellow Labrador named Endal.

Endal is famous around the world because he performed the miracle of bringing back to normal life (or nearly) his owner Allen Parton. Over the last 13 years, Endal has saved the life - and marriage - of his master Allen Parton, a former Royal Navy officer who was disabled in a car crash in 1991 during the Gulf War.

The story of Endal

Endal was something of a misfit since his parents, who were owned by a Southampton breeder, were father and daughter. Not realising that the bitch was still in season, they put her in with her father only to discover soon afterwards that she was pregnant. Unable to register him because of his parentage, they considered keeping him as a pet until a month later when Canine Partners for Independence visited them to inspect another litter. The attention of the programme director for CPI was caught by the quiet and attentive pup and she decided to give him the possibility of becoming an assistance dog.

While Endal was growing, she realized that he could become an excellent assistant for people who need



left: Allen and Endal one of the last official images taken.

under: Endal proudly wearing his PDSA Gold Medal.

basically: Endal operating the chip and pin machine by inserting the card.



help, but that at the same time he would need a person with whom he could make a strong bond to realize all his potential as an assistant.

The story of Allen

The story of Allen starts in 1991, when Allen, then a weapons electronics officer in the Royal Navy, waved good-bye to his wife Sandra and their two children Liam and Zoe, age six and five, to fight in the Gulf War. As they set off, Allen and his men had been told that "only" 15 per cent of them wouldn't come back. But like many brave servicemen, he was certain this wouldn't apply to him. Within a month of arriving, Allen's military car was smashed up in a serious accident, which shattered



both his body and mind. His first memory was waking up in a British hospital six weeks later: his right-hand side had lost all feeling and he had lost 50 per cent of his memory.

So Allen came back to UK and spent the next five years in hospital fighting against a severe disability and a terrible depression, the depression of a man that had lost almost everything and on top of that also the dearest memories of his family. He could not speak properly and didn't recognize people he had known before the accident, not even his wife and children.

"The fear and shock made me furious," admits Allen. "I refused to accept I was disabled and I'm ashamed to say that I was horrible and rude to everyone." He was also plunged into a deep, fathomless depression from which there seemed no escape. Twice, he tried to commit suicide. It was, he told himself, the only way out.

When he came home at last, his wife Sandra had to give up work to be able to look after him. She was almost at her wit's end, and she decided to take a pause and spend some time as a puppy walker for the dogs in training at Canine Partners for Independence (CPI).

interest in something and even moved a little to be able to pat the pup on the head. Allen says that he decided to apply for Endal as an assistance dog, and that "I had to fill in a form, describing my disabilities and this was the first time I had admitted there was something wrong with me," recalls Allen. "It was a cathartic experience, which finally gave me the hope I needed."

Thus, for thirteen years Endal and Allen lived and worked together helping each other every day.



Four images of Endal at work: this is how he helped Allen with everyday tasks.



Endal and Allen meet each other

The story goes that one day the bus for Allen's day centre didn't arrive and Sandra forced him to accompany her at CPI. There Allen and Endal met for the first time. Endal decided Allen was the special person he was waiting for and moving towards him he started a partnership that lasted the following thirteen years.

Sandra noticed that Allen for the first time showed some

Endal learnt to pull doors open (purple "tug" cords were attached to all doors in the house), to pick up cereals and other items when they went shopping in the supermarket, and to help Allen with the cash point machines.

Because of his poor memory, which means Allen can usually only remember things for forty-eight hours, he also forgets people's names and faces. Before Endal came into his life, Allen was too embarrassed to go out much or talk to friends who could remember him even though he had no idea who they were. "Now, they come up to

talk about Endal and even if I don't know who they are, Endal provides a talking point. They stroke and chat about him, which helps me to socialise again."

Endal has been awarded many different awards, among many others he was named Dog of the Millennium by Dogs Today, won the PSDA Gold Medal, and the Gold Blue Peter Badge. The PSDA Gold Medal is the equivalent of the George Cross awarded to animals who have shown outstanding devotion to their duties in peace time. Endal received his because when in 2001 Allen's car was hit by a car driving at 60km per hour in a parking lot, he managed to drag Allen into the recovery position (lying on his side), cover him with a blanket, get out of a bag the mobile phone and put it against Allen's face, then run to a hotel nearby, barking for help. He is one of the only two dogs who have won the Gold Blue Peter Badge (2003). The

As time went by, Allen and Sandra started looking for a long time for a young dog that could take Endal's place when he was eventually forced to retire. They found "Endal Junior" (EJ) which is now almost as good as Endal.

After having been to Crufts with Allen on Saturday 7 march 2009, the following week Endal had a stroke, and his family was forced to put him to sleep. He went in Allen's lap, with all the family paying him a tribute of love for the love and devotion he bestowed on Allen in all these years.



Gold Blue Peter Badge -a gold plated brooch in the shape of the ship log- is the highest award and is given for exceptional achievement, such as to people who have performed acts of extreme bravery, or represented their country in a major event.

Allen and Endal have been invited to Crufts many times, and Allen now volunteers with Canine Partners for Independence, helping other people to start a new life with their dogs. And ... Allen and his wife Sandra decided to re-marry, so that Allen could have a real memory of his wedding.



These pictures speak for themselves. Endal's expression and Allen's smile describe perfectly their common understanding.

***We would like to thank Allen Parton for providing photos and material for this article.**