

Let Buster Lead

Discovering Love, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Self-Acceptance

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is an often under diagnosed illness, affecting an estimated 6-7% of the U.S. population at any given time. *Let Buster Lead* is the inspirational story of how one woman's beloved dog helped her reclaim her life from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder following a harrowing accident.

Following the death of her father, Deborah Dozier Potter adopted a Border Collie, Buster, from her local animal shelter. She and Buster bonded instantly. His companionship helped Potter deal with her grief, the stress of her high-powered marriage, and her depression. She and her husband had developed a politically charged real estate law firm and other businesses, plus Potter also held a number of volunteer and board positions, helping to organize events for performing arts organizations and several political candidates. Their lives were full of constant meetings, receptions, and fundraisers—pressures and commitments that strained their marriage. She found that Buster's company had a calming effect on her moods, and his "hugs" helped her to feel less edgy during the day.

Tragedy struck when Potter suffered major trauma in a horse accident. As her body began to heal, Potter was unaware that a much larger battle lay ahead.

A year after the accident, Potter found that functioning among other people had become impossible. She had developed an aversion to being touched, even by her husband, because any unexpected touch was painful and frightening. She was growing increasingly reclusive, and avoided doing errands, going to business meetings or any social engagements because she felt uncontrollably panicked in a room full of people. Her persistent memories of the accident made her relive

her fall over and over again, even as she tried to “get back on the horse” and ride again.

Buster was her only comfort. She craved his companionship and couldn’t stand to be without him. He made her feel loved and safe.

When Potter met a woman who used a service dog to help her cope with an “invisible” disability, she began to look deeper into her own condition. She discovered that Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder usually sets in several months after a person suffers an injury or other form of physical or mental trauma. The symptoms rang true: irritability, tension, sleeplessness, weight loss, and an aversion to being touched.

When Potter sought out a trainer for Buster to evaluate him as a service dog, she learned that by instinct, Buster was already protecting her from unexpected touch. He shielded her from further harm by walking very close to her body. He alerted her to when people were near, would go through doors ahead of her to make sure path was safe.

As her official service dog, Buster helped Potter to manage her PTSD symptoms and become an active member of society again—and even saves her marriage in the process. Potter describes her experiences traveling on airplanes and learning how to function in public with a disability and a therapy dog. With Buster leading her back to a normal life, Potter reveals how she became able to resume her volunteer work, attend business meetings and receptions, and even travel internationally.

“Because of Buster, my disease felt less like a cage,” Potter said. “Without that support, and his love, going through life with a disability could have changed me into an angry, bitter recluse.” This tribute to Buster will touch the heart of every

animal lover, and will be an inspiration to anyone who suffers from a disability or self-doubt.

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Discovering Love, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Self-Acceptance

Deborah Dozier Potter

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About Deborah Dozier Potter

Deborah Dozier Potter was born into an entertainment A-list family. Her mother, Joan Fontaine, her aunt, Olivia de Havilland, and her stepmother, Ann Rutherford, were 1940s era movie stars. Her father, William Dozier, a popular film and television executive, produced and narrated TV's *Batman* series.

Seeking a "regular" environment, Deborah settled in Santa Fe, New Mexico where she continued her international career as an actors' representative. She and her husband raised two sons, developed a politically charged real estate law firm, and have formed partnerships that own several businesses.

Among her many volunteer positions, she is a volunteer acting teacher and play director at The New Mexico School for the Arts, she has served as the founding organizer of Santa Fe's Plaza Community Stage, a member of the Kennedy Center's President's Advisory Council on the Arts, and as a trustee of a college, and orchestra, and two museums.

A traumatic accident, and often un-diagnosed disability and a life-changing relationship with her Border Collie inspired her to write their story. *Let Buster Lead* is her first book, a tribute to her devoted best friend.

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Facts about Assistance Dogs

Service dogs, a type of assistance dog, can help individuals overcome both physical and "invisible" disabilities, such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, epilepsy, panic disorder, and others. In *Let Buster Lead: Discovering Love, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Self-Acceptance*, Deborah Dozier Potter gives a firsthand account of managing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder with the assistance of her service dog, Buster. Buster helps Potter restore her mental health and self-esteem, leading her back to a more normal life.

According to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), a dog is considered a "service dog" if it has been "individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of a person with a disability." The ADA allows public access for trained dogs for any type of disability. People with service dogs have access to nearly every place where the general public is welcomed. For example, service dogs are permitted to ride in taxicabs, buses, and trains. They may enter restaurants, theaters, hotels, and public schools.

Below are some of the tasks that service dogs may be trained to perform, according to the Delta Society (www.deltasociety.org)

- **Mobility:** helping person balance for transfer/ambulation, pulling wheelchair, helping person rise from sitting or fallen position.
- **Retrieval:** getting items that are dropped or otherwise out of reach, carrying items by mouth.
- **Open/close** doors and drawers.
- **Act as physical buffer** to jostling by others.
- **Bark** to alert for help.
- **Sense and alert** owners to oncoming seizures, enabling the owners to position themselves safely.
- **Leading** a person who has a visual impairment around obstacles, to destinations (seating, across street, to/through door, to/into elevator, etc.).
- **Sound discrimination:** to alert a person with a hearing impairment to the presence of specific sounds.

Research has documented the following benefits of companion animals:

- Lowered blood pressure.
- Moderation of stress.
- Improved motivation.
- Self-esteem
- Mitigation of the effects of loneliness.

Service dogs can provide the amount of physical and/or psychological support necessary to help a person with a disability lead a more functional and independent life. Additionally, having the responsibility of caring for the dog gives the owner a sense of purpose—another important aspect of the therapeutic