

Chester and His Dog

American Legion, Amvets, Veterans of Foreign Wars: These are the places where a veteran can go and find almost instant camaraderie. Everyone there is either a veteran, or a close relative of a veteran. Many of these men and women are firmly in their retirement years, but not all. These are the places where a veteran, who might be living alone, can find friends, good conversation, meals, and a fair price for a beverage.

These are also the places where a veteran or relative can go to find ways to become involved with the greater community. We supply speakers to schools, mentors to Boy Scouts, bats and balls to little league units, and myriad other charities. One of those is Southeastern Guide Dogs.

I've always been aware of service dogs. We see them everywhere. But it wasn't until I met Chester that I became fully aware of what they can do.

I was standing at the service bar, waiting for Betsy to bring me my drink. For those of you unfamiliar with bars, the service bar is the area where a patron who is seated at a table goes to place an order. There are no waiters or waitresses.

Seated on the stool adjacent to that service bar, was a man whom I had met and conversed with a few times. Chester usually sat quietly and drank no more than two beers per visit, while Bunker, his dog, lay quietly at his feet. We aren't supposed to pet service dogs, so even though I'd only spoken with Chester a few times, I knew him better than I knew Bunker.

As I stood there, Bunker suddenly jumped up and began to paw at Chester's arm.

I looked at Chester and said, "That's pretty unusual behavior, isn't it?"

Chester didn't answer for a moment or two, then looked back at me and replied, "It's okay. I was having a seizure. Bunker broke me out of it."

I was amazed. I was standing no more than two feet from Chester, and I didn't notice. The dog, apparently dozing on the floor, did notice and saved Chester from falling off of his stool.

Later on, after doing a little research, I learned that we lose 22 veterans a day to suicide. I also learned that PTSD is the most common precursor to suicide. The final bit of information that I will share is that, since 1988, not a single veteran with a dog from Southeastern Guide Dogs has succumbed to suicide. They have been my charity of choice ever since.

One Hundred percent of the profits from aluminum and steel cans donated by Townshores goes to help prevent veteran suicide.

The American Legion Riders of Post 125 are extremely grateful for your support.

Suicide Prevention Among Veterans Begins with a Dog.

Article by Thomas R. Cuba

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