



Artistic Vision Without Sight

Busser Howell was diagnosed with an eye disease by the age of ten and is sure that he never saw well. By the age of 15 he had only 3 percent of his vision and navigated with no cane or other assistive aids. At forty he was totally blind. While he would tell others now to take advantage of all of the tools available to them, he says that people are often embarrassed by their diagnosis and don't want to draw attention to themselves. This, of course, leads to doing strange things. "I realized at a party I could be introduced to my own mother," he says with a laugh.

Interestingly, Busser trained as an abstract expressionist painter. He painted with a tutor at 13 and went on to the Dayton Art Institute and Boston University of Fine Arts. In the early 1970s he began practicing Transcendental Meditation, which helped him in his 40s as he went through the process of discovering what he was feeling he wanted to paint.

"Sight is a brain function," Busser explains. "I feel the eye is only the camera taking the picture. I actually see with my brain, not with my eyes. I'm still very visual and see color and space there." And once in a while he gets a real hit of color through his eyes! He goes on to say, "I must have some residual nerve energy. There is so much we don't know. The body is about energy, cells transferring information."

One series of Busser's paintings is of dancing figures on black backgrounds and he feels that early on he overcompensated to show he wasn't blind. Meditation helped him to let go and paint freely, using the creative energy that passes through him to

tune out his conscious mind and listen to the messages he was feeling about color and design. He likes to work in series, as often his thoughts don't completely evolve until he has painted many canvases.



things to know what they look like, so sculpting doesn't come as easily. "I see the forms in my brain and try to express them with my hands," he says. In his Sidewalk Sagas series he conveys the dangers of traveling through New York, where he lives, and people being oblivious to what the others around them are doing. There is a blind person with a guide dog, people on cell phones, dog walkers with flexible leashes, moms with baby carriages, outdoor eateries, and construction obstacles, to name a few.

Becoming involved in Art Beyond Sight, Busser met other blind artists. His interest in their process led him to write a fascinating book called 20/20 Blindsight, which includes interviews with 15 blind or visually impaired artists and appreciators who candidly talk about their own "sight" and how it affects their art. It has been an inspiration to people who are low vision and now going blind to move forward and continue what they love.

In his 60s and living alone in busy New York City, Busser decided he might benefit from a guide dog. After a few trials and tribulations which left him devastated, a friend who was a guide dog user suggested he contact Freedom because they would come out and train him in his own surroundings. In 2012 he received Major, a sound and easy going black Labrador. Busser declares, "Major has given me a tremendous sense of freedom. He's such a blessing! It has been five years and we are constantly learning and evolving together. We go to appointments, the pharmacy, the grocery store... but he's lousy at picking out vegetables! There is so much that training



can't teach you because it's really between you and the dog."

Busser claims that Major is 90% fabulous. There is always construction where they live and each day is a new experience in sounds and obstacles. Major is off duty in the house, where Busser is sure he rolls his eyes at him when he bumps into things!

Busser's works have been exhibited in museums around the world. You can read more about him and view his paintings and wire sculptures at www.busserhowell.com. ♥

Spotlight: The Mulvihill Family

Following the passing of our 13 year old chocolate lab in 2010, we opted to check out puppy raising opportunities. With two of our four children still at home, we thought that giving back to those in need was an important value we wanted to instill.

In May of 2011 we began the wonderful adventure, through Freedom Guide Dogs for the Blind, of raising our first guide dog puppy. We were hooked at first sight, and recently picked up our eighth Freedom puppy!

We're pretty proud of the puppy names we've chosen along the way.



It's always a fun family activity, with even our two adult children

weighing in with their suggestions and votes! So far we've had Tank, Bentley, Hudson, Quaid, Winston, Abigail, Griffin and Pippa (6 boys and 2 girls; 5 yellow, 2 black and 1 chocolate).

Freedom and many of our puppies have attained "celebrity status" on college campuses around New England, including Union College, University of Rhode Island, Springfield College and University of

Connecticut. Many of those trips included classroom visits, overnight stays in dorms and apartments, fundraising opportunities for Freedom, sporting events and, of course, puppy/pet therapy for students and faculty.



New Hampshire, Vermont, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and New York, including Manhattan, Brooklyn and upstate. Whether traveling by car, bus, train, subway or boat, each puppy has experienced cities, the countryside, oceans, mountains and lakes.



old yellow lab who had been disqualified from training due to a skeletal problem with his rear legs. Our adult daughter jumped at the chance to adopt him, and Henry has



As part of our family, the puppies have all traveled extensively while visiting family and friends in Maine,

In 2015, Freedom requested a forever home for a 1-1/2 year

flourished in his homes in Ann Arbor, Michigan, Manhattan and most currently, Brooklyn.

We love meeting people while out with the puppies and sharing the good work of Freedom. In the process, we have been able to recruit six new families to serve as puppy raisers. My sister and her family in Delray Beach, Florida recently raised a white American shepherd for Freedom, and my sister-in-law in Brooks, Maine is currently raising a Lollie, a Labrador/Smooth Collie mix, for Freedom. It is being trained and socialized daily at a therapeutic boarding school for struggling teens. She is very loved!

Our current puppy, Pippa, will be making a big move with us later this fall as we relocate to Charleston, South Carolina. We anticipate that we'll continue raising puppies as long as we can manage the transportation to and from Cassville, New York. ♥



Editor's note: Article submitted by Sara Mulvihill. We wish Sara and her husband the best of luck in their new location!



Have you seen them? The newest Freedom teams successfully completed training in the spring and may be on adventures in your neighborhood. Whether with a new or successor dog, it's a very exciting time! We wish everyone on the spring graduation list the very best of what lies before them....

Thomas and Zeppelin, black Labrador, NY
 Elizabeth and Cozmo, yellow Labrador, PA
 Yaritza and Drea, black Labrador, NY
 Faith and Bleu, black Labrador, PA
 Kathlyn and Bradi, black Labrador, NY
 Elizabeth and Crom, black Labrador, PA
 Linda and Daisy, black Labrador, CT
 Rabih and Gunner, yellow Doodle, ME

Sylvia and Dory, yellow Labrador, NY
 Wendy and Harold, yellow Labrador, CT
 Lorna and Yva, yellow Labrador, SC
 Nancy and Decoy, yellow Labrador, CT
 Irene and Hadly, yellow Labrador, FL
 William and Dahlia, black Labrador, NY
 Yvonne and Arlo, black Labrador, FL
 Yanira and Chief, Bouvier des Flanders, NY

Tom and Zeppelin, & a Love of Work

Tom has been blind since birth. Born prematurely, he was placed in an incubator and the oxygen levels burned both of his retinas.

Tom was raised the same as his sighted siblings, except for his schooling at the New York State School for the Blind (NYSSB) in Batavia, New York. His other senses compensated for his lack of sight, and he once ducked and missed a shoe that his brother had thrown at him because he could hear it coming!

During his early life, Tom relied on a cane for travel. He worked for the Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (ABVI) after completing his schooling and looked into finding a guide dog when he moved on to working in the hotel business. He received his first of four guide dogs, a golden retriever, in 1992.

“Travel is so much faster with a dog,” Tom said. “We are trained with them, but the handler needs to work their dog and keep up their skills.”

While multitasking at the front desk at the hotel, Tom was approached by a law firm about coming to work for them. When his job at the hotel came to an end four years ago, Tom called law firm Brenna Boyce about their offer and was hired as the Client Services Manager. He keeps busy as their receptionist, calendar organizer, and phone system administrator.

Tom doesn't consider his blindness to be a disability, and uses old and new technology at Brenna Boyce. He takes notes in Braille, uses his iPhone as a communication tool, and has a computer equipped with a voice system.



This past spring Tom was placed with Zeppelin, his fourth guide dog. Zepp is Tom's third dog from Freedom Guide Dogs and interestingly was placed by trainer Jeff, who had also placed him with that first golden retriever way back in 1992!

Zepp has lots of energy, but it's controlled by being busy. Tom and Zepp are out in public a lot. They take the bus to work every day, cross busy streets, ride paratransit and Uber, and keep busy with clients at work. And Zepp gets playtime before work.

“You can tell he's smart,” Tom laughs. “I fell asleep in my chair and I felt nudging on my feet. Zepp had picked up my shoe and was trying to put it on my foot. He wanted to go outside!” Tom continued, “He also makes me stand on the porch to wait for our ride when it's raining because he doesn't want to get wet.”

It seems that Zepp and Tom share a sense of humor. While Tom can often be heard telling the partners at Brenna Boyce that their ties are crooked, Zepp is quietly under the desk playing with his leash. He has mischievously nibbled away at two and he now has a bone to pass the time.



Zepp arrived just in time for the 100th anniversary celebration of the alumni association for NYSSB. Tom is the current Vice President of Programming for the alumni and spearheaded a celebration that was attended by five Freedom clients, including friends Alberta with Yahna and Mike with Lloyd. Tom commented, “It was Zepp's first major outing and I was concerned that he was new to his job, but he made the conference so much easier for me. I can tell he was raised well and he has a great work ethic.”

While many folks can't wait to retire, Tom can't wait to go to work everyday. He loves it, and so does Zepp. With the same work ethic and sense of humor, this team will be great together! ♥



Zepp as a puppy in training
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You can raise a pup to be a fabulous guide dog for someone who needs them! Puppy raisers give pups love, teach them basic obedience, and socialize them in all kinds of situations. For more information contact alison@freedomguidedogs.org.

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Freedom is happy to announce the opening of the Freedom Guide Dogs Charitable Fund at the Community Foundation. Now you can assist Freedom in supplying guide dogs into the distant future by donating appreciated stocks and bonds, funds from your employer's charitable foundations, or monies from your estate to this fund at foundationhoc.org. Your donation will go further as part of this plan. Please contact info@freedomguidedogs.org for more information! ♥

Check out our new look!

Freedom has been hard at work updating the website. Be sure to visit us today at www.freedomguidedogs.org!



If you're interested in helping Freedom Guide Dogs, there are many ways to do so! We are always happy to have gift cards for Staples, Petco, Pet Supplies Plus and gas. We can also use hotel room discounts and frequent flyer miles. You can help a "Hero in the Making" with one of our donation programs that change and enhance lives:

\$500 Equipment Sponsor provides a collar, leash and custom harness for a Freedom Hero during placement;

\$1500 Name a Hero Sponsor provides for the care of a Freedom Hero in the making for one year;

\$5000 Puppy in Training Sponsor supplies vet care, food, treats and toys to a Freedom Hero puppy in training for it's first year;

\$10,000 Team Placement Sponsor covers all expenses related to a complete Hero team placement.

On our new website at www.freedomguidedogs.org/other/ there are some other ways to help. There you'll find details about cash donations, bequests and planned gifts, naming a puppy, donating your used vehicle, investing in vests for puppies in training, becoming a corporate sponsor, and volunteering!

Please visit www.freedomguidedogs.org/other/ and see what you can do to join our family!

We appreciate all that you do! ♥



Heartfelt thanks to Sean Patrick Griffin and Port 5 Naval Veterans for sponsoring the amazing first annual WienerFEST to benefit Freedom Guide Dogs and The Valley Goes Pink! Over 1,000 people attended to enjoy all things "dog." Special thanks to Tito's Vodka for their generous donation to Freedom! ♥



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