

# A World of Possibilities through Alberta

 [guidingeyes.org/a-world-of-possibilities-through-alberta](http://guidingeyes.org/a-world-of-possibilities-through-alberta)

By Guiding Eyes

September 12, 2014



by Guiding Eyes graduate Deni Elliott

I try to tell myself that sometimes it's not all about the dog. For example, I wanted to learn to play golf. With my loss of vision, I yearn for new ways to be in contact with my body and its boundaries. Then, after a year of my failed search for someone willing to teach me, Guiding Eyes Alberta found my instructor.

I met Ron Philo at the U.S. Women's Golf Open in Pinehurst in July, 2014. This golf pro/instructor and his wife were attracted by the gorgeous guide dog, sprawled across the back seat of a golf cart, resting her head on my lap. Alberta caught their eye as they turned from watching their daughter, Laura Diaz, who was playing in the tournament.



I told Ron that I wanted to play. "I tell people that golf is not a visual game," Ron said, intrigued by the possibility. He had never taught a blind golfer.

Ron invited me to his golf school in Stowe, VT for three days of lessons. I was surprised by the invitation. Ron was surprised that I accepted. Within seconds of being asked.

I bought golf shoes. Worked on my balance. Walked extra miles each day to get in shape.

Guiding Eyes Alberta would be at my side, but not working. Her job, I told her, was to be the golf cart ornament. No chasing golf balls. No cavorting off-lead through the fairways. No rubbing her back on the greens. No chewing on golf tees. Once she got me to Vermont, all she needed to do was to be quiet and pretty.

I thought Alberta was incidental on this trip. I realized, once again, that she was essential. I was in Stowe because my future instructor had noticed my dog. My time in Stowe was fun only because I shared it with Alberta. I wouldn't even have had the confidence to be there at all, if it

hadn't been for Guiding Eyes for the Blind.

Vacation alone, with Alberta at my side, was far from lonely. Stoweflake Inn had trails for walking and meadows for off-lead runs, a nine-hole course for extra practice, swimming pools and hot tubs inside and out, a great restaurant and yoga classes. A friendly staff member directed Alberta and me to river access in walking distance – it had a doggie-sized swimming hole.

Dinner at the nearby restaurant, *The Phoenix*. “Dining alone?” asked the waiter. “No,” I said, “my partner’s under the table.” We all laughed. I enjoyed my evening, listening to snatches of conversation around me, jotting notes for this blog, drinking a martini and eating briny oysters.



Alberta did not alert me to how I was holding the club wrong. She did not help me learn to calculate a 12 ft. putt. But, she listened, cocking her head, while Ron taught me to read the slope of the green under my feet. She lay at the side of the cart, front legs crossed, watching intently while I twisted and bent body and club into the right flow for a 180-yard drive.

**I have tried what I never would have tried if Alberta hadn't been by my side. Golf. Paddleboard – with a dog on board! I became a Fulbright specialist, hoping for invitations from around the world. I committed to co-lead a study abroad trip in food writing and photography.**

**This is possible for me only because my range is as far and broad as a dog can see and hear and smell. Together we navigate the world. As I can trust Alberta to take care of what is out there, I can pay attention to where my hopes and desires lead. I find a new adventure around every bend.**

**In the end, it IS all about the dog.**