

## Brett's Story about 'Doc'

DOC is a simple name for a complex and perceptive animal. DOC emanates business from the get-go. As he enters the arena his ears are perked and it is clear that he senses his job has started. DOC's job is one of utmost importance to me as Brett's mom; for DOC's job requires that he keeps my son safe while progressing toward re-learning to walk after receiving a severe traumatic brain injury (TBI) three years ago.

While DOC takes his job seriously, he allows for moments to keep the mood light because it's always more fun to learn through laughter! Case in point: when my Brett was still barely able to utter a word, DOC would elicit from Brett a whole sentence by letting out a loud gregarious snort, to which Brett would respond "WHAT'S UP DOC?" The whole team; sidewalkers, leaders, instructor, plus Brett would break out in a great belly laugh! Just a coincidence? Perhaps. But maybe, DOC is as good as I think he is, and there was some volition there.

Speaking of sidewalkers, Brett was barely able to keep himself upright in the saddle when he first started riding two years ago. Two sidewalkers were required for Brett's safety. Brett could not walk. Brett could barely talk. His upper body and lower body muscles were tight. One arm had regained no movement yet, and the other could barely grip around DOC's rein when he first started. At the initiation of Brett's rides, Susie had to make a choice. She had to decide which horse could allow Brett to progress, could allow for safety for a then-16-year-old, 6 foot tall, very impulsive young man recovering from a coma and a TBI. She chose DOC. And she chose well.

When faced with Brett's impulsivity, DOC is also a ROCK STAR! But first, did I mention that now Brett can talk! Brett cannot pass an opportunity to tell a fabulous one-liner, even while standing at the top of the ramp waiting to mount DOC while he is led to his mounting position. And his one-liners generally are hysterical so the crowd gets to laughing, which just eggs him on to dig deeper into his joke reserves. So this means DOC must patiently wait for Brett to wrap up his comedy routine. I do not know how DOC does it, but this is a horse with the patience of a saint.



So once Brett's verbal antics are shut down by pragmatic instructor Susie, it's time for DOC to really shine. Up to this point, I haven't even mentioned a thing about DOC's hard work physically and mentally while Brett is riding. Truthfully this is DOC's greatest achievement. Because of DOC's smooth, rhythmic gait, Brett now is able to get his hips relaxed. Those of you in the know understand what an incredible accomplishment this is for a young man such as Brett who physically has so many obstacles. He can now get his hips moving. Thanks to DOC! Because of DOC, Brett has gained so much confidence in his riding abilities, and gained so much trunk control, so much riding stability, that Brett is willing to ride outside now.

Over the course of two years of riding and heaping helpings of hard work on DOC and Brett's parts, Brett has progressed from having a leader plus two side walkers, to the lead rope being taken off and needing just one side walker that stands close by with hand on saddle, but without hands on Brett. Oh yes, Brett is nearing independent rider status!

I should share one other most essential and exciting fact...BRETT CAN WALK! He can now walk using a walker and also can walk with a minimum of assistance using a quad cane. He is not stopping there! With DOC's unwavering support and DOC's diligence in his ever important job of being a therapeutic horse, Brett, now almost 19 years old, expects to reach his goal of walking with no assistive devices. DOC is there for Brett every single week. Brett counts on DOC. DOC is the animal that is most central, most necessary, most loved in Brett's life.

In short, DOC is exactly the horse Brett needs physically. He's exactly the horse Brett needs to build his confidence. DOC's exactly the horse that Brett needs, period. DOC has offered me a new perspective about what it means to demonstrate heart and soul through hard work, as has my son Brett. They are both true champions who define what a hard worker is with the willingness to do exactly what it takes to succeed. DOC works very diligently to perform his job so that Brett can do his, which is to learn to walk again.

*Brett's mom*