

## VET'S NEW BUDDY BRINGS HOPE AND HEALING



***Brian and Woody bonded from the start. “He’s very gentle-spirited,” Brian says of his new best friend.***

In 2011, Sgt. Brian, an MP, was on patrol in Afghanistan “outside the wire”; that is, outside the safe zone of a base camp or support installation.

Suddenly an IED exploded and his truck rolled over and into a ditch. He slammed his head, and even his helmet couldn’t prevent the skull fracture that occurred, nor the PTSD and TBI that have tormented him ever since.

He returned home in 2012 with a 90 percent medical discharge. “We’re fighting for 100 percent,” said his wife, Alesha. “He needs 24-hour care.”

“I had reached my limit with the battle that lived on in my head each and every day, and I had given up, literally,” Brian said.

The breaking point occurred when he didn’t show up at school one day last month. He attends St. Petersburg College—Seminole Campus—and was found heavily bleeding, confused and hopeless. “He had cut his arms,” Alesha explained. She rushed him to the nearest VA facility where he was hospitalized for suicidal ideation and attempt.

“I was lost,” he said. Brian, 28, and the father of three children, had previously applied with [K9s for Warriors](#) in Ponte Vedra, Florida to receive a service dog but had been on a waiting list for over a year and wasn’t expected to access the program until late 2018.

While Brian was in the emergency room, Alesha contacted K9s for Warriors service dog organization and explained her husband’s desperate situation. She learned that somebody had dropped the class and there was now a vacancy. “We would like Brian to come now. We will make it happen,” she was told.

But there was one problem—the cost of transportation. Ponte Vedra is 250 miles from the couple’s home in Pinellas Point, and due to Brian’s inability to work, “expenses were tight.”

That's when I reached out to Air Compassion for Veterans."

By the next day, a check covering fuel for two round trips had arrived. Alesha drove her husband the five hours to K9s for Warriors, then made the trip again three-and-a-half weeks later to pick him and Woody up following Brian's training and graduation on July 20. "Without



ACV's help, Brian would have had to hitchhike home!"

Woody is a boxer-shepherd mix donated by K9s for Warriors and specifically trained for Brian's disabilities. He's "very gentle-spirited," Brian says.

Woody wakes him up from nightmares, protects Brian's personal space by positioning himself as a barrier from strangers, and distracts him from stressful situations in public. "He does anything he can to playfully gain my attention in order to pet him, which scientists have proven reduces stress levels and blood pressure within three minutes."

Since being home and joined at the hip with his new buddy, Brian is now able to go to public places with Alesha and his children, Kiera, 7, Micah, 4, and Brantley, 16 months.

"I noticed a huge difference even four or five days after he was back home," Alesha said. "Before, I had to drag him out because he couldn't be left alone. He would just be grumpy and mean all the time. We went Disneyworld and he did amazingly well. I've never seen him that calm in a situation with that many people."

Brian and Alesha have sent many emails expressing their appreciation for ACV's timely help. "My family and I cannot even begin to gather our deepest gratitude into words to convey how much Air Compassion has changed our lives forever," he said.

Alesha added, "The kids love the dog. The past few days have been great. I can tell it's just going to get better from here."