

Andrew—One Family's Miracle

By Sarah Jensen



Brigadoon has been a life saver for our family, both figuratively and literally. When I found Brigadoon, I was searching for a dog that would help my son, Hunter. He has Cerebral Palsy. He needed help with his balance and mobility. That doesn't sound too bad; there are lots of places that train dogs for that right? Well, yes and no. You see when we started the process with Brigadoon, Hunter was only 2 years old.

I contacted every single service dog group in the western US, some in central and eastern US and even a few in Canada. I kept getting the same answer. Not a single one of them would place a dog with a child under 10, in some cases 14. I could not believe it. Hunter is not the only child

to have Cerebral Palsy, but no one would help us.

I found Brigadoon and they were my last hope. I felt like we were on a ship back in the 1800's that was trying to weather a class 5 hurricane. The winds were deafening, the skies were black and I was about ready to give up hope, not just for Hunter, but for all of the parents and kids who may need help but couldn't find it.

When Denise Costanten, founder of Brigadoon, told me to come on up and we would see if she could help, it is hard to describe the feelings that I had. My belief in the human race was returning. We met Andrew in March of 2006. At this time, Hunter still was not able to walk yet, and was just beginning to crawl. It was love at first sight, although I don't know who loved him more, me or Hunter! Hunter pulled himself across the floor and gave Andrew a great big hug!

Andrew was only nine months old at the time, so I knew we would have to wait, but I was willing to wait if it meant that soon Hunter would have help and be able to do more things like other kids could do!

By July Hunter was beginning to be able to walk a bit. He still needed his walker, but he was getting there! He was even able to say a few words! Our joy was soon deflated rather quickly though. In December just before we were set to go see Andrew for another visit, Hunter had a massive seizure. Then 3 weeks later he had another one, each of them about 90 minutes long.

I knew that Andrew was being trained already to help with balance and mobility, but now that Hunter had a serious seizure disorder, could he possibly become a response dog as well? No problem! Andrew rose to the challenge! He began his seizure alert training. Denise made it clear that there is no guarantee that Andrew will be able to detect a seizure before it starts, but he will get Hunter help and stand with him to help keep him safe when he has a seizure.

In a few months, bonding with the two boys began: visits to Brigadoon, then Andrew came home. A weekend at first, then a week, finally a month. Soon it became clear that Andrew was no longer just a Brigadoon dog in training. He was Hunter's boy as we called him. With all the success that Hunter was having with Andrew, there was still a surprise up Andrew's sleeve, or paw in this case.

When he came for a month long home visit, he was acting a little funny. He didn't want to stay with Hunter. He kept running between Hunter and me. I could not figure out what was going on. Any time I went to get up, he would get up and push me back down. A few days later, I was in the emergency room. I had a massive kidney infection. I could not believe it. This was supposed to be Hunter's dog and here he was taking care of the whole family!

I could not have asked for a better ending to this journey. We will be forever in Brigadoon's debt for the security and independence that Andrew has brought for Hunter and our entire family!