



Documenting dogs being of service in more than one way

New book documents impact of service dogs through portraits and stories from their handlers

By **Ali Wilson** - May 25, 2017

As a result of her personal struggles and recovery, an artist from Breslau is hoping to leave a lasting impact on those in need of a National Service Dog.

Illustrator Jacqueline Gori and New Hamburg author Nancy Silcox have just finished their book, *In Service: Portraits of Dogs That Change Lives*.

Gori wanted to tell the stories of National Service Dogs to help raise awareness about the remarkable ways these dogs help people in their day-to-day life. The book is made up of portraits accompanied by a firsthand story of the dogs handlers.

Diagnosed last year with mental illness and suicidal depression, Gori knows firsthand the positive influence service dogs have on their owners lives. She credits her life to her service dog trainee Samson.

After running a successful paint night fundraiser for National Service Dogs, Gori said the idea came while she was sitting in her church, thinking about how she could use her artistic talent to make more of a difference with the organization.

"I was sitting in church thinking, 'this is great, I have sponsored five puppies but I want to set up something that will be a legacy, something that's not just every year I sponsor a puppy. I want to set up something that National Service Dogs can use going forward to generate a permanent income,' and that's when I thought of this," said Gori. "And so I just all of a sudden knew that's what I wanted to do – it's like the light came on, I wanted to do a book of portraits and their stories for National Service Dogs."

Gori said she knew she couldn't write the accompanied stories, so Judy Frank, former fundraising co-ordinator for National Service Dogs, approached Silcox.

Silcox said Frank was aware of her writing, after an article she wrote was published on post traumatic stress disorder and the program that National Service Dogs has started.

"She contacted me, she knew of my interest and style of writing and she asked me if I would be the person who would accompany Jacqui's drawings," said Silcox. "And I thought about it for a while and I thought no I didn't have time to do it, I'm writing three other book simultaneously and I did not think I would be able to fit this in. Then I thought it's such a great project and I didn't want anybody else to do it other than me so I said sure."

The book will showcase 13 stories of the relationships between handler and service dog, including a couple who are helped by their dog NSD-Lady to cope with PTSD following their military service, a pair of dogs that go to school with their handlers to help kids who are battling with school work and the relationship written by a non-verbal autistic child about his relationship with his service dog.

"First of all, I am glad that I made the time. It was a bit tough at times juggling, but I know that I would have been sorry if I hadn't I am glad that I did it," said Silcox.

A former counsellor at Wilfrid Laurier University, Silcox says even her knowledge of the support service dogs provide was vastly enriched after completing the project.

"I learned things about how the service dogs are used by a wide range of services from schools to individuals to care facilities. My own knowledge of how National Service Dogs are utilized was greatly increased."

The images portrayed in the book are based on a combination of submitted photos and those that Gori took herself, she says she likes to work off of her own photos because she gets to understand the personality of the dog.

The project has been a great boon for Gori.

"It has been a really lifesaving project for me because shortly after starting this in April ... by November I was diagnosed myself, and I have to say that when I started to really slip into some dark holes, doing these portraits gave me purpose you know. I would just stare into the eyes of the dog knowing that I had met the handler and that meant that I'd have to carry on, I'd have to help these guys. Just looking into the dogs eyes they just really got me through – it was a lifesaving project," said Gori.

With all profits going to National Service Dog, Gori hopes the legacy will raise more than \$20,000 to help sponsor service dogs.



Gori's portrait of NSD Gizmo, one of the service dogs showcased in the book. [Submitted]

Ali Wilson

<https://observerextra.com>

Ali Wilson is a Reporter/Photographer at The Observer.



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