

Wounded EOD Specialist Returns to Life and Nature with Help of Service Dog

For two decades, Trevor, a now retired Army First Sergeant, enjoyed his job as an Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) technician. “It was a unique job. Every day the mission was different, and every day you had to use your brain and learn something new,” he said. He enjoyed working with other EOD techs, who he found to be highly motivated and skilled.

Stateside, EOD techs provide support with explosives to everyone from county sheriffs to the FBI. But Trevor also served in major hot spots, including Kosovo, Iraq and Afghanistan.



Smoky Mountain Service Dog Gauge comforts Trevor as he prepares for surgery.

In 2009, while deployed in Afghanistan, he received a career-ending injury when he rushed to help a young soldier who had set off an accidental detonation. A second detonation severely wounded his abdomen, and Trevor underwent two and a half years of medical treatment before he could be medically retired. Peterson, who strives to see the positive in everything, just says “the good thing is no one else was injured. None of my soldiers were hurt.”

However, the injury changed his life. Surgeons had to remove his abdominal muscles, and coupled with a previous back injury, that affected his balance and mobility. The avid outdoorsman can no longer hunt, hike mountains or wade in trout streams. He also has problems with vision,

especially at night, and with depth perception. Even now, nine years after his injury, he visits doctors weekly.

For years, Trevor’s doctors recommended he apply for a service dog, and for years he resisted. Finally, at his wife Laura’s insistence, he applied to a Texas organization that had a dog for an EOD tech (the family of an EOD tech killed in action donated funds for the dog’s training with the stipulation the dog go to an EOD tech). The dog didn’t have the right training for Trevor’s needs, but the organization forwarded his information to Smoky Mountain Service Dogs (SMSD), which is located not far from Trevor’s home in Sharps Chapel, Tennessee.

Trevor was surprised when Suzy Kitchens, family liaison for SMSD, told him he was a good candidate, and even more surprised when she matched him with a dog just two months later.

Gauge, a Labrador retriever, has been Trevor’s service dog for eight months and “I can’t imagine life without him,” Trevor said. Gauge helps with his mobility and vision issues in myriad ways, such as turning on the lights when Trevor moves around the house at night. On wet concrete or on steps, Gauge stays close by to help with balance and stability.

*“He’s done wonders for me
... He takes care of me.”*

Trevor

“I get sore by the end of the day, and he can pull my shoes and socks off, put the socks in the basket and the shoes by the door. He can grab my cane, the remote if I drop it, or the phone if it’s ringing,” Trevor added. “He’s done wonders for me. My anxiety level being out in public is lower. He takes care of me.”

Trevor credits Laura with being the strength behind everything, noting she gave up her career to care for him. These days, Laura and Gauge “tag team” him, he joked.

With the dog, Trevor is able to return to the outdoors he loves so much. “Gauge and I take road trips, ‘nature-watching adventures’ Laura calls them. The peace of mind he gives Laura and me when I’m traveling is unbelievable, even if it’s only a few hours by vehicle. I can’t go hunting, but it’s about being outside and being with friends,” he said. “Gauge gives me a lot of confidence, and he gives Laura that confidence too. Smoky Mountain Service Dogs is a great organization that’s really making a difference in people’s lives.” 🐾