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Thanks to my service dogs over the past 15 years, I have been able to live a reasonably normal life, which included a demanding position as a research professor at a university medical school. A year ago, my last service dog passed away. While anticipating another dog from the fine organization that gave me the previous ones, I was disappointed to learn they would be unable to give me a dog with the skills now necessary due to complications from additional medical issues. Other credible service dog organizations reluctantly, but honestly, advised the same.

I did not want to give up. Knowing how valuable another service dog would be, I set out to find a trainer who could help me. Having worked closely with trainers from the national organization that provided my previous service dogs, I felt relatively knowledgeable about the questions to ask, the type of training needed, and the fact that—while there can be no guarantee that a fine dog will eventually work out as a service dog—the right trainer would be able to harness the animals full potential.

Training a dog to work as a service animal is a lengthy commitment in terms of both time (two years on average) and costs. My husband and I crisscrossed the country looking at dogs and interviewing trainers. Then, almost in our own backyard, someone suggested Pat Brown-John. Unlike other professional dog trainers with whom wed spoken, Pat had an immediate grasp of the situation and did not offer any false promises.

Today, the dog she has trained for us just turned a year old. To say that her training has exceeded all our expectations is to seriously understate her exceptional work. Her overt skills with every dog in her care reflect only a small portion of her capabilities and knowledge. She has an almost intuitive connection with every dog. The dog she is training for me has big paws to fill as I still think about and miss my previous service dogs. But when he stands stock still on a brace so that I can right myself, or steps ahead cautiously as I hold my hand inside his harness allowing me to walk with confidence, I know that the next year of training will only get better. I have a happy, confident dog, a wonderful pet, and undoubtedly the makings of the finest of service dogs. Pat Brown-John gave me hope and, because of her, I have a dog who is giving me back my independence.