



Faith, Miracles and a Guide Dog

You never know where life is going to take you, and Michelle's story is no exception.

Michelle grew up in New York State, met her husband there, and became a manager for Powder Barn. The next logical step was to build a house and start a family. Michelle's brother had recently moved to Florida and, since house plans weren't coming together in New York, the couple decided to relocate there as well, complete with a Powder Barn transfer. Things were looking good!

Two months after arriving in Florida the couple was in the midst of building their new house when Michelle had a grand mal seizure in the middle of the night. It came with shooting pain in her neck and her right side. After running tests it was determined that she had a cancerous brain tumor that needed to be removed. It was an unusual tumor, one that usually affects elderly men and has a prognosis of ten years. The surgery was successful, but doctors remained watchful as Michelle went on with married life, her new home, and the birth of two sons.

After the birth of her second son, Michelle's tumor grew back and she required another surgery. Wanting to live better and avoid standard treatment, she became 100% vegan, avoided alcohol, and tried all methods of holistic healing that she could find. And the tumor grew back larger than ever.

In 2015 Michelle had brain surgery for removal of a fourth tumor that affected her optic nerve and left her not only blinded, but in such serious condition that she was put in hospice care with only two weeks to live. Michelle is sure that her faith and family saw her through that time and when she came out on the other side, she had a new plan.

The next year was spent receiving chemo

treatments at the Moffitt Cancer Center in Tampa, more aggressively attacking Michelle's reoccurring brain cancer. She also had two eye surgeries and joined Lighthouse for the Blind, where visually impaired individuals are provided with on-site rehabilitation programs, eye health services and education to promote independence. It was here that she met Freedom client Lynn.

During this process, Michelle had begun to research and apply to guide dog schools. One of the issues that she was having with being approved for a guide dog was that her surgeries had left her paralyzed on one side. Lynn, a client with Freedom for many years, encouraged Michelle to reach out to Freedom since we have many clients that are visually impaired and have secondary disabilities. It was here that she found new independence with Alani (Loni)!



Michelle says, "Since Alani is my first guide, we have learned each other, together. I had rules to get used to and so did she. She had to learn my routine and where I go, and I had to learn what she likes, that she sometimes needs alone time at home. She quickly learned the route to my mom's and my friend's

houses in the neighborhood, guides me around the kids' toys in the house and keeps me from falling in the pool!"



Interestingly, Michelle says brain cancer is like a walk in the park compared to being blind. "Blindness is new to me. It has made me a different and better person. I've learned patience, understanding, to use my other senses, to be a better mother, to count my blessings."

Fourteen years since her first issue, Michelle is now 37 years old. She and her husband live in that house they built in Florida with their two busy sons, ages 10 and 12, and Alani, who is bringing Michelle newfound independence.





Join us in congratulating the newest members of the Freedom graduate family! With patience and hard work, these new teams successfully completed training together this past fall and are beginning new adventures together. We look forward to hearing about the exciting things they're doing!

Kristina and Bodie, yellow Labrador, MA
 Scott and Barley, black Labrador, NY
 Robin and Vega, black Labrador, NY
 Mike and Lloyd, black Lab/Golden cross, NY
 Arlene and Murphy, yellow Labrador, CT
 Alberta and Yahna, yellow Labrador, NY
 Nancy and Pinelopi, yellow Labrador, CT
 Elyssa and Ayla, yellow Labrador, NY
 Margaret and Benjamin, black Labrador, NY

Jane and Andro, black Labrador, NY
 John and Abigail, yellow Labrador, FL
 Susan and Braelyn, yellow Labrador, FL
 Elizabeth and Yale, yellow Labrador, NY
 Bill and Banner, yellow Labrador, NY
 Kirstyn and Austin, yellow Labrador, NY
 Sean and Yogi, yellow Labrador, FL
 Robert and Paul Bunyan, Lab/Collie cross, FL



Help Freedom just by shopping! Simply type <http://smile.amazon.com> into your browser and choose Freedom Guide Dogs as your charity of choice. Then shop as you normally would. Complete your purchase and Amazon will donate 0.5% of your purchase to Freedom!



Do good and good will come to you.



Words to live by. There is no doubt that in this world, those who help others seem to live happy lives, have good things happen to them, and have a circle of friends that help them when they are in need. Freedom is lucky to be surrounded by people like that.

Take, for instance the happenstance of knowing the good folks who run Fritz's Car Cruise in Oxford, Connecticut.



Every single Wednesday night from the end of April through mid October Bob (Chippy) Barbieri and Melissa Mekdeci and an amazing group of antique and classic car-loving friends gather to host a car show. There is no fee to bring your car, hang out, vote for your favorite, maybe win a gift bag or trophy, enjoy car talk and good food, and participate in the 50/50 raffle, a portion of which is donated

to Freedom Guide Dogs at the end of the season. Volunteers at this show also host car shows in nearby locations on other nights of the week and donate *their* raffle money to charity. In the meantime, many local businesses benefit by allowing space for shows. The time and dedication involved is amazing, and so many people win. It's so humbling.



CRUISE NITE
 Fritz's Snack Bar
 72 Oxford Rd, (RT 67) Oxford
 Starting Wednesday - May 2nd, 2018 5 pm Till 9 pm
 Trophies Every 2nd Wednesday
 50/50 Raffle - Give-A-Ways and Much More!!!



And of course you must remember our good friends Alyssa and Xaverie, paired together last year and featured in a prior newsletter. Alyssa and Xaverie are found all about their community volunteering in various ways and never seem to be at a loss to find ways to give back to Freedom. This past holiday season was no different. While most of us were busy baking our favorite holiday cookies, Alyssa, with her mom's help, started whipping up huge batches of festive dog cookies and treats

and selling them locally and to others she knew. It seems there must have been a secret ingredient in those cookies because word soon got out in the dog community that they were delicious and they were being eaten as fast as they were baked!

Amazingly, Alyssa sent a Brailled thank you card to Freedom for her guide dog and included a donation for over \$300 as a



result of her dog cookie venture.

And once again good works both ways.

At Freedom we're so thankful every day to have the opportunity

to serve those who need us, and for those who take the time to help us to do that.

Do good and good will come to you. ♥



Gifts of a Generous Heart

One of the most important parts of the Freedom family is the generosity of their volunteers. They give their time and use their creativity to help Freedom in the most interesting ways.

Julia Graser is one of those volunteers. Julia is a member of the Syracuse Moose Lodge where she runs the snack bar each week during bingo. She bakes and cooks for the snack bar, but also raffles off a gift basket with all of the proceeds going to Freedom Guide Dogs. In the past year she has raised over \$7,000!

Did we mention that Julia is also a puppy raiser for Freedom? And an amazing one at that.

Julia is currently raising three puppies for Freedom: a smooth coat Collie and a black Labrador that are both almost a year old, and a Barbet that is about five months. When asked how she manages to raise three pups at different stages of training she laughed and said, "We have one set of rules in the house and they're mine!"



Current pups Ray and Japsy



Current pup Noel



All of the pups get out regularly to stores and restaurants for socialization. Sundays the Collie and Labrador pups go to church and lay quietly through the service. Later in the day it's time for bingo, where Julia brings all three pups in training.... PLUS her Belgian shepherd and Yorkie pets! They get to check out the area, visit those arriving to play, go straight to their crates when told to, and then the games begin! Attendees ask if she's a dog whisperer because there isn't a single dog noise while bingo is going on.



Over 15 years Julia has raised so many pups to be guide dogs that she couldn't give a number. Asked what her favorite breed for training is, she commented that she is really stuck on Barbets since she started raising them recently. She has found them to be incredibly smart and very quick learners.

Julia says of her labor of love, "I do this because I want to give a set of eyes to someone who needs them. I can't imagine not being able to see." ♥

Do you love puppies and have some time to spend with one? Consider becoming a Freedom puppy raiser! Puppy raisers take in pups for 12-16 months, give them love, teach them basic obedience and house manners, and socialize them in all kinds of situations—then give them back to become specially trained guide dogs. For more information please contact alison@freedomguidedogs.org



Dining in the Dark to benefit Freedom Guide Dogs was held in Connecticut for the sixth year in a row last fall. An evening full of fun, it's also an opportunity for attendees to see Freedom guide dogs at work, to meet our pups in training, and to experience for just a brief amount of time how to navigate through dinner without the benefit of sight.

Many thanks to Heidi Voight of NBC in Connecticut for being the guest emcee! The night included a huge silent auction, a Disney parkhopper raffle, and of course the three course dinner with attendees blindfolded for salad and the main course.

We truly appreciate the sponsors for 2017:

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Did You Know??

Freedom Guide Dogs is the only guide dog school in the US where the co-founder and Executive Director is also a working guide dog trainer.

Eric Loori began his career training guide dogs for other schools, and upon starting Freedom with his wife Sharon has always continued with training and placement. While Labradors are the most commonly bred and placed dogs at Freedom, standard Poodles, smooth coat Collies, Barbets and Lollies (the Labrador/smooth coat Collie cross) are placed from time to time as well. Eric just had an interesting opportunity cross his path and trained and placed a Bouvier des Flanders. Both hardworking and intelligent by nature, Chief has been proving to be a great working dog!



Ever wonder what happens when guide dogs age? Just like us, they retire and relax and let another dog do their job. Over a lifetime a guide dog user will likely require several guide dogs, and new clients are unfortunately always being diagnosed. The need for guide dogs will never end.

Freedom Guide Dogs supports clients who received their guide dogs in the past, places guide dogs with new clients each year, and looks to provide new and successor dogs into the future. Be a part of that future by considering matching donation programs at work, notifying us of your employer's charitable foundations, donating your appreciated stocks and bonds, and remembering Freedom Guide Dogs in your estate planning. Your support is someone's independence. ♥



Freedom Wish List

- *Gift cards for Staples, PetSmart, Pet Supplies Plus, Petco and gas stations
- *Frequent flyer miles
- *Hotel room discounts
- *Fundraisers to benefit Freedom
- *Sponsors or raisers for puppies
- *Volunteers
- *Remember Freedom in your will



Heartfelt Thanks

There are many things we cannot do without the help of others. We are blessed to have the help of Patrick Thomas, the JM McDonald Foundation and the Maine Community Foundation in securing a new Ford Transit van. This van will be instrumental in getting trainers out with multiple dogs for training sessions together and holds an amazing 12 dogs at once! We so appreciate your generosity. ♥



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