

## TRUE STORY

# Simon and Axel

Simon Cook (58) from Oxfordshire, has an unknown neurological disease which throughout his life has spread through his body, and as a result he uses a wheelchair to help him get around.



When Simon was younger, his ankles would break regularly. When he was 17 years old he had several operations and doctors managed to get him walking again, with the aid of full-length callipers on his feet.

Later, when Simon was in his twenties, he returned home one night with severe back pain. Simon said: "I told my wife that my back was aching, the pain was horrific, it was like an explosion in my spine. I must have passed out because the next thing I knew I woke up in a hospital bed. That was when the doctors told me I was paralysed from the waist down, I was devastated, it was a huge blow because I was still so young, and my life changed overnight."

As a result, there was a huge impact on Simon's personal relationships and he really struggled with social isolation and loneliness during the first seven months of the pandemic.

In 2019, Simon had applied for an assistance dog with Dogs for Good, and because he'd had dogs before, he knew the unconditional love and support that a four-legged friend can bring. Dogs for Good receive over 5,000 enquiries a year, and fortunately they were able to find the perfect match for Simon in the form of yellow Labrador Retriever cross, Axel.

When Axel arrived about a month before the second lockdown, everything instantly changed for the better. The pair clicked immediately, and Simon said: "The first time I met Axel he was so affectionate, and it just felt so good, I knew he was the perfect dog for me. I was thrilled to welcome him into my life, I'll never forget the day he arrived, he just changed everything for me overnight. Having Axel in the second lockdown improved my life beyond measure, I suddenly found myself wanting to go out and enjoy life and because I had Axel, I met so many new people and made loads of friends."

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Every assistance dog is specially trained to help with practical tasks that many people with disabilities find difficult or impossible to do, such as opening and closing doors, retrieving items like keys or a bag, loading and emptying the washing machine, pressing a pedestrian crossing button and reaching up to shop-counters with items such as a wallet.

Simon says Axel is the reason he gets out of bed every day.

