

TALES FROM THE SEEING EYE





“

I have so much more

independence now.

I used to have a lot of anxiety

about traveling alone. Now I know

I have a *partner* with me.

There's nothing we can't

accomplish *together!* ”

- Army Staff Sgt. Jason Pepper

WE ARE PROUD TO SHARE THESE AMAZING STORIES.

JIM KUTSCH & Vegas



*M*y name is Jim Kutsch, and in 2006 I had the honor of being the first graduate of The Seeing Eye to be named its President and CEO. As a college student in 1970, I was matched with my first Seeing Eye® dog, a German shepherd named Sheba. For almost every life milestone over the past 47 years, I have had a Seeing Eye dog at my side. The picture shows me with my arm around my current partner, a German shepherd named Vegas.

Since 1929, The Seeing Eye has been partnering people who are blind or visually impaired with dogs we have trained to guide them. Seeing Eye dogs are renowned the world over for their intelligence, loyalty, and gentleness. We have created more than 17,000 Seeing Eye partnerships, and each one is an amazing, inspiring, and unique story. We wanted to share a few of these stories with you, featuring recent graduates of The Seeing Eye.

Thanks to your generous support, The Seeing Eye is creating new amazing stories of partnerships every day.



SOMA ALI & *Mimi*



This photo shows Soma Ali of Vancouver, British Columbia, with her first Seeing Eye dog, a yellow Labrador/golden retriever cross named Mimi. The photo was taken at the Canadian Federation of the Blind's Convention, held in July in Victoria. Soma is sitting on the floor with her face pressed against Mimi's, cheek to cheek!

Soma is quite busy these days -- she is a student at Langara College, a CNIB volunteer, a competitive dragon boat rower, an aspiring violinist, and sings in The Tempos, a choir comprised of blind and low-vision singers.

"Mimi takes me to classes, to my volunteer work, to church, the gym, anywhere I need to go. She's great at finding doors, chairs, and obstacles," Soma said.

"We play every night. She loves to play hide and seek. I hide behind doors, under tables, or behind chairs, and then I call her and she looks all around until she finds me and then I give her a treat. She loves it!"



MIKE YOUNG & *Grand*



W

here do people who live in Hawaii go on vacation? For Seeing Eye graduate Mike Young, who lives in Kailua on the island of Oahu, the answer was... Alaska!

Mike took a cruise to Alaska with his family, and of course that includes his Seeing Eye dog, a German shepherd named Grand. "We flew to Seattle, took a cruise to Alaska, back to Vancouver, and then Seattle, and flew home," Mike said.

"Princess Cruises has an accessibility person, and when we told them we are bringing a guide dog, they set up a relief area for him and took care of everything. They even provided the other passengers with a handout on etiquette around guide dogs, such as not petting them or distracting them while they were working, which was really nice," he said.

Mike works at the University of Hawaii, where he is an agricultural research technician, studying microscopic round worms known as nematodes.

"In between classes it can get pretty hectic, with students going every which way. He just takes me right through. We charge along no problem," he said.

The photo shows Mike, wearing a blue shirt with a tropic leaf pattern, smiling as he hugs Grand.



CLIFF AARON & *Ford*



*C*liff Aaron is a Seeing Eye graduate, a lawyer... and a golfer.

How does a blind person play golf? “The answer in my case is not very well,” Cliff quipped.

“In all seriousness I’m a better golfer as a blind person than I was when I was sighted. That’s not a joke. I was always a terrible golfer. Like most people I had the problem of picking my head up to admire my shot before I’d even hit it. Now what am I going to look at? So I keep my head down and I hit it much straighter,” he said.

It helps to have a good caddie, Cliff said. “He’ll tell me the distance, the terrain, and he’ll line me up. Then it’s just muscle memory. If I hit it well, I know it will go straight.”

Cliff, a partner at the New York law firm of London Fischer, was matched with his first Seeing Eye dog in 2006. He returned in 2013 to be matched with his second, a yellow Labrador/golden retriever cross named Ford. The photo shows Cliff, smiling, with his arm around Ford, who is looking attentively at the camera.

Cliff said he usually leaves Ford at home when he’s golfing.

“The golf course is the one place he can’t help me,” he said. “He’s an amazing dog. He’s incredible. I just can’t imagine life without him.”



SOFIA PANTEL & Beta



*S*ofia Pantel is the founder of Abre Tus Ojos, a nonprofit organization based in Puerto Rico dedicated to raising awareness about the capabilities of people who are blind.

Sofia was matched with her first Seeing Eye dog, a female German shepherd named Beta, in 2012. She returned to The Seeing Eye for follow-up support following the destruction wrought by Hurricane Maria on Puerto Rico. The photo shows Sofia crouching down to hug Beta on the lawn of The Seeing Eye campus.

"We need to prepare for what we're going to face," she said. "There's debris all over the streets, communications are down, there's no power. I need to brush up on my skills so I can continue to work and travel independently."

Sofia reported that fortunately her husband and their families survived the storm. "It was very scary. It was unlike anything we've ever experienced," she said. "The power of the storm -- it went on for 14 hours. The gusts of wind, the pounding of the rain, the trees coming down, things flying off people's houses... you can't imagine. But Beta, as always, was perfectly calm throughout the entire experience."



LLOYD BURLINGAME & Al



Retired Broadway and opera set designer, later chair of NYU's prestigious Tisch School of the Arts' Design Department, Lloyd Burlingame lost his sight in middle age due to Stargardt disease. He then turned his tremendous creative talents to writing. He's already written three books, including *Two Seeing Eye Dogs Take Manhattan... A Love Story*. He's now working on a novel.

Lloyd's interest in the stage began as a boy, when he saw *The Mikado* at the National Theatre in Washington, D.C. "The show was wonderful, but the scenery...! It changed every scene. I was fascinated." He began building his own little sets in shoe boxes.

By 19, Lloyd was the set designer for the Arena Stage in Washington, D.C.; he designed his first Broadway show at age 25, and became the go-to designer for legendary Broadway producer David Merrick.

The photo shows Lloyd walking on a New York City sidewalk with his third Seeing Eye dog, a black Labrador/golden cross named Al.

"I'm in my 80s, I'm nearly totally blind, and I'm having the best time of my life. And a lot of that is because of the dogs," Lloyd said. "This has been the great adventure of my life. And I certainly didn't lead a dull life up to that point. I moved in some pretty great circles. But it pales in comparison to what I've done with these dogs."



TIFFANY JESSEN & *Quest*



This photo shows Tiffany Jessen with Jonathon Epstein, who piloted their tandem bicycle during their 42-mile ride in the annual New Jersey Gran Fondo, at The Seeing Eye's rest stop with a Seeing Eye puppy, a yellow Labrador retriever.

Tiffany recently returned to The Seeing Eye to be matched with her second Seeing Eye dog, a black Labrador retriever named Quest.

In addition to bicycling, Tiffany enjoys rock climbing, hiking, cross country skiing, and rowing as part of a crew team.

"I love being active. I'll pretty much try anything," she said. "The Gran Fondo is very challenging because of all the hills. I've done longer ones, but it's one of the toughest. And of course it's a great fundraiser for The Seeing Eye. Over the years I've raised enough money to name two puppies!"

Tiffany said she and Quest are off to a great start. "She's definitely a retriever -- when I throw a toy, she brings it right back and drops it into my lap!"



LORI HYSERT & *Galileo*



L

Lori Hysert said it was “a lucky break” – literally – that got her interested in getting a guide dog. But at the time, it was anything but lucky!

“I worked near what was then the SkyDome, now it’s called the Rogers Centre,” she said. “It was a very busy area and three times I broke my cane because people kicked it or tripped over it. The third time I thought, ‘This isn’t going to work! It was time to get a Seeing Eye dog.’”

Lori now lives in Edmonton, Alberta, with her newest Seeing Eye dog, a German shepherd named Galileo. The photo shows her smiling as she stands next to Galileo, a German shepherd whose big ears are standing proud. She works for the Canada Revenue Agency and also has her own massage practice.

“Galileo is amazing,” she said. “He’s just a gentle soul. He’s got such a nice, easy-going personality. But when it’s time to go, he goes!”



ALAN MACKEY & Oliver



*A*lan Mackey, a retired captain in the U.S. Air Force who flew B-52s and later was a commercial airline pilot, lost his sight in 2000 due to a bacterial meningitis infection.

Alan returned to The Seeing Eye to be matched with his third Seeing Eye dog, a black Labrador/golden cross named Oliver. In the photo, Alan is smiling as Oliver turns to give him a big kiss on the chin.

“Oliver is doing really well,” said Alan, who lives at almost 7,000 feet in Lone Tree, Colorado. “He’s like a race horse. He loves to go fast and I like that. He’s got that need for speed! It’s almost like a slow jog. He just loves to go!”



LAURENCE HYSCHUK & Satin



*L*aurence Hyschuk of Toronto, Ontario, is now working with his sixth Seeing Eye dog, a female German shepherd named Satin. In the photo, Laurence stands alongside Satin as she attentively looks at the camera.

Laurence was a college student in 1971 when he was matched with his first Seeing Eye dog, a black Labrador retriever named Cinder. “I was at university and another student, a year or two older than me, had a dog from The Seeing Eye. Up until then, I’d never met anyone with a guide dog.”

In fact, Laurence said he’d never had a dog and was “a little intimidated” by them. “I love dogs now, but I didn’t know anything about dogs when I arrived at The Seeing Eye,” he said. “It almost brings tears to my eyes to think about it now. It was such a wonderful experience doing the training and getting accustomed to having a dog. I had gotten around fairly well with a cane before then. But once I got a dog, I really noticed a huge improvement immediately. It just worked out so well, so quickly. And it has ever since.”



LEXI RENDON & Honey



(Photo courtesy Texas Tech University/Ashley Rodgers)

This photo shows Lexi Rendon, a freshman studying human development and family studies at Texas Tech University, walking on campus with her Seeing Eye dog, a yellow Labrador retriever named Honey.

"Blindness or being visually impaired does not affect how I do a lot of things," Lexi said. "I hold myself to a very high standard. I always say I would like to do things equal to the people around me or even better."

As an infant, Lexi was diagnosed with bilateral retinoblastoma -- a rare form of pediatric cancer that affects the eyes. Lexi's left eye was removed and she has very limited vision in her right. Now among the careers she is considering is Child Life Specialist -- a pediatric health care professional who explains to children and their families their diagnosis, procedure, or outcome.

"Honey does really well," Lexi said. "She learned the campus so quickly. And people recognize us all over campus. People don't remember my name, but everyone knows Honey!"



KRISTYN LEIGH & Bella



K

ristyn Leigh of Tucson, Arizona, recently came to The Seeing Eye to be matched with Bella, a German shepherd. The picture shows Kristyn with her arm around Bella, who has her mouth open so she appears to be smiling!

"It's hard to find the words," Kristyn said when asked what it's like to work with a Seeing Eye dog. "It's an amazing feeling, that you kind of relive every time you come back."

After reflecting for a moment, Kristyn said: "Working with a Seeing Eye dog is as close as I can come to traveling the way I did when I could see."

Kristyn said she and Bella average about 4 miles per hour while walking. "It's a pretty good pace. She's always ready to go," Kristyn said. "She's very good at getting around those slower people out there!"

Bella loves to play, Kristyn said. "She loves to play ball, and she loves to play fetch," she said. "She's a shepherd, but she must have taken lessons from one of the retrievers, because she brings it right back to me!"



INSPIRING STORIES

The difference The Seeing Eye makes in the lives of people who are blind is best explained by the graduates of our program – people whose lives are enhanced by their daily experiences with their dogs.

The Seeing Eye is the world's oldest guide dog school. We breed, raise, and train our world-famous Seeing Eye dogs, and every month bring blind men and women from across the United States and Canada to our campus in Morristown, New Jersey, to learn how to care for and work with these amazing dogs. We are a charitable organization supported solely by donations from individuals, corporations, and foundations. Please help us put "miracles in motion" by visiting www.SeingEye.org/SupportUs or by calling (800) 539-4425.





The Seeing Eye
10 Washington Valley Road, P.O. Box 375, Morristown, NJ 07963
800-539-4425
info@seeingeye.org