

## How a Dog Can Be My Companion in Releasing the Demons Which Used to Save Me

How can Curtis help me? It's difficult to begin this response...Severe OCD, Major Depressive Disorder, PTSD, and low self-confidence swarm my brain with voices that constantly whisper and buzz, "I must write the PERFECT response. With perfect words and perfect grammar and perfect spelling and perfect ideas and perfect sentence structure and perfect thoughts and perfect intentions and the perfect number of sentences and ..." and I think you get the idea. This subject is so dear to my heart, that I'm afraid to mess it up. But thanks to intensive treatment and 12-step meetings, I'm healing from the scars and shame of my past and have the courage to write this. I'm going to prove how Curtis, the fur-baby that's been selected for me, would be helpful to my overall recovery from mental illnesses and eating disorders, as well as how beneficial he would be in my everyday life.

I've decided to title this letter, which may seem odd, but it seemed like the best thing to do. I need you to understand from the first glance at this, that I'm not blind to my past and what it's made me become. I used to **DEPEND** on perfectionism and extreme black-and-white thinking. I was a victim drowning in my own mind; but now, I'm a fighter. Although self-pity and self-disgust try to draw me back toward identifying as a victim, I am a trauma *survivor*, NOT a victim. Having a dog like Curtis is the next step in my fight for sanity and wholeness.

Curtis is not just a snuggle buddy, although he definitely will be! He's going to be my (very loved!) Psychiatric Service animal. Anxiety has been a part of my life for many years, but wasn't diagnosed till I was 11 years old. Panic attacks, hyperventilating, and oftentimes, it feels like there's an elephant standing on my chest. Another piece of anxiety is Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. PTSD is real. I look forward to Curtis's companionship through PTSD panic attacks – when a person being present can be even more triggering, he will be there for me. When I'm triggered with flashbacks of

sexual trauma, whether it be from the multiple rapes at the innocent age of 6, the sexual abuse from my ex-husband, or the “friend” who abused me last fall, Curtis will be there to support me through any feelings of shame, anger, and fear. When depression lurks in the shadows of my soul, or when all hope is lost, I can imagine pressing my face into his warm, breathing body and I feel...comforted. Finally, I can feel safe.

OCD is also part of my type of anxiety. To my surprise, Curtis can also help me with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. I didn't know there was help out there, but New Life is even with me through this struggle! I haven't had eyelashes in over two years due to trichotillomania (“A disorder that involves recurrent, irresistible urges to pull out body hair”), a symptom of OCD. I also struggle with obsessive repetition of thoughts, numbers, and phrases in my head. There are other symptoms of OCD present, but I have discovered that when I'm around animals, the thoughts have less power over me. I fully believe that Curtis can help me by being a (trained) companion.

Along with psychiatric help, Curtis will help me through day to day life and emotions. Many days, I have a hard time getting out of bed, and it's impossible to hide in bed when you have a dog licking your face to get you up! Walks and hikes through the magnificent Maine mountains will be more manageable knowing that Curtis will be by my side. And realizing that I have a responsibility to him to get up and go outside, will help motivate me. Also, Curtis will be comforting and emotionally supportive. My boyfriend is in the Coast Guard, so I have quite a bit of time alone at home. Curtis will be able to keep me company and help me feel safe and loved through these lonely days and nights.

Unfortunately, I'm unable to financially afford to get Curtis. I will be able to take care of food, toys, and other daily expenses, but the cost of receiving him is too steep for me. Because of mental illness, I'm unable to work as much as the average, healthy person. Panic attacks, fear, OCD, and Depression keep me locked in my own mind, and house. Meetings, support groups, and therapy, although helpful, also take much of my time and money. I desperately need help to get Curtis! And I thank you in advance for anything you can do!

Thank you for a piece of your valuable time today. I look forward to your help and working together to bring Curtis to his new forever-home!

