

Nicole and Leroy

Nicole first heard of PADS through a friend who used to volunteer. An enthusiastic horsewoman since the age of five, Nicole's early love of animals was more focused on horses than dogs. But in 2004, assistance dog Leroy entered her life and a lot of things changed for the better.

Many people have heard of guide dogs for people who are blind, but are not aware that assistance dogs can also help people with other disabilities. Leroy is trained to assist Nicole with physical and mobility tasks such as opening doors or retrieving items that are out of Nicole's reach.

"Leroy has given me more physical independence. When I drop something he will pick it up, no questions asked. He has literally become my 'shoulder to lean on' when I am walking or standing."

The relationship and trust that Nicole has built with Leroy have helped her to become more confident.

"Leroy has given me a voice that I didn't have before," Nicole says. "At the PADS graduation recently I ran into Leroy's puppy raiser and I was telling her how we were doing. She said that I had changed since the last time I had seen her 4 years ago. She said that I was quiet before and now I was more talkative and confident."

"The process of working with a PADS-trained assistance dog is rewarding," Nicole says. "However, I was unaware of the amount of responsibility there was for the client. Not only do you have to take care of your dog, but you also have to maintain the dog's training and skills. They will drop their skills and training if they are not motivated to work."

Nicole points out that some members of the public feel that having a dog do service work is "mean" to the dog and that dogs should just be dogs. Nicole deals with this in a non-confrontational way by explaining that the dogs really do love the work and if they didn't they wouldn't be assistance dogs.

"Telling people not to pet the dog is an ongoing issue, but if you explain why it makes it easier."

Being denied public access is still sometimes an issue when Nicole is in public with Leroy. Nicole and Leroy are ambassadors for the PADS program and help to educate the public on these and other assistance dog issues.

But for Nicole, life with Leroy is definitely worth the effort.

"Having an assistance dog is a full time commitment. The working relationship you have with your dog is only as good as the time and effort you are willing to put into it. My early experience with horses has helped me with the bonding process and training my dog

Leroy. I know that it takes patience, respect and love to become a successful working team.”

Watch for Nicole and Leroy at PADS events, where they demonstrate their teamwork.

Nicole concludes, “It has truly been a honor to represent such an amazing organization as PADS. Meeting and becoming friends with many of the puppy raisers, staff, clients and volunteers has added such joy to my life.”

Susan and Jonathan (Taylor)

Susan and her husband Jonathan were used to seeing assistance dogs when they lived in England, but did not get involved in raising assistance puppies for PADS until 1995.

Jonathan was intrigued by the idea of service dogs, so when he saw a PADS dog wearing the distinctive blue and yellow cape, he phoned to inquire about the program.

That weekend, a PADS volunteer turned up on the doorstep with a 6 month old puppy, already 70 lbs, who was a rescue dog from the SPCA. The dog was a Labrador/German Shepherd cross who turned out to be one of the very best dogs PADS has ever had. He worked until he was almost twelve years old. As Susan says, the rest is history!

Susan says, “I have discovered that I am a committed dog person. That can be taken any way you like! I have learned that each and every dog is as individual as any human. I've also learned that I much prefer puppies to babies.”

When Susan and Jonathan started with PADS thirteen years ago, the organization was just getting started. “At that time, PADS literally lurched from month to month and survived on a shoestring. Several times there were real worries about how to pay the bills at the end of the month but somehow things always worked out,” Susan recalls.

“PADS was so small and was so desperate for puppy raisers that there was no time for preparation. But puppy raising is hard work and a huge commitment. The advice I would give to people who are now thinking of puppy raising is to do a lot of reading and attend several puppy classes.”

While most of their experiences with PADS have been positive, Susan acknowledges that sometimes being involved with the program can be hard.

“Of course it’s difficult to part with a dog when it goes into advanced training. But I find it even harder to hear that a dog I have raised has not met expectations and has to be released as a pet. This is absolutely the toughest thing. Our fourth dog went all the way through advanced training and then he decided he didn't want to work. He was a "prince," and people served him! He was released to a family with a young son. I still can't talk about it.”

Susan's work with PADS has made her more aware of people with real challenges to surmount. She says, "I've become so passionate about the program that I bully my friends into coming to the events and several now support PADS in other ways."

"Working with PADS is tremendous fun. We have met so many dogs and fabulous people over the years, including the staff, other volunteers and the clients. It seems that almost everywhere one goes with a PADS dog, you get to meet some wonderful people. It's very social."

Working as a puppy raiser is good for Susan and Jonathan as well.

"Having a dog means you have to get out and exercise the animal every day. I used to think that on days when the weather was ghastly, that one could just hibernate. With a dog you have to just dress appropriately and get out."

"I've walked at the beach in January in driving rain and wind, which was quite an adventure. We had one dog so mad about swimming that we even broke ice at the edge of the lake so he could swim in the middle of winter. It can be really bracing for me and the dog and we both feel great afterwards."

To learn more about the PADS puppy raising/puppy sitting program, visit [◁▷](#).

Anita

Anita's association with PADS began when she saw an article in the local newspaper about the PADS annual dog walk fundraiser. She started volunteering with PADS as a puppy cuddler one morning a week.

"One day I was asked by a trainer if I was interested in helping bath and groom the advanced dogs. After spending time in the Training Center I was hooked! I eagerly accepted to do anything they needed help with."

Anita has not always considered herself a 'dog person.'

"Growing up we had Dobermans. I gave them a pretty wide berth most of the time. I was not a fan of large dogs and would even walk out of my way if I saw one loose on the street. That all changed when 11 years ago I got my own Labrador, and I discovered the joys of sharing my life with a dog."

Anita is now involved in just about every aspect of the PADS program.

"I have immersed myself into as much of PADS as I could. I have gone from puppy cuddling to puppy sitting, twice a week training the puppies in the EPE program, assisting with whelping, being an aide to the Client Services Coordinator one day a week...and anything else I can do to help."

Anita is also a member of the Friends of PADS fundraising group, which meets every Tuesday to sort and collect stamps which they then sell to stamp collectors. All of the money is donated to PADS.

Anita says, “PADS has made a huge difference to me... my world has opened up to include many, many wonderful people. The whole concept of PADS and the difference it makes to the people who receive a service dog is wonderful to see and be involved in.”

For her many efforts, Anita was honored in 2007 with the 'Volunteer of the Year Award' as well as the prestigious 2008 'Spirit of PADS' award. But for Anita, the best thing is knowing that she is helping get a service dog ready to change the life of a client.

Anita remains philosophical about some of the challenges that working with service dogs can provide. She says, “I expected there would be difficult things. I try to put things into perspective and learn as much as I can about how the PADS program works. It really helps to educate yourself about all aspects of PADS.”

“Anyone wanting to volunteer at PADS must be willing and able to accept that things can change quickly. Dogs and puppies are not machines, and they are different every time you see them. They go through phases, and can change from sweet to cheeky in a heartbeat. Their poop is very messy, sometimes they get sick, and sometimes all they want to do is nothing! You really need to be able to go with the flow.”

For Anita, the hard work has wonderful benefits attached.

“You feel great just knowing you are making a difference in a client’s life. Not to mention the dedicated people who work for PADS. Working with them is a huge factor in why I love coming into PADS.”

“Right now my life has literally 'gone to the dogs' and I wouldn't have it any other way. I cannot imagine not being involved in the PADS program. I feel truly blessed to have found this organization where my love of dogs is combined with helping someone obtain a service dog. For me, it can't get any better!”

Susan and Ember

When Susan first heard of PADS from a friend, she went online to learn more. She and her husband Jonathan completed the application form immediately, but never got around to submitting it. “The idea just went by the wayside,” Susan recalls, “and then one day last summer we were in the mall and saw the PADS display at the Bay.”

Susan admits, “I was never really that interested in working with service dogs. I was only interested because I thought it was a nice compromise between Jonathan and myself. He wanted a dog. I did not. I figure having a ‘rent a dog’ for a year was a good compromise. He could have his dog for a year, and then after a year, the dog would leave us.”

Susan says, “While I *liked* dogs, I never wanted to own one or have one in my own living space. They shed too much, and I don't like ‘dog smell’.”

“But as it's turned out, we've developed great friendships with other people affiliated with PADS and that's been the best thing. On top of that, it's so wonderful to have opportunities to be around such adorable puppies!”

Raising a puppy for PADS has shown Susan that she enjoys having a puppy around after all.

“PADS has brought us Ember, who has become a new member of our family. Also, the awareness of this organization has been great as I knew nothing about PADS prior to being involved. And now, I'm able to talk about the organization, the cause and the dogs whenever someone asks about Ember. I think the Facebook pages, and the dog walks and other dog outings, have helped immensely for getting people together.”

Susan says, “The best thing about Ember is her unconditional love and affection. Also, I made a deal with Jonathan that it is his responsibility to pick up her poop!”

Susan acknowledges that even with these benefits, it is not always easy. Shortly after Ember arrived, Susan and Jonathan became parents for the first time.

Susan says, “With the arrival of the baby, it's almost like we have two children in the house. It's not that Ember is a handful, but it just means that one of us has the baby and one of has the dog. I do miss having that ‘extra’ pair of hands, when Jonathan is busy with the puppy.”

Susan concludes, “Raising a puppy is a bigger responsibility than you might think it is. It's not just ‘take a dog in and socialize it’ but it's being responsible and committed to ensuring that the dog has basic skills before being turned in.”

“Also, it's easy to think ‘Oh, just this one time I'll let her get on the bed’ or eat table scraps or whatever, and for selfish reasons we let them do things they shouldn't. It's hard to remember that we are not helping the dogs when we allow for rules to be broken.”

But for Susan, it's all been worthwhile.

“It's wonderful to see how we've impacted this dog's life and how in turn, she will help someone else.”

For more information on being a puppy raiser, or being involved in some aspect of PADS, see <>.