

Freedom Forum

A celebration of those dedicated to our mission to partner guide dogs with the visually impaired through Hometown Training, and the members of those special partnerships.



"Knowledge Kept to Oneself is Useless"

Josh Espinal never forgot this important lesson he learned from one of his martial arts instructors. He lives life pushing forward, always learning, practicing discipline, and sharing it all with others.

When we first spoke with Josh in 2016 he had just received his first Freedom guide dog, Quigley, a black Labrador. Only in his 20s, Josh had already served as an E5 Sargent in the US Army, a patrol officer and K-9 handler in the Virgin Islands, and was hired by the Orange County Sheriff's Office. On the day before he started that position he suddenly lost his vision, but the department stuck with him and Joshua became the second blind law enforcement officer in the country! "Captain" Quigley happily worked at his side.

"I worked with a lot of domestic violence cases," Josh said. "Being blind really helped me to open my ears and listen to what people were going through."

Since then, many things have changed for Josh ~ and Quigley!

Josh married his girlfriend in 2017, has two daughters, and moved to the warrants division within the Sheriff's Department, where he verifies warrant information to ensure there are no mistakes before they are served.

Is that all, you ask? No way!

Knowing that Josh was deeply involved in martial arts from a very young age and that it was a core part of who he is, wife Jasmine suggested that he open his own martial arts school, teaching many disciplines to students in low income neighborhoods because ~ you know ~ "Knowledge kept to oneself is useless," Josh shares. "It's a lesson from one of my

instructors that always stays with me."

Josh uses his cane to check on body positioning and form and can tell by sound if students perform movements correctly. "Being blind is not a disability to me. It teaches you to use your other senses more," he shares. "I can teach kids and adults that no matter how tough it is out there, they can do this!"

As if two careers aren't enough, Josh and Jasmine also opened Blindfire Gunworks, with two separate divisions that custom build firearms: optics and parts for retail sales to civilians and specialty products for the police and military. He also speaks to police officers around the state about how to build and maintain their firearms while on duty.

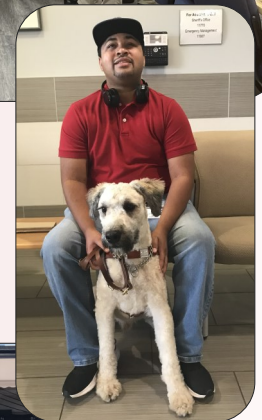
Two years ago it became evident that Josh's youngest daughter was allergic to Quigley. Quigley retired to the Virgin Islands with family and a few months later Moose arrived to take over the exciting post of guiding Josh.

Josh remarks, "Moose is a Bouvier des Flanders, but most people are unfamiliar with the breed. We get stopped a lot and asked what kind of dog he is!"

Left fluffy in the winter and trimmed short in the summer, Moose doesn't shed and therefore prevents the allergic reactions that Quigley was causing in the house. "He's quite energetic and likes to run," says Josh. "He zooms from the yard into the house and goes slipping across

the tile floor. But when he's out working he is focused and unreactive. Visiting St. Augustine he did great in crowds, around trolleys, and with people and dogs."

With four jobs, a family and a new guide dog, Josh seems nonplussed. "You just have faith in yourself," he advises. Seems like great knowledge that he should not keep to himself! ❤️



Goofy Muppet to Working Guide Dog!

Moose arrived in late July of 2021, at about 14 weeks of age. He was an adorable, mischievous, fawn fluffball. He joined an extended family including my pet shepherd, Freedom's Uzo (Barbet) and my youngest daughter's two dogs, left with me when she moved to California. Freedom's Cypress (Lolly) and my oldest daughter's dog came weekdays while their "mom" worked. That's seven dogs for those who have lost count.

The day Moose came home with me I was only supposed to be returning with Cypress, to be raised by my daughter, but here was this adorable, bouncy muppet who didn't have a raiser, and me, who when it comes to dogs absolutely has the word "sucker" stamped on my forehead!



In late August Moose went to my dear friend Lynn for a month while we "downsized" our dogs by traveling to California via RV. Uzo did a round trip and my daughter was reunited with her two pups. Phew! Down to 5 dogs!

While with Lynn, Moose continued to practice basic obedience. He had a great recall. Lynn called him down the length of her hallway, across a foyer, and into the living room. He picked up speed in the carpeted hallway and attempted to come to a sit just as he hit the tiled foyer, like a car hitting black ice. He skidded to a halt

so fast that he went over backwards. His recalls were always at freight train speed.

Moose liked to steal things to chew on, too. Baby socks, twigs, and once, Lynn's comb. He could put a pickpocket to shame. He took Lynn's comb as soon as she put it down and she didn't know until she reached for it and it was gone! It was found all the way down the hall, no longer usable.

While Moose didn't make the California trip, he and I did travel a lot. I drove to Florida to help Lynn, post-surgery, and to bring Freedom pup Geo (Collie) and her van to her. He was a great traveler. He had just turned six months when we flew back home, from Tampa International to Liberty International, to Albany International. Moose behaved well beyond his age and, except for his vest identifying him as a puppy in training, no one would have guessed he wasn't a working dog. In order not to be trampled while disembarking, we waited for the herd to deplane first. As other travelers went by there were many remarks of "I didn't know a dog was on the plane!" Exactly how it should be!

To fly home, United Airlines required a vet exam within a few days of flying. This is when Moose showed he had met the first and only someone who didn't like him. The vet we saw openly announced that she didn't like Bouviers and Moose was an absolute basket case in that office. He never acted that way before and he was fine at future vet visits. He just knew

the vet didn't like him and he didn't like her, either!

While in Florida, a sizable group of guide dog handlers and puppy raisers gathered at a ZooTampa outing. A great time was had by all, including the sea otters! They played with Moose nose to nose through the plate glass enclosure barrier, back and forth, up and down. Someone's little stump tail was wagging as fast and furious as it could go. As we turned to leave, a couple of the keepers approached us saying the otters had a great time playing and they had a good time watching the show. The painted dogs also seemed to want to play with Moose, but I prudently moved on, removing an about-to-be-out-of-control Bouvier.

Moose turned a year of age on May 1, 2022. To my surprise, I got "that call" from Freedom about the same time that the spring class had been in training for a month. I was assured Moose would be able to catch up just fine and the rest is history, as they say. That goofy muppet is a successfully working guide dog.

I am very proud of him! ❤️



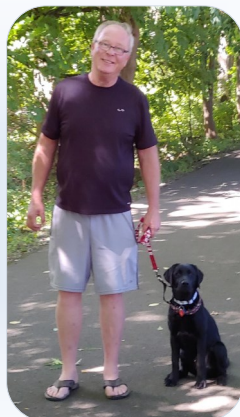
Article written by puppy raiser Ginny Wilday and edited slightly for space.

In Sympathy ~

We are sad to share the loss of a member of our family.

Tom Fulford and his wife Anette raised five puppies for Freedom and also housed Presley, a stud dog from our breeding program. Tom was also a loving husband, father and grandfather.

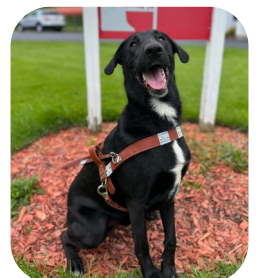
Our deepest condolences go out to Anette and the entire Fulford family. ❤️



WISH LIST

We've made a list, checked it twice. Our pups think these things would be nice:

- Gas/hotel/airline/VISA cards
- Hotel points or discount points
- DuraChew Nylabones, L/XL
- Milk Bone mini dog treats
- Dog boots size L
- Staples, PetSmart, Petco or Pet Supplies Plus gift cards



Cassie, Right Out of the Box

Being born visually impaired might not be easy, but Laurie took it in stride and made her way through to high school graduation in the public school system. It was while studying criminology at Florida State University that she applied for and received her first guide dog.

"That dog was a bit of a handful," Laurie laughed. She and her guide worked together through graduation and continued as Laurie began her 13-1/2 year job with Lighthouse of the Big Bend. Lighthouse seemed like a good fit, as they provide orientation, mobility, vocational rehabilitation, and assistive technology training to individuals with vision loss. They also provide services for children and teenagers, and have support groups for those struggling with vision loss.

During her time at Lighthouse Laurie met and married her husband. A few years later she left Lighthouse to stay at home with her daughter and son for 18-1/2 years. During that time her first guide dog, of course, aged out of being able to work, and Laurie didn't immediately apply for a successor dog.

The time seemed right in 2013, and Laurie applied to Freedom Guide Dogs. John Byfield came to her home to do a test walk and interview and thought a placement might be possible the following year; however, in 2014 he told her that the dog Freedom had in mind was not exactly right for her. Laurie appreciated John's honesty and agreed that she would rather wait for just the right match.

In 2015 Gemini, a focused and loyal yellow lab, entered Laurie's life. She was confident with public transportation and was a comforting presence in large crowds. Laurie even took her to a farm to socialize amongst all kinds of animals and

Gemini never gave them a glance. Once when Laurie had to go out without Gemini, Gemini picked up a sock and wouldn't give it up. When Laurie's daughter said, "Your momma's gonna be mad at you," Gemini quietly let it go.

When almost eight years old, Gemini began to slow down. Shortly after she started having back spasms that required bed rest. When she recovered, she worked for a month or two and then required medication for her pain, walked more slowly, and avoided stairs. Last June when it seemed something more was wrong, Gemini was diagnosed with lymphatic leukemia. One of the veterinarians said that Gemini might survive her diagnosis with treatment and offered to keep her personally. Gemini is in the vet's loving home and doing well.



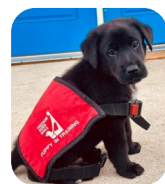
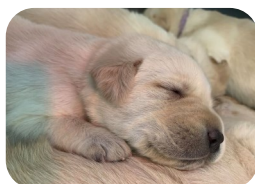
Florida Department of Law Enforcement, where she has worked for the last five years. In her position with the Firearm Eligibility Bureau Laurie manages Florida's competency database, doing in-depth searches for any reasons why a person applying for a firearm permit may be disqualified. She also enters and deletes records whenever necessary to keep the database current, and processes and releases paperwork to the court system.

This pair has already made great strides together and we wish them many happy adventures! ❤️



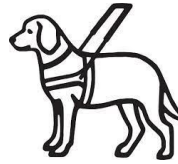
Last September Cassie, a Freedom Lollie (Labrador/smooth coat Collie mix) arrived at Laurie's home. Laurie said, "She's lively and energetic. I call her 'right out of the box' because she's new and ready to go!" Four other dogs in their home help to calm Cassie's energy.

Right away Cassie memorized the transportation route to get Laurie to the





Fall 2022 Grads!



Angelina and Zazu, Lab/Collie mix, NY
Charlene and Brea, yellow Labrador, FL
Daniel and Berkeley, yellow Labrador, FL
Debra and Blair, yellow Labrador, FL
Gerald and Zizi, Lab/Collie mix, NY
James and Vice, black Labrador, NY
John and Angel, black Labrador, FL
Jose and Duke, fawn Bouvier, FL
Josh and Moose, fawn Bouvier, FL
Karla and Ashley, black Labrador, NY

Laurie and Cassie, Lab/Collie mix, FL
Mary Lou and Beacon, yellow Labrador, GA
Michael and Yuengling, smooth Collie, FL
Richard and Crystal, Lab/Collie mix, NY
Richie and Alvin, yellow Labrador, NY
Robert and Axl, black Labrador, NY
Roger and Mikey, Lab/Collie mix, PA
Timothy and Cypress, Lab/Collie mix, SC
Tom and Poseidon, Golden Retriever, NY



"The future depends on what we do in the present."

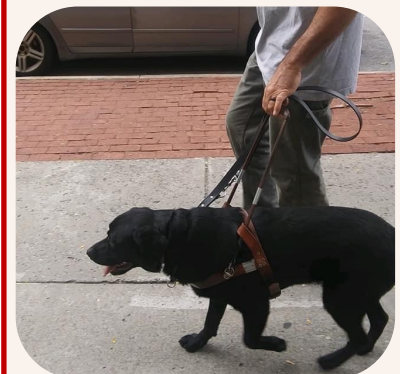
~ Mahatma Gandhi

It's difficult to find the words to describe the special bond between a person and their guide dog. It's a partnership that we are able to create over and over again through grants, gifts and donations that sustain us from day to day.

Freedom's future depends on decisions made today, and we are always looking ahead to fulfill upcoming client needs. Our future starts with a firm foundation today.

We invite you to be part of our clients' future! Please consider including Freedom Guide Dogs in your will or estate planning to help us carry our mission into perpetuity. You may also be eligible for matching funds from your employer, or might consider donating appreciated stocks or bonds. Totally non-profit, we rely on our staff, puppy raisers, volunteers, board of directors and ***you*** to get the job done, now and in years to come.

With your help today, the future looks like this ~



Saying Goodbye

In the spring of 2020 we celebrated the retirement of Al, long time dad in the Freedom Guide Dog kennel.

Al fathered 80 Freedom guide dogs, 8 Freedom breed dogs, 4 Japan Guide Dog Association breed dogs, 5 dogs exchanged with other institutions, and 1 Utica, NY police dog. He then spent his retirement lounging around the house where Sharon and Eric Loori treated him like a king. He even got to move from chilly New York to balmy Florida!

Sadly, Al passed away toward the end of 2022. His legacy lives on in all of his hero offspring, and this sweet, sociable guy will never be forgotten. ♥



Special thanks to the Tampa Downtown Lions for their assistance with cooking and logistics!

Cheers To 30 Years!

Freedom Guide Dogs held a 30th anniversary celebration at its Cassville, NY campus last July, and on November 5th the party continued at Lowry Park in Tampa, FL. It was a smaller gathering of clients and puppy raisers close to Freedom's southern location in Cocoa, FL, but the camaraderie and enthusiasm was just as big! Many attendees stayed a night or two at a hotel near the venue for a chance to make new friends. The weather was perfect, and people, guide dogs and puppies enjoyed food and treats all afternoon. The day was topped off with a raffle and a gift to Sharon and Eric Loori, cofounders, of a book of letters of appreciation from many clients and puppy raisers! ♥