

Dear Life Changer,

December 8, 2018

I call you "Life Changer" because of your incredibly selfless act of kindness that has forever changed my life. You have never met me, yet you helped save me. When I came back from my deployment not only was I having problems fitting back into normal, everyday life but I also lost my youngest brother to suicide. At that time I was experiencing everything from complete anger, uneasiness with everyday situations, to survivors remorse. There were several times during my deployment that I considered myself very lucky, and yet, to this day I have trouble evening thinking about those times.

I am a Father of 3 outstanding kids and a husband to an incredibly beautiful wife, and I found that I could not get my anger and other emotions under control. There were times that I was so exhausted of fighting to suppress all of my thoughts and feelings that I wasn't sure I wanted to keep going. I was struggling for quite sometime trying to find help. I went to several counselors, was prescribed different medications and still things just sucked, for lack of better terms. I was on a downward path of severe depression and it was affecting everything.

My wife and I were going through a rough time and I knew that I needed to find something that would help me feel better. I was missing many family events and felt that my family was having to live their lives without me. It wasn't that I couldn't go places, it was that it seemed as though as soon as we arrived I was angry, tired and stressed before we even got started. I didn't know how to deal with things, nor did my family. There were times that they didn't want me to go with them because of the amount of stress that I would cause them and myself. I was tired of watching life pass by me.

I had been talking to my wife about getting a puppy and she wasn't to thrilled of the idea but knew that maybe it would help. I had searched for a while, going back and forth on the idea, ultimately coming to the conclusion that it just wasn't the right time. Just before I closed my computer I saw an add for service dogs for veterans. I had heard of service dogs before, but I didn't know much about them. I had been diagnosed with PTSD for about 7 years, but had no idea that there were service animals available for people with PTSD. I decided at that moment to send an email asking for information. I was amazed by how quickly someone replied, and how truly helpful and kind that person was. That was the day that began the change in my life.

When I initially talked with Mary, I asked if my family would be able to raise him as a puppy so he could develop a relationship with my family and myself. Mary was not so sure at first, however she changed her mind within a few weeks after our initial meeting. From day one, Abel and I have been extremely close, and the entire family fell in love with him! Beyond the normal "sit" and "stay" commands, I have not trained a dog. We learned so much with Abel! I had to promise Mary that I would take Abel with me everywhere I went in order to help get him socialized in as many situations as possible. I remember being so nervous about doing something wrong, or not working with him properly, that it would cause set backs on our process, but I was determined to not mess this opportunity up. Mary has been one of the most greatest and amazing people I have ever met. There are no words that can describe how grateful I am for her and her family. She is always available; even at 2am when I was having a very difficult night. She has taught me how to trust in my dog and by having him with me it helps keeps my mind off of things.

Abel and I have been a team for about 15 months now and we are getting ready for our final tests in the process of becoming a service dog and service dog handler. I can't explain how he helps me. I just have a feeling of comfort when he is with me. Since having Abel, I have been able to go places with my family and actually have a good time. My wife, kids, friends and other family members have noticed a positive change in me. From time to time, I still experience moments in which I just can't pull and free myself of the depression and anger feelings, but I am trying to teach myself to rely on Abel and those feelings melt away.

Since he and I have been a team I have received two spinal fusion surgeries for a total of 3 back surgeries (I previously had an emergency surgery in June of 2016), and am looking towards another fusion of my SI joint in approximately 4 months. The physical and mental burden this injury has taken on me and my family has been utterly exhausting. It has affected my ability to work, play with my kids, help my wife with everyday tasks around our home, and temporarily taken away my ability to fish (which was my only escape before receiving Abel). He and I still have a lot of learning to do, but I know we are now on an upward hill and improving every day. With the love and support that I get from my family at home, and my new family at Service Peace Warriors, I know that I will always have someone to always lean on.

I would like to extend to you my complete and upmost gratitude for your generous donation to Service Peace Warriors. Because of people like you, and those that are part of Service Peace Warriors, make all of my sacrifices worth while. You are truly what makes this world a better place! I can honestly say that I don't know where I would be if it wasn't for you and Service Peace Warriors. Thanks to your donation, I was lucky enough to be given my dog Abel. We have now been a team for 15 months. Everyday we are together he continues to help improve my life.

Once again I truly thank you for your generosity. This opportunity have given me a chance to be a better father and husband. Your donation has given me a second chance at life. I can not find the words to express my feelings for your kind, generous, and extremely selfless act. I don't know how I can truly express my incredible appreciation for your charitable give. I will do my best to pay it forward to help others in their time of need so that I can unequivocally honor this blessing that has been given to me.

Sincerely,

Staff Sargent Jerrid Barber  
US Army