

## October Members of the Month

**Daniel and Stephanie Dooley**  
Franklinville, NJ

### Two Worlds Become One

In April of 2015, I was engaged to the love of my life, Stephanie. Shortly after, in June of 2015, we bought our home together. Things were truly falling into place, except one thing seemed to be missing. Despite my mother's constant reminders that grandchildren were the obvious next step, I had my heart first set on a four legged member of our soon to be family. This overwhelming desire had manifested over the last ten years since my dad first become very ill.



Much of my father's remaining few years were spent between hospitals and rehabilitation centers. Each time we visited him at one of these facilities, he was always happy to see us, but his first question was, "How is my puppy doing?" My dad was referring to our family's then English Bull Dog, Dooley. After realizing that my dad would spend most of his remaining days away from home, I had Dooley trained as a therapy dog. The look on my dad's face the first time I brought his "Puppy," a then four year old dog, to see him will be something I will never forget; how dogs can make the worries of the world disappear.

Soon after the passing of my father, Dooley became ill and passed away at the young age of five. Over the last decade, my desire to get another dog only grew stronger. For years I researched, searching for the perfect breed and on numerous occasions had picked up the phone to call a breeder only to hang it back up with the realization that between the demands of my job and finishing graduate school and then my doctorate that it just wasn't the right time to take on any additional responsibilities that come along with caring for, training, and loving a new addition to my life.

But now I had someone to share this commitment with. Stephanie, not growing up with any pets, was at first skeptical but remained open to the idea, understanding how important it was to me. I told her all about the dogs that I had researched, and ensured her that I had found the perfect breed, A Greater Swiss Mountain Dog, but as to not scare her away by their official name, I only referred to the breed as a Swissy. There was only one problem, neither of us actually had seen a Swissy in person, but that didn't stop me from pretending I knew everything about the breed, spouting off every known fact about them, and expressing time and again, "How great they are said to be with children."

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Stephanie, as in her approach to almost everything, was practical yet supportive. I knew that I had one shot to seal the deal, so picking the right breeder was a necessity. For me the choice was obvious, Stephanie and I went to visit Swiss Kiss Farms located in Elizabethtown, PA.

In September of 2015 we went to meet with the owners, Katie and Randy Markley. Just as I had hoped, all of their pets were living in their home, swimming in their pool, and running free with all of nature's beauty. Mrs. Markley explained that the key to a sound "Swissy" was responsible breeding and exposure. Not only were Katie and Randy a true resource with genuine love for all their pets, their dogs were beautiful, mannerly, free spirited, lighthearted, and for Stephanie, very big. However, there was one six month old pup that stole her heart: "Skye The Little Guy."

As the next litter was expected, we were placed on a list of potential owners. As luck would have it, we were number seven on that list and Friday had only whelped six pups. I explained to Katie that we were disappointed, but we were committed to her to find us the perfect dog, as we trusted her and felt instantly connected to both her and Randy.

We talked about how I wanted to start an AAT program at my school where I was Superintendent.



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AAT (Animal Assisted Therapy) is when an animal is incorporated into therapy sessions facilitated by a trained mental health professional in order to help a client achieve specific therapeutic goals. The research has found that the benefits of AAT include:



- Increased participation in and disclosure during therapy
- Increased self-esteem
- Anxiety Reduction
- Enhanced Mood
- Reductions in ADHD symptoms
- Enhanced socialization skills in individuals with Autism
- Reduced perception of pain
- Reduced PTSD symptoms

In April of 2016, while waiting for the next litter of pups, Katie called me and told me that after much consideration she believed she truly had a perfect match for me and Stephanie. She asked if we remembered “Skye” who was now the “Not So Little Guy” at thirteen months, and asked if we would be interested. We were thrilled, as the last ten years of waiting for the right moment had ended with one phone call. Katie and Randy had believed in Skye’s new endeavors so much that they donated him to us, for the greater good to serve the students with disabilities in my district.

The deal came with one catch, Skye was co-owned by his breeder Joe and Carol Neuman of Kismet’s Swissies, with the intent for conformation and potential breeding. I knew nothing about owning a show dog, and at first was skeptical about having to co-own our newest addition to our family. However, Katie assured us that we were in good hands with Joe and Carol and boy was she correct. Joe and Carol are both so knowledgeable about the breed, and Joe gave us a crash course on conformation after our first dog show together; which was harder than my final comprehensive exam in college. I was so impressed on how much he knew, and how much he cared about the breed and his line of dogs. The only person that may be a bigger fan of Joe than us, is Skye who knocks us out of the way to get to Joe every time he sees him.



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Joe and Carol have become a huge part of Skye's recent success in conformation and an all-around great resource for the breed. Just in the last few weeks, Skye completed his Championship and is well on his way towards his Grand Championship, with 10 points, 2 Majors, and 2 Champion of Record wins. Over the last few months we would consider Joe and Carol not only our mentors but also our friends; one more example of how the MAGS community continues to grow and unite as a family.

Stephanie and I were married on August 5, 2016, and we are now officially a family. All three of us work very hard each day, and we are so thankful to crawl up on the couch with each other after a hard day at work.



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Skye and I go to work together Monday through Thursday where Skye, a registered Therapy Dog with a Canine Good Citizen title, works with 10-12 students per day, at three schools. We have visited students of ours in hospitals and partial care facilities. Skye works with multiple school counselors, school social-workers, and school psychologists throughout the week to meet with students one-to-one or in small groups.

Our family motto is to make a difference in a person's life every day. Skye touches many, but most of all he has made a difference in our life by all of the joy and love he has provided during our first few months together as husband and wife. We are looking forward to our days ahead as our love for him and for each other continues to grow.

