



Like so many who serve their country, Allen G. Parton returned home from the Gulf War a changed man. He had been seriously injured in 1991 while serving with the Royal Navy and came home unable to speak, write, or walk. After years of intensive rehabilitative therapy, Allen was still disabled and profoundly discouraged. Allen's life changed after he teamed up with Endal, a Labrador retriever in training to be an assistance dog. Although Endal failed to pass the health exam necessary to continue his training – due to a faulty elbow joint – he and Allen formed an immediate bond and Allen agreed to try this dog who didn't quite make the assistance dog grade. Their journey together has

been an incredible story peppered with awards for Endal and a realization by Allen that life still has lots to offer. Theirs is a true story of courage, determination, and teamwork at its finest.

It's a privilege speaking with you, Allen. First, I'd like to thank you for your service. The sacrifices made by those in the military and their families is very great and I hope you hear often how those of us who benefit from your service appreciate what you and other service men and women do. Can you tell us a little about how life changed for you after your injury.

**Allen Parton – Firstly, there is never a need to thank any of us that have served or for the sacrifices we've made ... it is our duty and one we are proud to execute to defend the freedoms and rights we all enjoy today! I had volunteered to sail to the Gulf during the Desert Storm operations and I am totally responsible for the consequences of that choice. I was only asked the other day whether, knowing what I know now, would my actions be the same and the answer is emphatically yes.**

**On my return from the Gulf War I spent the following five years in hospital and rehab. Due to my head injury, I had lost all memories of my wife Sandra and my children Liam and Zoe, and 50% of my life's history was wiped out (none of these memories have ever returned to this day). I had no emotions, such as love, hate, happiness, or sadness ... in my opinion just**

lacking one of these emotions makes one inhuman .... lacking all four well....

I had lost the use of my legs and feeling down one side. I couldn't talk, read or write. The prognosis was that I would never recover and my wife was advised to put me into a care home and move on. Sandra, being a nurse by trade, never gave up on me though. Out of 95 seriously injured service personnel that were married, only five marriages have survived to this day ... a hidden statistic in the aftermath of war.

I found myself in the darkest pit of despair that any human can find himself in. I even tried to take my life twice ... feeling such guilt that I had let my Queen and country down by coming home injured.

For those of us who have never experienced a life-altering injury, it's hard to imagine what the rehabilitation process would be like. What was the hardest part about going through rehabilitation for you?

AP – My time in rehab and hospital was my worst nightmare. I had spent twenty years in the Royal Navy having worked my way up through the ranks to officer. I was a weapons electronics engineering officer, designing new weapons and on call to travel the world to repair systems that had gone down on ships that were deployed. I was the provider, the carer for my family, and then suddenly finding myself dependent and reliant on others was horrible and beyond my control. Sandra and the children were complete strangers at the foot of my hospital bed and I think love is based on history and that was missing in my case.

You're blessed with a wonderful family and wife, Sandra, who really stood with you and helped you through your recovery process. I know there are a lot of families out there, still struggling with the early stages of rehab. What advice can you give to those families?

AP – I have fallen in love with Sandra all over again; whatever it was I saw in her when we first married 25 years ago, I found again! We had a full white wedding all over again so that I could feel we were

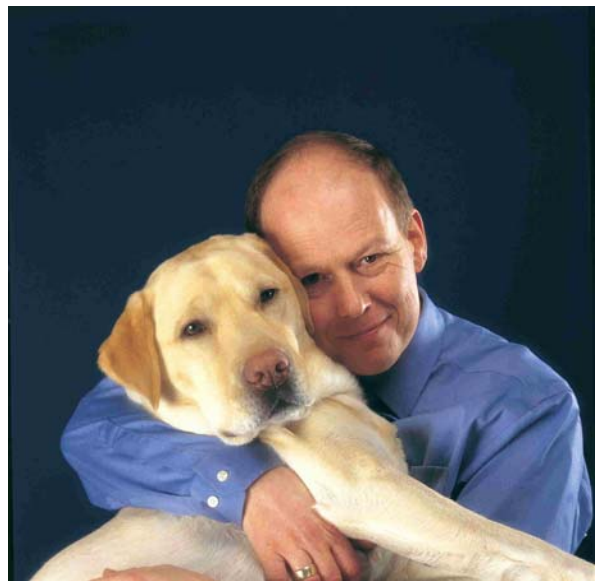


married. It was an opportunity to look forward with such hope and not back with constant sadness and “what ifs”. We couldn’t change the past, but we could take charge and guide our destiny.

To others, I would just say never give up. I nearly did and, knowing what I do now, it would have been such a waste. Many service personnel don’t get an option to return home ... they become a name on a war memorial in some sleepy English village. Those of us who have returned, even if broken, must not waste a second of our lives. When the guns fall silent on the daily battlefield, the battle with disability, trauma, and bereavement go on until one draws their last breath. Whether life gets better as time marches on I am not sure, but one does learn to live with the situation and draw on an inner strength to cope.

Can you recall what it was like when you first met Endal?

AP – I was going to daycare every day; a bus would pick me up in the morning and deliver me home in the evening – more for the sake of giving Sandra and the children some quality time without me constantly dragging them down. It was during this period that Sandra had decided to puppy walk for a service dog charity in the UK. To this day, we don’t know why, but one day my bus failed to pick me up and it coincided with a puppy class. I had to accompany Sandra to class and was sat in the corner of the training center in my wheelchair, unable to communicate with anyone and in a world of my own.



At the puppy class was a twelve-month-old Labrador that had health issues and it was questionable whether he could continue in the programme. He saw something on the floor by my wheelchair and trotted over picked it up and put it in my lap. He was not rewarded with treat or thanked and that hacked him off no end. He then found something else and put it into my lap ... still no reaction .... Anyway to cut a long story short, he kept loading my lap up with anything he could find and just before I completely disappeared behind a mountain of stuff ... for the very

first time in six years the man in the wheelchair smiled and the Allen and Endal story was born! Sandra took the puppy she was puppy walking, the chap in the wheelchair, and young Endal home.

When you and Endal first started working together, was it easy for you to communicate with and understand each other's needs or was there a learning process?

AP – I couldn't talk, but between Endal and I we learnt our very own sign language: touching my head was hat, my hand – gloves, my chin – electric razor, my chest – coat ... the list was endless. Ironically, I still couldn't communicate with my family, but Endal and I were as one. If I went to cross a road with out looking Endal would stop me and actually he very quickly became the solution to my memory problems.



How did Endal change daily life for you?

AP – Sandra and the children had become my carers and our relationships were different from that of husband and wife, father and children. Sandra was falling into her career role of nursing again.



Endal ,without training, had leant to put me into the recovery position, activate the emergency alarm, open a window and bark to a neighbor for help, or even open the front door and seek help.



If I fell unconscious in the bath ... for the ladies out there, think of Brad Pitt when I leave you with that mental image ... Endal would pull the plug out and then go through a range of emergency procedures.

Endal had had no formal training, other than socialization, but his ability to problem solve was incredible. Sandra knew that if she left me in Endal's competent paws that he could save my life. This gave us the space to rebuild a normal relationship. I have become independent and Sandra no longer has to be on call twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, allowing her the freedom and peace of mind to live her own life again.

Endal also reacted if I grunted or stuttered when asking something of him, and this encouraged me to communicate more. I now give talks all around the world about how important animals are in our lives.



Through Endal's unconditional love and devotion, I experienced 13 years of independence and a quality of life that no one, including myself, thought I would ever achieve again.



Endal even taught himself to operate an ATM machine, still the only recorded dog to be able to put the card in to the machine and then take out the card money and receipt. For this amazing feat he was voted Dog of the Millennium and has been filmed by over 330 film crews from all around the world.



Endal actually saved my life one evening when we were struck by a car and I was knocked unconscious out of my wheelchair. Endal pulled me into the recovery position, covered me with a blanket from under the buckled and upturned wheelchair, recovered my mobile phone, and pushed it into my face. Unable to wake me by barking, he limped off to a nearby hotel to raise the alarm. For this act of bravery and devotion he was awarded the PDSA Gold medal .... the animal's George cross.



Service dogs can be such a blessing for people who are disabled – filling the role of limbs for folks in wheelchairs, eyes for the blind, and ears for the deaf. How does someone know if they have a disability that's appropriate for having an assistance dog? What would your advice be to someone considering getting an assistance dog?

AP – Regardless of the level of anyone's disability, it has to be recognized that not everyone is suitable to have an assistance dog or even have a life style that is compatible. Every application though is taken on its own merits so there is nothing to lose by applying for an assistance dog and everything to gain.

After 12 years of service, Endal began to train a new assistance dog to fill his role. Tell us a little about Endal Junior (EJ) and how Endal assisted in training this new helper.

AP – Sandra realized that Endal was aging before I had reached the same conclusion and that I should be looking for EJ (Endal Junior) .... a suggestion that I resented at the time as this would affect the amazing relationship that I was having with Endal. After lot of soul searching, I realized that so much of what Endal was doing for me one can't teach a dog to do and if I introduced an "EJ," then the big yella fella could intuitively pass on some of his skills. I knew when EJ was a mere six weeks old and bringing me his food bowl ... just like the older dogs ... that this plan was going to work. Endal actually adored little EJ and EJ just loved Endal with every fibre in his little body.



Sandra now works for the assistance dog charity that gave me Endal as the puppy operations manager with some 90 odd puppies in her care aged between 6 week and 14 months. EJ and I have been attending weekly puppy classes and, as we are living with the puppy operation manager 24/7, we get away with absolutely nothing!



**Sadly, when Endal had to be put to sleep, I wrote this statement:**

### *My Endal*

*Having just completed the book and documentary, I had the unique and wonderful opportunity to explore Endal's and my our past in such detail. We laughed at the things we had done and actually at some of the things Endal was invited to were to open a school, open hydrotherapy centre, help launch Crufts, and even open a wheelchair accessible loo!*

*The list rolls on ... but if I was to think of the most important thing Endal has opened over his thirteen years, it has to be opening so many people's minds to how important and valuable dogs are in our lives ....well ... it really is a job well done my faithful Endal. I still can't pick a point in my life when I can say that did some thing in life that deserved Endal's unconditional love and devotion that I have experienced .... I been truly blessed, but now I realize that Endal was never only my dog, he was everyone's and the world truly is a sadder place today for his passing.*

*His greatest legacy has to be bringing me back to my family and also mentoring faithful little E J (Endal Junior) too ... who is already punching above his weight and able to do 90% of what Endal was capable of; but it would not have been possible if Endal had not been here. The two were as one and I would be being selfish to think my sense and feeling of loss was the greatest because Ikea [the Parton's Golden Retriever] and E J dearly miss him too ... the three Musketeers are two.*

*I had been given the opportunity yesterday morning to tell Endal how much I love him and to thank him for all he has done for me these last twelve years and that is possibly the most important and significant moment of our whole relationship. He went very peacefully in my lap, surrounded by those that loved him most, much loved and now much missed by the Partons.*

EJ has really taken on Endal's role and obviously my heart broke when Endal left my side, but little EJ was always there with a hanky to wipe away the tears. EJ, though still a young puppy, has maintained my level of independence and quality of life with his unconditional love and devotion.

I guess God has a few dogs at his feet and he loaned me Endal in my greatest hour of need and when the time came to take him back ... his work done ... He gave me little EJ to fill the huge hole that Endal had left in my life. I know Endal will be looking down on us now and wagging his otter-like tail with pride to see his protégée ably taking up his lead.



I understand that after losing Endal at 13 years old this year, you decided to set up an organization to provide needed assistance dogs to veterans and emergency services personnel (like police and fire fighters). Tell us a little about your plans for *Hounds for Heroes* and how people might help with this important effort.

AP – What is currently on offer in the UK to injured veterans in way of assistance dogs does not meet the need. Very few injured service personnel currently have assistance dogs ... perceiving them more as a badge of disability than ability. We ex-service types have immense pride and sense of independence. A group of us have realized that we need our own organization, one that understands our psychology and unique needs. Sadly though, there has been a huge resistance from the existing assistance dog organization in the UK. Having fought for the right of people to live in a free world regardless of one's creed colour, religion, or physical ability, the need to protect one's freedom of choice in all this is one battle we are not prepared to lose and the fire is in all our bellies to defend. The programmes in the USA that are working with veterans have been really helpful and we have learnt a lot from them. I am a strong believer that we really don't need to try to reinvent the wheel. Two of our trustees, serving members of the armed forces, have just returned from their tours of duty in Hellman and are fired up now to launch *Hounds for Heroes*. We have quickly realized though that we have to include emergency services

personnel (police, fire, etc.) in this group ... all heroes in our eyes, in uniform and serving Queen and Country. Ironically, quite a few are also ex-armed forces personnel.

In the UK, ownership of the dog still remains with the charities, unlike the rest of the world where ownership is given to the client but the jacket remains the property of the charity. Hence, this is why I wanted to train my own service dog and be given a choice. Admittedly, I am in a privileged position of having had the experience with Endal for 13 years, access to an assistance dog puppy class, and being married to the puppy operations manager of a service dog charity.

Anything else you'd like to add.

AP – Endal was very special to me ... but everyone should realize that they too can have a magical relationship with their dog, whether that dog is an assistance dog or a companion pet. Don't underestimate the impact of the human-animal bond. Dogs can also help bring people in a community together by helping to facilitate conversations and socialization between those who might otherwise not have gotten to know each other.

You might also be interested to know that I've been working with several organizations to advocate for dogs, including Labrador Retriever Rescue and Dog Theft Action (promoting dog safety from theft). Another wonderful organization is Vet Dogs that helps service Veterans. After the cameras stop and the papers are no longer reporting war news, military personnel and their families continue to struggle with the aftermath of war and war injuries. One service that Vet Dogs provides is to send dogs to greet military personnel when they return but are unable to be met by family. It's sad when there's no one there to greet you and a loving dog can really provide much needed affection and support to those in that situation.

Finally, I'm delighted to let you know that Endal story's is now being turned into a movie! I'm hoping that people will see how a fairly ordinary dog is able to turn someone's life around ... not only by providing physical services but also fostering an openness to emotions, communications, and important live-saving connections to others.

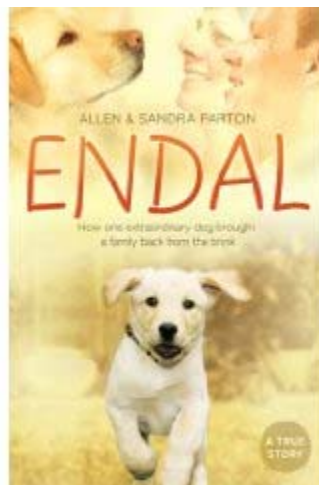


Before we concluded our chat, I was granted the first transatlantic interview with EJ. Although not naturally one to bark, Allen has been teaching EJ to bark when needing to alert for help. So EJ, is there anything Allen left out of this story that you'd like to add?

EJ – Arf! Arf – ARF!

I think EJ's telling us that Endal left Allen in good paws and that he and Allen will be carrying on their important work sharing advice with today's Veterans, working to help open doors for the disabled, and promoting the health-giving human-canine bond. EJ may not have had a lot to say today, but I'm confident he and Allen have a bright and busy future in store and that we'll be hearing much more from this new assistance dog!

**If you'd like to read more about Allen's amazing journey with Endal, check out the book Allen and his wife Sandra wrote, called *Endal. How one extraordinary dog brought a family back from the brink.***



**You can also learn more about Endal and EJ at:**

**Dog Cast Radio [http://www.dogcastradio.com/blog/23290\\_crufts-day-three.htm](http://www.dogcastradio.com/blog/23290_crufts-day-three.htm)**

**Labrador Rescue at <http://www.loveyourlabrador.co.uk/endal.html>**

**And if you're interested in helping some causes Allen supports, visit:**

**Labrador Retriever Rescue at <http://www.labrador-rescue.org.uk/>**

**Labrador Rescue at <http://www.loveyourlabrador.co.uk/>**

**Dog Theft Action at <http://www.dogtheftaction.com/>**

**Vet Dogs at <http://www.guidedog.org/vetdogs.htm>**