



# Tails for You

a publication of Can Do Canines®

*Samantha's symptoms  
can come on anytime and  
anywhere.*

*But thanks to your support,  
she knows Obie will always  
be right by her side—ready  
to help.*





Photo by Nichole Laase

# EVERYTHING to ME

*Your support transformed an invisible disability into visible results*

At first glance, Samantha Wanner seems like the average 21 year-old. She lives at home with her parents in Buffalo, Minn. while attending school at St. Cloud University for psychology. After graduating, she wants to support herself financially, travel abroad and make a difference in the world. But there's something under the surface, which people can't see and few she encounters ever realize.

"I have what is classified as an invisible disability, because it's all neurological," Samantha says.

Officially diagnosed at the age of 15, the umbrella term for her disability is autonomic dysfunction—a chronic problem with the internal system that controls functions like heart rate, breathing rate and blood pressure. In essence, Samantha's sympathetic nervous system (responsible for the "fight or flight" response) is constantly in overdrive. This causes her body to experience extreme exhaustion, deep aches and sporadic and quickened heart fluctuations. In addition, Samantha has Neuropathic P.O.T.S., which can

cause a fall in blood pressure and result in a temporary loss of consciousness. Her rapid onset of fainting has resulted in the loss of two front teeth and a handful of concussions.

There is no cure, treatment or medication for Samantha's disorder. She is charged with the unfortunate task of simply trying to deal with whatever her disability decides to challenge her with on any given day. After her doctor suggested various lifestyle changes to ease her situation, a nurse suggested an assistance dog. Google suggested Can Do Canines.

"I was doing some online research on assistance dogs and Can Do Canines seemed to be a perfect fit," Samantha says. "I personally came to the facility and took a tour before turning in my application."

"When I go out—because I look healthy—I don't get offers like 'can I hold the door for you?'"

This is how a Mobility Assist Dog named Obie came into Samantha's life. When she feels fatigued, the two-year-old yellow Labrador retriever helps her up the stairs or acts as a brace when she stands up. He hauls her laundry and picks up items that she drops. But what Samantha feels is the most impactful is how Obie decreases her anxiety when she's in public.

"When I go out—because I look healthy—I don't get offers like 'can I hold the door for you?' Or if I'm having trouble breathing, no one thinks to stop and ask 'are you doing ok, do you need any help?'" It used to be hard for me to go out in public," Samantha says.

Obie wears a special vest and a "Medical Alert Dog" tag with instructions to look in his vest for medical information.



Due to Samantha's condition, exhaustion and fatigue are common. Mobility Assist Dog Obie helps by acting as a brace when she stands and by carrying the laundry up and down the stairs. Photos by Nichole Laase.



Previously a positive, motivated youth, his parents were worried. Austin had even dropped out of the activities he used to love—football, baseball, robotics and golf. So they enrolled him in a brain re-training program. Four times a week for a year, the teen went through exercises to regain the skills he had lost from his brain injury. And while the training was successful, Austin’s full recovery wouldn’t happen until a four-legged friend entered his life.

The journey began when Austin’s father Jon told him about the need for Puppy Raisers after he heard a story about Can Do Canines on the radio. Austin had always wanted a big dog—a guy’s dog. Sandy, the ten pound Shih-Tzu at home, just wasn’t cutting it. So, after researching puppy raising online, he realized Can Do Canines might be the ticket to that big dog he always dreamed of. He was also beginning to feel better. Between the proper balance of medication and the brain re-training activities, he felt ready to get back out there and do something positive.

“When this opportunity came up, I don’t know, I was intrigued,” Austin says. “It’s weird sometimes how things happen. The timing could not have been better.”

“I was always working toward the next goal, or accomplishing the next skill. It was a confidence booster.”

## BRINGING UP MORRIE

*How raising an assistance dog changed one teen’s outlook on life*

Being a teenager isn’t easy. The clichés about peer pressure, social cliques and getting good grades ring as true today as they did in years past. But for a Plymouth, Minn. teen, he had an additional obstacle. In 9th grade, Austin Wisdorf suffered a concussion during football practice at Armstrong High School. The accident triggered frequent migraine headaches and intermittent nausea. His short-term memory and attention span were on a downturn and as he began tenth grade his grades started to decline.

Jill, Austin’s mother, wasn’t so sure about the timing. Bringing a puppy into the house wasn’t part of her ‘new carpet plan.’

“We were just about to get new carpet,” Jill says. “But when Austin brought up the idea of raising a puppy, we realized it was actually the perfect time to wait!”

As a typical teenager, Austin didn’t wait for his mother’s approval. He had already signed the family up for a Can Do Canines Tails to Tell Tour and turned in a Puppy Raiser application. In less than eight weeks, Austin had his puppy

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With that, Samantha says, she has a walking banner that waves, “I might have an episode, watch out for me!” Obie has boosted her confidence to be out in public. Samantha says she feels safer going to places like the grocery store since Obie can convey medical information if she is unable to do so.

An unexpected bonus is that Obie seems to sense changes that Samantha cannot recognize herself. Obie will lick her legs or rest his head in her lap to let Samantha know that, ‘something’s going on, but I don’t know what it is!’

“That’s when I take a step back and really focus on how I’m feeling. Sometimes if I don’t feel anything obvious,

that’s when—in maybe a half-hour—I’ll have the beginning symptoms of a migraine. So then I can take a preventative instead of having the migraine and trying to chase after it.”

Confidence is the word that keeps coming up when you talk with Samantha about her assistance dog. Confidence that when she’s tired, there’s someone there to lend a hand ... or paw in this case. Confidence that if an episode happens when she’s out in public, there’s someone to help keep her grounded. Confidence that every day she doesn’t need to worry so much about how she’s going to feel, someone will let her know. For that she is grateful.

“I would like to thank anyone who has even touched Obie in any way—thrown a ball for him said ‘hi’ to him or even cat-called him as he walked by!” Samantha says. “Every single person who has touched him has impacted him in such a way as to become the dog that he is today—the helper. He’s everything to me.”

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Photo by Erica Gullickson



*Pictured above is Austin and Morrie taking their senior pictures together. At left is Morrie on his first birthday.*

to raise—a six-month-old yellow Labrador retriever named Morrie.

It wasn't an immediate success. Between the constant needs of a young pup and the pressure of bringing up a future assistance dog, Austin wasn't sure he made the right choice. Fighting through his depression, he even thought about quitting. But over time, and through the puppy training classes he attended each week, Austin's confidence began to grow.

"I was being encouraged by others on how well I was doing with Morrie,"

Austin says. "I was always working toward the next goal, or accomplishing the next skill. It was a confidence booster."

Austin worked with Morrie to become skilled at picking up dropped items, something the pup wasn't that interested in at first. In addition, Austin worked to keep Morrie from jumping up on people who he first meets. He says Morrie is such a happy dog he wants to enthusiastically greet everyone!

But it wasn't all work and no play. When Morrie turned one year-old they threw him a birthday party. Morrie was keen on the attention, but not on the birthday hat. The hats came in packs of a dozen and after 11 failed attempts (and 11 broken birthday hats) they finally got one to stay on long enough to snap a picture. Moments later the twelfth hat met the same demise as the others and become a deshevelled piece of paper on the floor.

Morrie was raised by the Wisdorf's for about year. In June, 2015, the day finally came to turn Morrie back in. Austin and Jill had been hearing the success stories as they went along and knew they were raising Morrie for a higher purpose, but it was still a difficult moment.

"It was really tough," Austin says. "Not giving him up—leaving him. But if I had to do it all over again, absolutely I would."

Morrie is currently fine-tuning a few skills and undergoing a final



Did you know that Morrie's name came from a Can Do Canines' donor? He was named by a member of the Forada Lions Club as part of our Name-A-Puppy Program.

You too can name a puppy. By doing so, you'll provide the first step to help someone with a disability receive life-changing assistance from a Can Do Canine.

Visit [can-do-canines.org/donate/name-a-puppy](http://can-do-canines.org/donate/name-a-puppy) or contact Janet Cobus, Development Director, at 763-331-3000 x153 for more information.

evaluation. If all goes well, Morrie will be partnered with a client in the coming months and will begin to use all the great skills he's learned with the help of Austin.

Can Do Canines extends their profound thanks to Austin and the Wisdorf family for raising Morrie and to all our volunteer Puppy Raisers for their time and dedication.

## You Can Raise a Puppy Like Morrie

There is always a steady line of pups coming through Can Do Canines, just like Morrie, who need good homes and good people to help raise them. So how about it? Want to become a Puppy Raiser for Can Do Canines?

Puppy Raisers take a puppy in for about six to 18 months and teach the puppy good house manners and basic obedience. They also teach early assistance dog skills and expose the puppy to as many social situations as possible. If you're looking for more of a short-term puppy fix, consider being a 'Great Start' volunteer. These volunteers raise the young pup for six to eight weeks and get the dog ready for one of our prison programs.

To learn more about becoming a Puppy Raiser, or for other opportunities, visit [can-do-canines.org/puppy-raiser](http://can-do-canines.org/puppy-raiser) or call Volunteer Coordinator Laurie Carlson at 763-331-3000 x113.





Photo by Angie Koos Photography

# A SECOND CHANCE AT INDEPENDENCE



Shiya alerts and then leads Julie to the source of sounds she can't hear, like the oven timer. Photo by Angie Koos Photography.

The passing of a beloved dog is not easy for anyone. But it's even more difficult when that dog is a vital part of your independence. Julie Schneider of Arden Hills, Minn. had to endure such heart-break. But after a period of grieving, she was able to find the help—and love—from another best friend.

Due to a hereditary condition, Julie started losing her hearing in her 20s. Her condition deteriorated over time and she became unaware of the sounds and noises around her. She was also often unsure of where the sounds were coming from and exactly what they were.

In 2003 she got help from her first Can Do Canines Hearing Assist Dog, Sandy—a Cocker-Papillon. The hearing helper alerted her to all the sounds she had been missing and Julie was feeling reconnected to the world again. But when Sandy died of cancer in 2011, Julie's problems reappeared.

"Communication became more difficult and it was affecting my work," Julie says. "After the loss of Sandy, I didn't think I would ever be able to get another dog."

It would take a chance encounter with a doctor who used an American Eskimo therapy dog for stroke victims to help repave her path to independence. The doctor referred her to a breeder who introduced Julie to Shiya, a four month-old American Eskimo. The two had an immediate connection.

From the start of their training together, Shiya was beginning to alert Julie to sounds. But the little pup had some kinks and quirks that needed to be worked out. That's when Julie reached out to Can Do Canines for help.

Bred to be a herding dog, Shiya could be timid and shy toward strangers. Can Do Canines worked with Julie to make Shiya more comfortable approaching people, especially men. One way this problem was overcome was by handing Shiya over to male dog trainers so they could positively interact. Gradually, she overcame her fear.

Shiya also had a problem with pulling while on leash in public. Can Do Canines worked to overcome this issue through various training techniques and a special harness.

"I've been extremely pleased and blessed—Shiya just sort of fell into my lap."

"It took a lot of work and determination," remembers Julie. "There were a couple of times I almost gave up."

But the two persevered, and now Shiya consistently alerts Julie to everyday sounds most of us take for granted. Alarm clocks, oven timers, door knocks, fire alarms, running water and Julie's name being called all fall under Shiya's repertoire. When a sound occurs, Shiya quickly scampers over to Julie and leads her to its source. This has provided a renewed level of security for Julie and her family.

"It does take a burden off my husband," says Julie. "We both like having the security that I missed after losing Sandy."

As for her second chance at independence, Julie is thankful for the serendipity that helped make it happen.

"I've been extremely pleased and blessed—Shiya just sort of fell into my lap," Julie says. "She's changed my life."

## Name one of our Puppies



This summer, 428 people took part in a contest to name an assistance dogs in training. The name that emerged as the winner was **Clover!** Thanks to everyone who participated.

## YOU HELPED

make the following possible over the summer.

### Graduate Team #500

Thanks to your support, we graduated our 500th assistance dog team. This August, we placed Hearing Assist Dog Nina with Paul Chavez of Mequon, Wis. Together, we can graduate our next 500 teams!

## Raise \$61,000 by walking



182 walkers and 86 dogs came out to the 2015 Can Do Woofaroo Walk & Festival. In total, we raised more than \$61,000—enough to fund two new assistance dog teams!

# YOU MADE THESE PARTNERSHIPS POSSIBLE

Read these stories at [can-do-canines.org](http://can-do-canines.org).



*Pictured above (from left to right)*

Cory Anderson & Mobility Assist Dog Paddington • Alan Burggraf & Mobility Assist Dog Oz  
 Paul Chavez & Hearing Assist Dog Nina  
 Marilyn Chazin-Caldie & Mobility Assist Dog Checkers  
 Lawrence Endres & Mobility Assist Dog Sierra • Kelli Heimerl & Mobility Assist Dog Justeen  
 Linda LaReau & Mobility Assaist Dog Karma • Sarah Lawrence & Mobility Assist Dog Lucy  
 Amanda Mollner & Mobility Assist Dog Phyllis • Ethan Schmidt & Autism Assist Dog Noble  
 Signe Scott & Autism Assist Dog Luther • Lucas Smart & Autism Assist Dog Neville  
 Tami Summer & Hearing Assist Dog Lola

TO THE MAX  
**give** **DAY**  
 NOV 12, 2015

Give to Max Day is edging ever closer! Please consider making a contribution to Can Do Canines on Minnesota's biggest day of giving—November 12, 2015.

## Take a Tour—Meet Our Dogs

One of the best ways to see your support firsthand is to come to a **Tails To Tell Tour**. You'll have a chance to meet a volunteer Puppy Raiser, one of our graduates and see the facility where our dogs learn their life-saving skills.

All tours take place at our facility located at the address below. Please call our office at 763-331-3000 or email [tour@can-do-canines.org](mailto:tour@can-do-canines.org) to reserve your spot!

- **Thursday, October 29, 11 a.m.**
- **Saturday, November 21, 10 a.m.**
- **Thursday, December 17, 11 a.m.**



## Change a Life While You're at Work

It's fall and that means workplace giving campaigns are gearing up. While Can Do Canines is not a United Way agency, you can still write us in and donate! If your company participates in Community Shares, consider choosing us for your gift. Or, if you work for the federal government support us through your CFC campaign. Just designate our assigned code (67285) on your donation form.



### OUR MISSION

Can Do Canines is dedicated to enhancing the quality of life for people with disabilities by creating mutually beneficial partnerships with specially trained dogs.



# CONNECT WITH US



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