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A B O U T U S

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Our mission is to establish optimal quality of life for the Northwest Parkinson's community.

We welcome comments and inquiries regarding this newsletter and all our activities. Our contact information can be found on the last page of this newsletter. We look forward to hearing from you!



NORTHWEST
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Indispensable dog is a 'special breed' to one patient

By Joanna Glickler

In Daniel Defoe's 1719 novel, an inhabitant of the island where Robinson Crusoe is shipwrecked becomes his indispensable companion and helper. The faithful "Friday" is named so because of the day of the week Crusoe finds him.

An indispensable helper and faithful companion is just what a dog called Friday has become to his human charge, Charles Countryman of Spokane, WA.

Countryman was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease in December 1993, when he was 42, although he and his doctors suspect the muscle stiffness he experienced in his leg starting in 1988—thought at the time to be an old athletic injury—was probably the disease's onset.

For Countryman, who goes by Charlie, Parkinson's meant a premature retirement from his career in state social services and the end of his duty with the Marine Corps Reserve. He'd begun by gradually reducing his work hours, but a lack of energy and difficulty multitasking led to his complete retirement in 2001.

These days, Countryman says he's faring well, having benefited from drug advances and the care of Dr. Anthony Santiago, a Spokane Parkinson's specialist.

He also credits Friday, a 3-year-old male yellow lab mix adopted from a Spokane shelter in 2003. Under the guidance of animal behaviorist Kathy



Photo by Kathy Person

Friday guides Charlie Countryman off the bus after a trip on Spokane Transit.

Rambo, Friday has grown to play a key role in Countryman's quality of life.

An eager learner, Friday has mastered a number of important tasks, including helping Countryman out of his chair, nudging him out of the "freezing" episodes common to many Parkinson's people, and picking up dropped items—his cane, his keys, his wallet.

Much of Friday's training has been about thinking ahead, Rambo said. While Countryman has never fallen in the shower, for example, Friday is trained to fetch the phone in that scenario.

Friday's personality is conducive to the role of helper: For one thing, he's motivated by food, which is used as a reward in initial training. Countryman's wife, Kathy Person, laughs as she tells the story of Friday's "random phone fetching" early on in his training in hopes of getting a treat.

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Donation adds mileage to your old car



Thinking of selling or trading your old car, boat, motorcycle, trailer or RV? Why not donate it to the Northwest Parkinson's Foundation instead? It's easy, it's tax-deductible, and your donation will help us achieve our mission—quality of life for the Parkinson's community.

We can accept donations of vehicles located in Western Washington. Get the process rolling by calling us toll-free at 1.877.980.7500. If your vehicle is accepted for donation, a qualified transportation company will contact you to arrange to pick it up. Paperwork is completed on the spot and your liability for the vehicle ends at that point.

Once the vehicle is sold, you'll receive a receipt certifying that you donated the vehicle. This letter shows the IRS that you are authorized for a charitable deduction.

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Importantly, Friday is also motivated by the work itself. "We can make almost any dog do something," Rambo said, "but we want them to *want* to do it. If you have an animal that wants to work, that's their reward."

While Countryman no longer goes cross-country skiing or hikes alone, this former triathlete and martial arts enthusiast still exercises daily. But now he does so with his canine exercise partner. Friday's presence brings him peace of mind as they hike along city trails and walk the neighborhood.

"When I'm shuffling along with short steps in the Parkinson's mode, gentle pressure from Friday pulling on the leash quickens my step," he said. "If we're downtown, he walks in a slightly forward heel position and clears a way for me."

Beyond being Countryman's "mobility assistance dog," Friday's presence also equals emotional support. "With Parkinson's, you have 'on' and 'off' times," he said. "During those off times, you don't feel like doing anything." But Friday tells him it's time to go out, whether or not Countryman feels like it. "And those walks are good for both of us," said Countryman, an advocate of regular exercise for anyone with Parkinson's. (He is certain his daily walks with Friday have kept the disease progression at bay.) He also said Friday gives him a sense of purpose because he has to focus on the dog's needs as well as his own.

And Friday is a compelling topic of conversation, meaning Countryman can't retreat into the corner in social gatherings—he is often front and center with Friday, answering people's questions.



Trainer Kathy
Rambo with Friday.

What makes a dog a good prospect for helping? Rambo said that beyond being food- and work-motivated, a helping dog must be well socialized and accepting of other people and animals. Dogs that are sensitive to sound and motion don't usually make the best helping animals.

She said sometimes a person's own dog can be trained to help. But even "if all the dog does is make you get up in the morning and take it for a walk, then wow—that's great," she said.

She acknowledged that the idea of dogs to help Parkinson's people is fairly novel: Countryman is her only Parkinson's client. But, given the positive outcomes, she's all for it: "I think it's an incredible idea."

Countryman agrees. "Friday has become much more than just some hound rescued from the pound—he has become a special breed, a companion dog... a trusted friend."

Helping animal resources

Charlie Countryman and Kathy Rambo both welcome your questions. Countryman's email address is dog.friday@earthlink.net. Rambo's is top20@localaccess.com. Her phone number is 509.714.8337.

In addition, the Washington-based Delta Society (www.deltasociety.org) is a starting point for information on service and therapy animals. The phone number is 425.226.7357.

Another resources is Assistance Dogs International Inc. (www.adionline.org), a coalition of nonprofits that train and place assistance dogs. Its website lists member nonprofits by geography.

Joanna Glickeler, a longtime animal lover, is development director at the Northwest Parkinson's Foundation.