



My name is **Stefania Ventura** and the reason I have this service dog as a companion is that I have epilepsy.

I am prone to complex partial seizures; this neurological disorder causes me to become unconscious and often leads to falls which cause severe injury. Certain types of injuries that I am prone to are head injuries, scratches, breaking my nose, and even suffocation if I fall faced down onto the snow or other soft surface.

The effects of epilepsy have convinced me to obtain a service dog.

This service dog - **Vader** - is a new addition to my life that has changed my life in a very positive way. *There is one word to describe this silent companion and that is a "miracle"*. Because of him, I feel there is a sense of safety around me. My self-confidence has increased allowing me to lead a more independent life. That is what I love about my seizure-response service dog.

Before going to the **Lions Foundation of Canada** in November last year, I was in a car accident. I experienced a concussion which made the frequency and severity of my seizures increase. Thanks to my research and suggestions from others, I applied to the Lions Foundation of Canada to obtain the assistance of a service animal.

I stayed at the Lions Foundation School in Oakville for 3 weeks uninterrupted. Going to classes, meeting people who have various disabilities and getting to know and work with the wonderful and warm staff members, was very interesting and fun. On my third day I met my service dog, Vader. My life improved from then on. The bond between us has increased and my feelings of safety, self-confidence, security, and independence have become stronger. Those facts are what have made me a happier person now!

Thanks to the bonding between me and Vader, my service dog has demonstrated a great capacity to learn how to predict several of my seizures prior to their occurrence. After several days of intense practice and bonding sessions, he developed his ability to sense upcoming seizures, and warn me of the onset of a seizure a few minutes in advance, so that I can find a safe location to settle before the possibility of getting injured.

There are a few examples from my everyday life, which illustrate how much Vader assists me at home and at work. I am a secondary school teacher, and two months ago, there was once an incident where I was teaching my students and my companion

suddenly tried to get my attention. He began rubbing his body against my knees while pushing me toward a chair close by. Students also started to see that he was acting differently. I decided to sit down, and after 30 seconds I had a seizure! What a blessing that I was safe! Of course I do not recall anything that happened during the seizure, but my students stated that my service dog was worried, and tried his best to be sure I received help from the office and from the students.

On December 24th, 2010 I took my companion out for a walk, and after an hour, I noticed he pulled me onto the ground covered in snow. I saw him rubbing his body against my knees, and acting worried. Suddenly I had a seizure on the ground rather than on the cement of the sidewalk. I had no injuries. I woke up with a lady next to me asking if I was okay. I also woke up with my companion licking my face and trying to lift my head as if he was asking me to get well soon.

At home, I have a Lifeline with a puck on the floor. When I have a seizure, Vader presses the puck which automatically calls the emergency assistants. Since I become unconscious and cannot respond to the assistants, they contact five other people in my family and friend-circle to help me.

Having Vader often prevents me from getting injured badly. I have learned to be careful and to listen to Vader. I have also learned to pay closer attention to his warnings. It took time and a lot of work to understand his patterns of communication, but it is worth every moment of my life. He is my angel and my warning system. I love him so much.

It has now been almost five months since we have been together, and I cannot imagine my life without this amazing silent companion. Every single day I can get up and feel that I have more control over my day. Vader is always there.

Thanks to **Care-Alive** who generously sponsored Vader as the service dog for me, and thanks to the hard work of the Lions Foundation of Canada, I now have the opportunity to educate others since experience has taught me that many people do not know very much about service dogs. I have run into several situations where people have the preconceived idea that guide dogs are only for people who are blind and I have had to correct this incorrect notion several times. I would like to continue to correct the stereotypes about guide dogs, and I feel that the message must be passed on.

Vader and I do our best to continue the hard work that the sponsors Care-Alive and the amazing experts at the Lions Foundation of Canada have dedicated their time to do for people in need. These fuzzy little angels like Vader become a guardian angel to help save one's life.



There is nothing better than saying that this is a blessed dream that has come true. *Finally, I am safe, healthier, and more independent with my service-dog!*

Stefania's sister Patrizia, Stefania & Vader at Care-Alive's Oscar Party in February, 2011