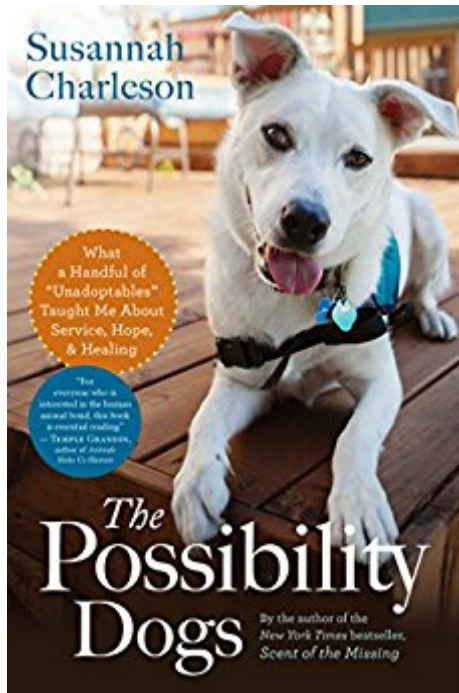


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# The Possibility Dogs: What I Learned From Second-Chance Rescues About Service, Hope, And Healing



## Synopsis

After a grisly search-and-rescue operation led to troubling consequences for author Susannah Charleson, she found that her relationship with Puzzle, her search dog, made a surprising contribution to her own healing. Inspired by that experience, Charleson learned to identify abandoned dogs with service potential, plucking them from shelters and training them to work with disabled human partners, to whom the dogs bring assistance, comfort, and hope. Similar to her best-selling first book, *Scent of the Missing*, Charleson's *The Possibility Dogs* goes beyond the science that explains working canines to tell the stories of the dogs themselves. Like Merlin, a black Lab puppy who had been thrown away in a garbage bag and now stabilizes his partner's panic attacks. And service dog Jake Piper, a formerly starving pit bull mix who went from abandoned to irreplaceable. This heartwarming combination of memoir and research is sure to both inform and inspire.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

A few years ago, I was entranced by a book cover and stopped to pick it up. "Scent of the Missing" was my first exposure to Susannah Charleson's writing and I vowed it would not be my last. If you

have any interest in search and rescue operations, you should read this compassionate and compelling book. By the end, you will add a number of two- and four-footed heroes. I grabbed "The Possibility Dogs" without hesitation or even much perusal of the topic. Ms. Charleston did not disappoint me. This second book is every bit as good as the first. "The Possibility Dogs" doesn't have the heart-stopping detail about search and rescue that was covered in "Scent of the Missing," but believe me, lives of dogs and people are at stake here. Patients needing service dogs are often just as lost as a child or an elderly patient who have wandered away from home. Depression, trauma, physical illnesses, put these people at risk. Often, "invisible illnesses" make it doubly hard because the general public does not understand and cannot empathize with their need. Dogs first came into service for the blind and visually impaired back in the 1920s. World War II saw many soldiers returning with visual issues in need of a dog. As people realized the potential for canine assistance, dogs have gotten an even larger role from seizure detection to mobility and balance assistance. With Iraq and Afghanistan, the need for dogs has increased--but many of these animals are helping with PTSD. Some organizations breed dogs for the task. The pups are subsequently trained and weeded out. But a group of intrepid rescuers asked -- what if we tried shelter dogs? A good question, since the need for homes for these animals has increased.

The book is about the author's love of dogs and her efforts to train psychiatric service dogs and eventually found a non-profit called Possibility Dogs, Inc to do just that. In the first chapter we are introduced to Bob, a burly ex-firefighter suffering from PTSD and helped along the way with his service dog Haska. In the very next chapter we learn of the author's own battle with PTSD, after coming upon a gruesome scene during a search mission she and her partner were not expecting and how this changed her life goals. Ms Charleston seems to have a houseful of mixed breed rescues of various sizes from tiny Pomeranians to her main search dog Puzzle, a female golden retriever. Although she dearly loves Puzzle she realizes that she is simply not cut out to be a psychiatric service dog, so she begins her quest to secure one wanting to train it herself. During chapter eight the author documents the traits she is looking for in potential service animals and how she goes about testing for them. In the very next chapter, which I found particularly interesting, she discusses some rather inexpensive modifications to the home environment that would allow a service animal to help with both physical and psychiatric task assistance. e.g. changing door knobs to door handles, which can also be very helpful to those with severe arthritis; adding a sturdy rope to the refrigerator so that the dog can open it and bring things from inside to the human companion; and adding inexpensive masking tape to a portable phone to make it easier for the dog to grasp and

so that its teeth don't mar the phone. There were others but I found these simple and most beneficial.

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