

# How volunteers help Guiding Eyes create miracles

 [guidingeyes.org/guiding-eyes-creates-miracles](http://guidingeyes.org/guiding-eyes-creates-miracles)

By Guiding Eyes

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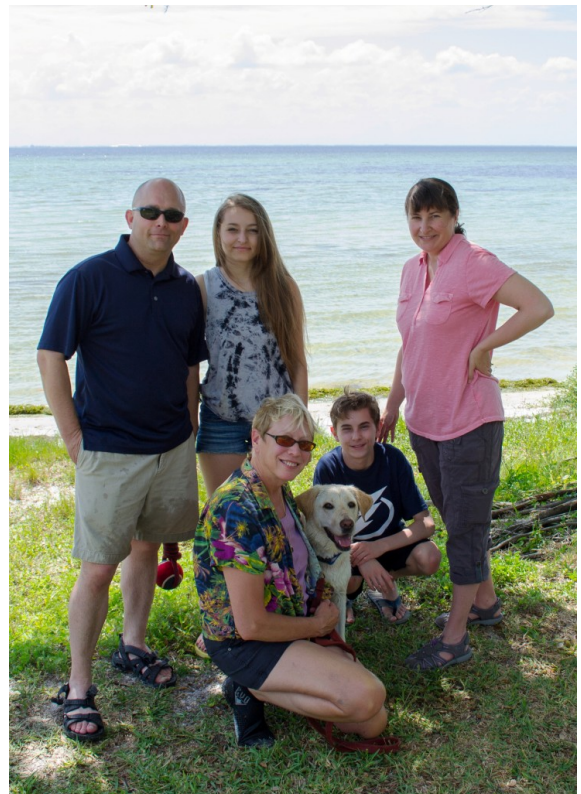
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by graduate Deni Elliott

There is no doubt that Guiding Eyes creates miracles. Few people can declare, “We’re together forever!” just a few weeks after meeting a potential partner. Even fewer relationships have the long-term success rate of Guiding Eyes matches. A summer visit from Alberta’s puppy raisers reminded me that Guiding Eyes’ miracle-making is as much dependent on our dogs’ first families as it is on the school’s award-winning genetics, breeding and training programs.

Alberta enthusiastically welcomed the McMains, her first family, to our home, greeting Lisa, George, Owen, and Shaye in turn. Head high. Tail beating out her happiness on every surface. That little bounce that says, “I’d really like to jump up on you, but you and I know that I’m not allowed.” She showed them her favorite toys.



Alberta shined in the center of all of our attention. She settled in her usual place, against my leg. She wrapped her paws around my right foot. But as her first family members spoke, she gazed steadily at each. “I remember you,” Alberta seemed to say, cocking her head at every of the many mentions of her name.

Alberta splashed in the bay with her first family, zoomed around them in the park. Wrestled. Played tug. She showed off how she had perfected her chase and catch with the Frisbee that they brought for her. Every move said, “Look at me! See what I can do now.”

This was no ordinary visit for any of us. The McMains clung to the details of every Alberta story. Unlike friends who get bored with my updates on the world’s best dog, the McMains delighted in every bit of evidence that Alberta had grown to be the smart, social and fun-loving guide that they thought she would be. I cherished their stories of late night cuddles with baby Alberta. I laughed as they described her comical attempts to coordinate her parts when her

mind and motivation grew faster than her body. Lisa said that she knew that Alberta's time with them was done when she saw Alberta successfully working in a grocery store, without any treats, handled by then 11-year-old Owen.

Proud parents all, we kissed and hugged our good-byes. Alberta slept for hours. She was exhausted from staying engaged with that many people for that long.

Since their visit, I incorporate echoes from Alberta's past into our daily life. When I say, "That's IT!" or exclaim, "Good job!" I know that Alberta feels wrapped in my praise, but snuggled also in memory of love and support from the past. When I accept Alberta's invitation to play tug in a stressful situation, I now understand that I am helping her soothe herself just as her puppy raisers had from the start.

The McMains raise puppy after puppy for Guiding Eyes and provide respite for other raisers as well. Raising Guiding Eyes puppies was this family's choice of how to give back to the world. What better way of teaching children that loving can mean letting go.

Successful puppy-raisers prepare themselves for the call back to training. They know it will hurt. They deliver their latest success back to Guiding Eyes. They wipe their tears. Give final hugs. They breathe hope for a wonderful future deep into the dog's fur.

All that Guiding Eyes asks of grads is that we care for the partners who have widened our world. If we're inclined to say thank you, an occasional note to the puppy raiser is a good place to start.

**Guiding Eyes for the Blind creates miracles, but not without a village of volunteers.**

