

■Sasha

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It wasn't.

When Sam fell from the elevation where the two were working, Larry was there with him.

"I was right there when he fell, but I couldn't do anything to stop it," he said, shaking his head.

At first, Larry thought that Sam may have survived, but as time passed and the rescue efforts turned to recovery, he knew.

His friend Sam was gone.

With a ragged and shaky voice, Larry described the look on his friend's face as he fell.

"I can't forget his face," he said, adding that he still dreams about the mill and the accident at night. "I have a hard time talking about it without getting upset. I was the last person to see Sam alive, and I was the last person he ever saw."

Because he also worked with the emergency response team at the mill, Larry was suddenly cast into another role, trying to respond to the accident.

Due to the circumstances surrounding Sam's death, Larry continued to feel somehow responsible, to go over the events and actions of the day, and to relive the accident in his mind, trying to find some way that he could have saved his friend. The trauma and stress have led to years of struggles that have been impossible to overcome. In the months following the accident, Larry realized that he needed help. He met with Human Resources personnel at the mill to seek assistance.

"They had a program for six visits for counseling," he said. "I had already been going to counseling with my pastor for months."

Larry continued to work for the next six months as he tried to cope with the trauma.

"That six months was a nightmare for me," he said. "It was hard going there every day, but I needed to work."

One of the most difficult parts of his role at the mill was



Sasha provides companionship for Larry when he is working aboard his tractor, and when he is in public places like businesses, restaurants, and events.

his continued position as emergency response leader. Although he was asked to return to a leadership role in that capacity, he found it impossible to deal with the emotions that came with it.

With his stress level continuing to pose a significant problem, Larry finally left the mill to try to get his stress under control.

"I knew my career at GP was over," he said.

In October of that year, Larry suffered another blow – the loss of his father.

"A lot happened to me that year that probably contributed to the problems I have," he said.

Larry was diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and now lives with the day-to-day struggle to cope with the memories, the questions, and the trauma of the loss.

But three years ago, he met Sasha.

The beautiful Husky with the striking eyes would soon become his constant companion and his source of comfort through the emotional turmoil that has continued since the accident.

Larry and his wife Linda got Sasha when she was only a nine-week-old puppy – an untrained and rowdy dog that few would have believed could be trained as a service dog.

"I knew I wanted to get a service dog," Larry said. "A Husky is not a service dog, most of the time. Most are labs, or some other breed. I just wanted a Husky."

At first, Sasha was not at all able to provide the service that Larry needed, but after weeks of obedience training by a professional, followed by training as a service dog, she developed into a trained working dog that is now his constant companion.

According to American Humane, about 500,000 service dogs are now providing assistance in the United States, including dogs utilized for a variety of medical issues, including those with visual or hearing impairments, epilepsy, or other problems. Service dogs are being increasingly trained to help individuals with PTSD, including military personnel and others who suffer with it. Studies show that service dogs can reduce stress and anxiety levels for those diagnosed with the disorder.

Sasha is certified by USA Service Dogs and holds a certification number and collar denoting her training. She wears a specialized vest with a vibrating collar that lets her know that she is on the job.

"If I take her anywhere else, she has her vest on," Larry said. "If you take her vest off, she is a different dog – much more high-strung and playful. But when she's working, she's not like that at all."

It's like she knows that, when that vest is on, she has to be different," Linda added.

Larry said that he has not had any problems with business owners or members of the public when he takes Sasha into public places.

"I've taken her everywhere – to restaurants, the hospital, everywhere in public, and never have any problems," he said. "I have a tag that I wear around my neck when we go in places where they don't know me."

For Larry, Sasha's presence has been a giant step forward in his ability to cope with the stress and emotional distress that he still suffers.

"When we've been at the counselors' office and I get upset, she'll get up in my lap," he said. "She can sense when I'm having a hard time. She's the smartest dog I've ever had."

But Sasha has provided much more than comfort for Larry. She has become his ally in the fight against PTSD. While others have not been able to get through the hard shell of protection that he has built around himself, Sasha has broken that barrier.

"She is able to get through to him when even I can't," Linda said. "And it's like she gets more attached to him every day. She's focused on him and won't take her eyes off of him. The longer we have her, the more she does that."

Both Larry and Linda said that they want the public to know that people have service dogs for a reason, and oftentimes, those reasons are not visible on the outside.

"In the beginning, when people would see her, they would say, 'why do you have a service dog?'" Larry said. "What's wrong with you? When I would tell people I have PTSD, I felt embarrassed. As a man, you think you should be able to handle things."

They also want people to know that when service dogs are working, they are not pets. They are doing a vital job for their owners.

"So many people come up to her and want to pet her because she's so beautiful," Larry said. "If you ask me, most of the time I'll say yes. But so many people will come by and see her, I try to turn her where they can see the words 'do not pet'."

While Sasha has provided a much-needed solace for Larry, he still struggles. For Linda, watching her husband cope with the devastation and emotional trauma following the accident has altered her life in ways that she can barely describe without tears.

"He's just not the same person," she said. "There is a wall I can't get through."

Larry finds it difficult to watch young families interact, to see fathers with their children, and to know that Sam will not be there with his own.

"Different things trigger it," he explained. "Small children and their parents. A dad with his daughter or son. I feel guilty. I still have those things, and Sam is not there to have them."

"I feel so guilty because I'm alive and he's not," he continued. "I was 50 something, and Sam was 29. It just doesn't make sense."

Since the accident, Larry has become close to Sam's wife and children, visits his grave often, and has recently spent time with the whole family.

"I can't describe how it has felt to be able to do that," he said. "Just knowing that they are okay, that means the world to me."

Every year, on the anniversary of the accident, Larry pens a letter to Sam and leaves it on his grave.

"His wife has every one of the letters," he said.

While Larry talked, Sasha continued to lay quietly at his feet, raising her head often to ensure that her owner is okay.

Larry is still coping with the tragedy, the loss, and the stress that has altered their lives, but, he said, he finds strength in the Husky that has become his solace and his friend.

"I have bad days," Larry admitted. "When I'm out working on my tractor, when I'm alone, I still have really bad days. But when she's with me, I'm able to pet her and talk to her. It just makes it better. She's literally my best friend."

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Allen, Nathan J. - CPL Army
Barefield, Aubrey - PFC Army
Bowman, James E. - 2LT Army
Boykin, David E. - PVT Army
Bozeman, Eldridge - PVT Army
Britt, W. Earl - PV1 Army
Broadhead, William F. - PVT Army
Bush, ED M. - PVT Army
Bush, Frank S. - PVT Army
Champion, Robert - Army
Chappell, Herbert A. - Army
Chesnut, ALT - Army
Cochran, Buford F. - CPL Army
Coke, Emmett L. - Army
Coleman, Wilkes - Army
Cook, Joe D. - Army
Cooper, John W. - Army
Covington, T.R. - Army
Cunningham, Earlie E. - Army
Daniels, Pliny E. - Army
Davis, Jefferson - PVT Army
Devane, Emma L. - Navy
Devane, Percy F. - SGT Army
Dikes, Freeman A. - Army
Doggett, Slater A. - Army
Dothard, Raymond - Army
Ezell, Clark T. - Army
Ford, Charles E. - Army

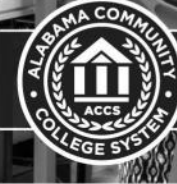
Ford, Homer H. - Army
Gibson, Joseph F. - Army
Green, John A. Jr. - Army
Haguewood, Scott - Army
Hamrick, John E. - Army
Hendley, Calvin B. - Army
Herrington, E.C. - Army
Hicks, Bryan - Army
Hurst, Arzett - Army
Jackson, Henery - Army
Johnson, Norman - Army
Keener, Freeman - Army
Kennedy, Lonnie J. - Army
Land, Willie L. - Army
Lanier, Frank W. - Army
Lanier, William F. - PFC Army
Littlepage, C.T. - Army
Lolley, O.H. - Army
Lucas, William C. - Army
Lyles, Austin B. - Army
Mason, Louis
Mazingo, Joe D. - PVT Army
McIlwain, William S. - PVT Army
McIlwain, W. Stover - Army
Miller, Andrew - PVT Army
Morgan, Joseph S. - Army
Mosley, William "Bill" - Army
Odom, John M. - Army
Pittman, Joe - PVT Army

Powell, Benjamin - Army
Powell, Eddie W. - Army
Rackley, Bryant - Army
Rentz, Gerald A. - Army
Rodgers, Mossier C. - PV2 Army
Sager, John L. - Army
Scott, D.W. - Navy
Scott, Edward E. - Army
Sealey, Elmo E. - Army
Shamburger, Leonard - CPL Army
Shaw, R.W.
Skelton, C. C. - Army
Slay, Auburn T. - Army
Smith, James H. - Army
Smith, William E. - Army
Stafford, Clyde - Army
Taylor, A. Gray - Army
Tew, William E. - Army
Tindle, Matthew M. - Army
Wallace, Jessie J. - PVT Army
White, Dale V. - Army
Whittington, Robert
Wilcox, Carlton - Army
Wilcox, Winston - Army
Wilson, William H. - Army
Young, Joseph W. - Army
Young, Joseph W. - Army
Young, James D. - Army

**If you are aware of any WWI veteran not listed above,
please contact Tommy Dailey at 334-341-2391 or email Cw4dailey@tds.net.**

American Legion Post 81 in Butler is putting together lists of local veterans who have served in wars through the years in order to honor them on the new Veterans Memorial Park that is being erected. Listed above are veterans who served in WWI, according to available records.

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