



Helping Others to Find Their Way

Born prematurely, Bonnie Rizzino has been blind all her life. She also has cerebral palsy, which affects her gait but doesn't keep her down!

Bonnie went through orientation and mobility training, which enabled her to combine where she was with where she wanted to go, and the ability to get there efficiently and safely. This gave her the knowledge necessary to travel using a cane until she became a guide dog user in 1983.

The first six guide dogs that brought independence to Bonnie's life were from another guide dog school. She was a shy 25-year-old when her first guide arrived. "I couldn't believe the feeling of freedom that I felt with a guide dog," she commented. "It was much easier to go places and I was no longer worried about tripping people with my cane." But things changed when tragedy struck: she and her dog were hit by a car. Bonnie broke both legs and required corrective orthopedic surgery, and her dog didn't survive.

"God takes care of us and leads us to where we are," Bonnie reflects. "I really grew from that accident."

Going where jobs took her, Bonnie has lived in Pennsylvania, New York, Virginia, Massachusetts and Florida with her various guide dogs. She worked in customer service and banking, and as a hospital operator and a Braille proofreader. And for 18 years she has been a case manager for Blind & Vision Rehabilitation Services of Pittsburgh, a non-profit agency that provides rehabilitation services, blindness

prevention programs, and employment independence in manufacturing assembly and commercial services. Bonnie works to process clients and let them know what programs and services are available to them. A psychology major in college, it's a great fit. She loves interacting with clients and often talks with people who come into the low vision clinic because they are gradually losing their sight. "I usually don't tell clients that I'm blind," Bonnie says. "It often doesn't make a difference, but once in awhile it helps someone to know that I understand."



support cane due to her cerebral palsy and arthritis. She also knew that she wanted to train with her new guide at home, keeping her work schedule intact.

Fala, a yellow Labrador retriever, arrived in November, along with a special needs harness that allows him to both guide Bonnie and provide some stability if she is unsteady on her feet. Bonnie also uses a

support cane in her right hand, and her husband developed a special magnetic attachment to her fanny pack where she can quickly attach her cane and have her right hand free to use a handrail, open a car door, or enter a building.



Bonnie tells us, "Fala and I were meant to be! We continue to grow together. These very special dogs adapt and know what their person needs. Fala's

Bonnie was needing a new guide dog last year and reached out to Freedom. She always knew about Freedom and their attention to secondary disabilities.

About 7 years ago she had to start using a

personality is blooming! He's happy, silly and playful at home, and then completely focused when he's working!"



While visiting with friends over the holidays, a gate was placed at the bottom of some stairs to keep the dogs in one place. Fala kept showing up where he didn't belong and everyone thought the gate wasn't being closed. Turns out this smart guy was opening it himself. Seems like a bright dog with a long, amazing future with Bonnie! ♥

Editor's Note: Bonnie, her husband and their guide dogs currently reside in Pennsylvania.



Companionship, Responsibility, Joy!

“**M**om, can we get a dog?” Words I have heard often as my husband and I raise four children. Our go to response was always “we have four cats.” Then something changed.

The past two years have been challenging for my family. I was diagnosed last summer with stage 4 colon cancer and was initially given a bleak chance of survivorship. During this time, I did not feel I could commit to getting our own dog. In the beginning of this year, my son’s school had a presentation done by a guide dog school and the idea of raising a service animal was something my family could rally around. There was one small problem in that my mother, who visits often, is afraid of German Shepherds as she was attacked by one when she was younger. I remembered that someone from my running group a few years back raised Labrador puppies but could not remember for what agency.

About three months ago, on the Facebook group Moms of Trumbull, my running friend Carolynne posted that Freedom was looking for puppy raisers. I responded and she put me in touch with Alison, who sent me a folder. My husband saw the folder on the desk and asked what it was, and I told him it was information on puppy raising and that I was going to fill out an application. He agreed (thinking it would take some time to get approved) and the next thing we know we are headed to meet the transport in Vermont to get Turlough, our Freedom puppy. Not only did we pick up Turlough, but we also transported her brother Thunder and an older dog, ready to begin formal training, Taffy.



Turlough has been with us just shy of a month. It is like having a newborn all over again — night waking, paranoia, “baby” proofing and schedules. What she has given to me is a sense of companionship, a routine that I had been lacking and unconditional love. She has given my kids a sense of responsibility and joy. My 17 year old son relishes his time with her. When she first came to us, he was at his friend’s house watching a hockey game and thought he would rather be home with “his” dog. Training requires patience and my kids are learning that. My husband loves coming home from work to play with and walk the dog. He has a stressful job and it is a joy to all of us to see him running around the yard with her. She takes my mind off of cancer and gives us something to focus on.



Turlough has experienced so many things since she came to stay with us. She has been to the beach, the zoo (very interesting as she got a reaction from the tigers and the zoo patrons got quite a show) and to many a school pickup. Our local firemen love her, and she is not fearful of their sirens. She visited our local agriscience high school and the vet tech students gave her a bath and removed a pesky tick. She has ridden in the car on a

few journeys and has been to choir practice and ballet class. Kids love her and she responds well to them. She also loves other dogs and wants to make friends with our elderly cats — who are not having it. She has a strong personality and is quite stubborn. In short, she is a good fit in our home.



I am often faced with the question of “how are you going to give her back” and I usually tell people that we have been given a unique gift, a chance to help someone else and that we are blessed to be able to open our home to do this. We look forward to working with her in the coming months on training and obedience and I am sure it will break our hearts when she goes on for further training. My whole family is grateful for the chance to work with her and Freedom and thankful for the opportunity. ♥



Editor's note: Article written by Lorie Hansen Boveroux. She and her husband live in Connecticut with their four children.

Guide, Coach & Teenaged Boy

McClain is a high school senior who was already swimming competitively at the age of four. After becoming legally blind at an early age, she continued to compete as a Paralympic swimmer and currently holds 20 American records, five Pan Am records and one world record.

At the age of eight McClain was diagnosed with Wagner's Syndrome which caused detached retinas in both eyes. It's a rare disease that affects about 250 people in the whole world, and only 15 with the version that she has. McClain was the youngest patient they had seen with the disease and they had to cut down hospital gowns to fit her when she went through four surgeries in the following six weeks to attempting reattachment. Surgery wasn't successful, and by the age of nine she was using a cane to navigate as she mainstreamed through school. Even then she knew that the best thing she could do was move forward and deal with this new thing that was a part of her. As she got older, she also relied at times on a sighted guide.

Also at the age of eight, McClain and her dad started Shoes for the Souls to collect and donate new and slightly used shoes to the Atlanta Mission. Donating 365 pairs in their first year, they have now donated over 27,000 pairs of shoes to homeless men, women and children!

McClain continued to pursue her passion for swimming and joined a Paralympic team at the age of fourteen. At fifteen she was competing in Rio, the youngest member of a Paralympic team and competing in three

events. In 2015 she won a bronze medal at the ParaPan American Games and is national champion in the 400 freestyle, 100 backstroke, 100 breaststroke and 200 individual medley.

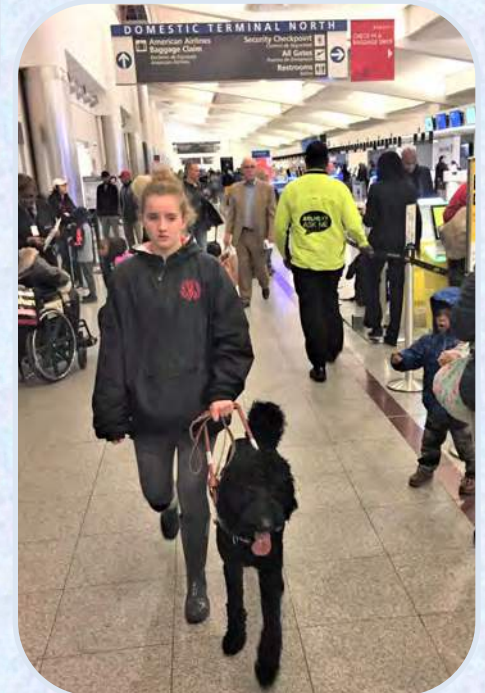


When in high school, McClain found that her county offered online schooling and she began studying from home. This helps immensely when she is traveling because she can continue her school work anywhere. McClain takes this opportunity seriously and takes high school and college classes through the dual enrollment program, is a member of the National Honor Society, and was named a USA Swimming Scholastic All American.

Thinking about her next step, going to college at Loyola University this fall to study communications and journalism, McClain reached out to Freedom about getting a guide dog. Her family has always had dogs, but they had to be non-allergenic.

In November McClain received Blake, a seventy-pound black Goldendoodle who thinks he's small and sits in her lap when they're taking a break. And he smiles about it! "I'm so much more independent with

Blake. It's easier to go places alone, and we figure things out together. He can find my mom in the store when we go in separate directions," McClain says, "and my parents feel better about my safety because of him. Less than a month after I received him, we were on a plane. He's already been on 12 flights since November, and we have two coming up next month. He loves to fly and looks out of the window just like when he's in a car!"



When out with family or visually impaired friends, Blake takes his responsibility seriously. He makes sure McClain is safe,

continued on page 4 . . .



Join us in wishing our fall 2018 graduates happy tails and trails! There is nothing like beginning an adventure with a new friend!

Juanita and Abigail, yellow Labrador, FL
McClain and Blake, black Goldendoodle, GA
Linda and Daisy, black Labrador, CT
Mary and Elvis, black Labrador, NY
Paige and Erris, black Labrador, MA
Howard and Everlie, yellow Labrador, NY
Murry and Evie, yellow Labrador, NY
Valerie and Ezekiel (EZ), black Labrador, MA
Bonnie and Fala, yellow Labrador, PA
Michael and Farley, yellow Labrador, NY

Vishal and Febe, yellow Labrador, CT
Macey and Ferguson, yellow Labrador, MA
Chris and Fiona, yellow Labrador, MD
Anna and Granger, yellow Labrador, NY
Lindsay and Griffin, yellow Labrador, MA
Deborah and Gylden, yellow Labrador, MA
Marion and Trooper, smooth Collie, FL
Edward and Ulani, yellow Labrador, FL
Ken and Wells, golden Retriever, ME
Jerry and Y-Filo, yellow Labrador, FL

amazon

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 order and Amazon will donate 0.5% of what you spend to Freedom!



Guide, Coach & Teenaged Boy

... continued from page 3

but also watches out for the others she's with and makes sure they are staying together.

At the pool whoever is working with McClain uses a device to tap her on the head as she approaches the pool wall. When that person moves away or is distracted, the onlooking "coach" Blake barks to alert them that they'd better pay attention - even if he's not working in harness. He also stops fake fighting between McClain and her sister by getting in the middle and breaking things up.

"When he's not working, Blake is goofy," McClain relates. "He retrieves random things and happily brings them to people, like tissues! And he reminds me of a teenage boy: he hates shopping, lays under the racks sulking, nudges jeans off the rack, and looks at the door like he wants to go. He also loves eating and sleeping!"

McClain and Blake will be busy in the upcoming year. They'll head to college in the fall, where McClain will be living on her own and joining the swim team. The longest she has ever been away from home before is six weeks. And 2020 brings the

next Paralympics, in Tokyo! In addition, McClain speaks publicly about swimming and community service, hoping that young people will learn that anyone can make a difference.



Off to a running start, McClain and Blake, her guide, self-proclaimed coach and teenage boy, are really going places! We wish them the best of luck!



Join us in securing Freedom's future by donating your appreciated stock to the Freedom Guide Dogs Charitable Fund at the Community Foundation. Full market value is a charitable contribution if you have held the stock longer than 1 year and there is no capital gains fee. Bonds, employer charitable fund monies, and monies from your estate are also acceptable. Be a part of Freedom's continued service to the blind and visually impaired community into the distant future by taking advantage of this new opportunity to support Freedom! Contact info@freedomguidedogs.org for more info. ♥



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. How about raising a hero? Freedom is always looking for puppy raisers for their fabulous guide dogs. Puppy raisers give pups love, teach them basic obedience, and socialize them in all kinds of situations. For information contact alison@freedomguidedogs.org. Raise a guide dog, change a life! ♥



Thank you for your continued support of Freedom Guide Dogs! We could never change lives without you! Please mail your check payable to Freedom Guide Dogs to 1210 Hardscrabble Rd, Cassville, NY 13318 or donate easily on line at www.freedomguidedogs.org today!