

Words of Encouragement From Members of the Blind Dog List:

I'm Karen Goodale, from Portland Oregon. Our sweet Jack Russell Terrier (Lucy) suddenly went blind overnight in September 2004 from SARDS (Sudden Acquired Retinal Degeneration Syndrome) when she was just 2 ½ years old. My husband and I were devastated to learn that Lucy could see one day, and be blind the next! We "humans" were very sad and depressed... we love Lucy so much! After a few days we noticed that Lucy wasn't feeling sorry for herself "at all" and was looking at "us humans" like... "what in the heck is the matter with you guys!" We then realized that as long as we treated Lucy as if she was still "exactly" the same dog she was before... she acted as if nothing had changed. Lucy can still do most anything she could do when she had her eye sight (other than catch her frisbee in mid-air!) Lucy still runs with the other dogs at the off-leash dog park by listening to their tags, and stays on the inside of the group so she knows she is safe there, and won't run into anything. She still plays fetch with a tennis ball... and is darn good at it! She still plays frisbee (more like fetch, instead of catching it in mid-air) but she is so totally HAPPY - - as long as she gets the chance to "play" period! You can read more about Lucy, and other dogs from the Blind Dog list at: <http://www.blinddogs.net>

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She came into my life suddenly, and left very suddenly. But, every second that she was with me was a great gift.

I hadn't intended to bring another dog into my home at the time, but as soon as someone showed me her photo on an adoption website, I fell in love with her, and 3 days later, she was officially part of my family. I thought that the blind and partially deaf dog that I was adopting was going to be a couch potato, but she had other ideas. She became the first blind dog to earn the ARCH title, (APDT Rally Obedience Champion), and if not the only, was one of the few completely blind dogs to be active in agility as well. She Loved music, and was a member of the Dancing Paws Therapy Troupe, a group of therapy dogs who did routines to music, as special therapy dog visits. She was a very active therapy dog, visiting the VA hospital, nursing homes, and a couple of schools. Her therapy dog work earned her the ACTS award, (Animals Contributing to Society), which was a great honor.

But, most of all, she was my special girl, who taught me far more than I could ever put into words, and had a great joy for life. I can't begin to put into words how special she was. But, Sunday morning, it was time for her to leave that beautiful blue Great Dane body. She woke me up that morning in distress, and we rushed over to the emergency clinic. Xrays showed probable mesenteric torsion. I did acupuncture on her while they got her ready for surgery, and then she was rushed off to surgery. The news was the worst possible news: too much of the intestines had died after the torsion to save her. She was fading fast during the surgery as well, so they let me join her in the surgery room, and say goodbye.

There will never be another girl like Sapphire. She was truly a precious gem.

Jeri

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Blind Poodle...another Update

After one week, my brother's little boy is doing great. He gets along very well being blind. I have his mother and I care a lot about Pete. I delivered him and helped raise him to the good dog that he is. My brother has always been active with Pete. They would go boating together, riding off-road in his 4x4 Explorer, Chasing birds, etc. Pete loves the outdoors and refuses to stay inside. Though Pete no longer has his vision, he still refuses to stay inside. He wants to go outside to play.

Just about every weekend, my brother and I get together. Molly, Pete's mother, must know something isn't right with Pete. She has again shocked us. She will nudge Pete to play. They will wrestle around a little, then she will start to run slowly. Pete follows her. She runs just fast enough so he can follow behind her. She will lead him around the house. After a few laps, he sits down to rest. She will look at him. She must know he is thirsty or something, nudge him and lead him to the water bowl to get a drink. If he is in the house, she will get up, grab food for him and take it to him to eat. When I give Molly treats, she takes one, gives it to Pete, then comes back for another to eat herself.

Pete still wants to do stuff with my brother. Larry, my brother, started the engine on his boat to check some stuff out. Pete ran right to the boat. He wanted to go. It doesn't appear that his handicap will affect him at all. He might not be able to chase birds any more, but he is still able to run...with his mom's help.

We humans think we are so superior to animals. I truly believe that the communication skills of animals is as complex as ours is. How else would Molly know Pete is thirsty and needs something to drink? How does she know he wants to run?

Pete is in good hands with my brother. He will take care of that little boy until his time on earth is done. Looks like Pete will do the same for my brother. Pete picked my brother out as a pup. When my brother came to visit, Pete sat on his lap. When people would come to look at the pups, he hid. When my brother came to visit, right back with my brother. Animals never cease to amaze me.

Tom

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I would like to welcome all new members to the blind dog club - and it is a 'club'. We all joined because we wanted to help our dogs as much as we could - and most of us received as much help for ourselves as our dogs. Whatever the reason your dog has gone, or is going, blind, someone in the group will have had the same or similar experience, so you will probably, like me, go from deepest despair and feeling you are the only person in the world this awful thing has happened to - to realizing that there is life after blindness and maybe it's not going to be as bad as you imagined.

You'll read about dogs that will astonish you with their courage and bravery and others who will make you cry. All of them have humans who care deeply for them - that's why they joined this club. Now you've joined us - so welcome. My own dear Rosie is half way down the road to blindness but I'm sure the road is going to be much easier for both of us than if I had never met (in cyberspace only unfortunately) the great people who are "the blind dog club".

Annette and Rosie the one-eyed cocker (glaucoma)  
Berkshire UK

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(Terrific advise on moving to a new home, or helping a blind dog when visiting a new place!)

When Little Bit first went blind at 9 months old, I lived in a 9 room house. He went blind so gradually that he had the house mapped out very well and had little problems adjusting. I've moved four times since then, each time to a smaller place...this one being the smallest, only 3 rooms. Each move I would bring him in on leash. He already knew "Easy" and " Step up, Step Down" so getting in and out was no major change. Once inside, I walked him around the entire house. I kept him close to the interior walls, hitting it with my hand and saying "Wall." When I came to a door opening, I would change my tone of voice and say "Doorway." I allowed him to bump into the furniture on his own and actually started calling him "Pinball" for the first few days. He's a typical lab though, with a very boxy head so when he would bang into something, he would just change direction and keep going. If I saw him headed into the table, chairs, or a wall, I would say "Turn" and somehow, he knew which direction to turn into. I still don't understand how he knows, but it works.

His food is always kept in a corner of the kitchen, right near the sink, always using the same bowls and placemats. He never has trouble locating his food.

His Mom, Pepper is his guiding eyes for the most part, and I've seen her herd him away from an object. She also uses her eyes to steal his toys and treats, but I use MY eyes to get her attention and tell her to give them back. The only problem I had encountered were the sliding glass doors that lead to the deck they are allowed on in good weather. He can smell the outside, and had gone through the screen a few times, so I added a new word "Closed". If he approaches the screen and it's closed, I say "Closed" and he stops, puts his nose on the screen and then walks away. Even when it's open now, I see him try to touch it with his nose. If his foot touches the threshold without his nose feeling the screen, he just walks right out.

I limited the amount of furniture I brought with me on this last move, knowing the house is small, and wanted to give him as much room as possible. I only have two chairs at my table to make it easier for him to go around or under it. I gave up on coffee tables long ago. My couch, or I should say "his" couch, shields my glass curio cabinet. There are no obstacles on his side of the bed. When I get in bed, he stands by his side until I touch his nose and waits to hear "Bit. Up." and jumps right in.

Blind dogs will be a bit disoriented when they first move. Talking to them so they know where you are, leaving the tv or radio on when you're gone, and maybe scenting one special "safe" place are all things you can do to make the move easier.

They are more resilient than most people think, and their natural curiosity may cause a few bumps. But unless they are charging ahead at top speed, there shouldn't be any problems, provided you've puppy proofed the house to begin with.

Hope this helps.

Arlene, Little Bit, Pepper & Freddie the Duck

Hi and welcome to blinddogs!

When my Cocker Spaniel mix Lassie went blind a few years ago, I was absolutely devastated. I blamed myself, missed a week of school, and cried for three weeks straight. Finally, I went on anti-depressants. After a few weeks, however, I noticed something that I thought was very strange: Lassie was still Lassie.

I discovered that Lassie did not wallow in self-pity and did not feel that her life was over. In fact, she rejoiced in chasing squirrels and lizards at my mother's farm. She would speed through the fields as if she were sighted. Once she almost ran straight into a culvert, but because she's always been such a good dog, she stopped when I told her to.

If it weren't for the blinddogs group, I'm afraid that my adjustment would have taken a lot longer. The endless tips and the constant outpouring of affection, understanding, moral support, and humor kept me uplifted. I found that reading the posts were the highlight of my day. Lassie is a huge blessing to me, and now I also shared the joys and comfort that the other blind dogs bring to their owners.

No matter how distressed you are when your dog first goes blind, you should know that there is a rich and rewarding life ahead for you and your dog. Dogs have a wonderful resiliency and bounce back with humor, personality, and typical "dogness": they still love bones, walks, car rides, trips to the country, swimming, etc. If you are anything like me, you will someday look back at your current level of stress and say, "What was all the fuss about? My dog's blindness, at worse, is a minor inconvenience." Once you get used to warning them away from culverts and to re-orienting them after you rearrange your furniture, neither you nor the dog will have too many problems related to the actual blindness.

If your blind dog has other health-related problems that make life more complicated than my experience with Lassie, rest assured that there is a wealth of information on this site and people truly do care. If your question doesn't get answered right away, please be persistent. Everyone on the list is here to learn and share, and considers you an important addition. And don't be afraid to post updates and advice. Sometimes that can be the most healing thing of all.

Take care and know that my best wishes go out to you.

Best,
Andrea Robinson

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My dog Bear, a 10 year old Australian Shepherd mix, went blind from SARDS on May 30th. After almost 5 months of worry and concern for her, I began to see significant improvement over the past 3 to 4 weeks. The improvement "just happened." Although still bumping into things as much as ever (I call it "mapping ability impairment" due to SARDS), she has increased vim and vigor, has begun to play with toys again for the first time since going blind, and is playful with the other dogs, also a first. She still bumps into everything just like the first week of blindness, and probably always will. But her blood work is normal, she is healthy and full of piss and vinegar like before...so I'm writing to say "have patience." I didn't think Bear's personality would ever return, but one day, almost 5 months later, it did. Now instead of a tail at half-mast slowly wagging, she's got it up and wag, wag, wag, wag, wag. Others on this list told me things would continue to improve over the first year of blindness, but I didn't believe them. They were right.

Eileen and Bear

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I lie in bed last night, my arms wrapped around Little Bit, my face gently resting on his head. His paw moved, searching for my hand. I held his paw with one hand while the other stroked the soft fur on his chest. I felt a sigh as he drifted off to sleep.

We have cuddled in the same position every night, for almost eleven years. Yet last night, something was different. I could feel his body relax and melt into mine. I could hear his thoughts as he slept. "Mom. I feel so safe, so loved in your arms. Although it's been ten years since I've seen your face, I remember every feature, the sparkle in your eyes, the smile you seemed to reserve for me alone. So much has happened between us, the joys and sorrows, the highs and lows of our life. You've kept me safe; you've fed me and kept me warm. You've cared for me when I was sick and laughed at my silly ways. I'm sorry for the tears I've caused, and happy for the joy I've brought into your life.

It's Christmas Mom, and my gift to you is a promise. I promise to stay by your side, to love you always, to continue to make you smile, to cuddle with

you every night, as long as time allows. I love you Mom. Merry Christmas."
There can be no greater gift than the love Little Bit and I share, no bond stronger than the one we have. He is my heart, my soul, and my Little Bit of Heaven on Earth.

I kissed the top of his head and whispered "Merry Christmas my little bitty buddy. Thank you for being you, and for showing me a love I never knew existed. I love you too."

Arlene, Little Bit, Pepper and Freddie...the Duck

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Toshatu update and thoughts on glaucoma I have learned through the years.

It has been a very long time since I posted here. So many new names I do not recognize. It has been just over a year since Tosha had her remaining eye removed due to glaucoma. She is doing absolutely wonderful and is still queen of the house.

She maneuvers through the house and yard so well it is hard to tell she has no eyes at all. We had implants put in and both are now a dark brown black...a vast difference from her mesmerizing ice blue eyes she was born with. She is still beautiful and magnificent and oh so spoiled:).

She loves walks and takes off at a very fast trot fully confident that we will alert her with an "easy" if she gets too near something she may trip over or hit. She maneuvers the 17 stairs to get in and out of the house with ease and actually runs up and down them! The command "get tosha" sends her into a frenzied running and jumping play in the yard because this is what we have always said when we want to race and wrestle with her. She sits and puts her nose in the air just reveling in all the smells of the day and night.

She is completely comfortable and in absolutely NO pain. She is loving her life as we are loving watching her be completely happy and content.

I think back on all the time and worry we expended trying to save her eyes. I think of all the pain and confusion she went through during pressure spikes, endless surgeries, treatments and doses of meds. I remember my wonderful eye vet being so compassionate yet trying to make me understand that site is not that important to dogs, not like their smell and hearing. Her trying to help me see that it was me, as a human, that was devastated with her loss of site, not Tosha. All

Tosha wanted was to be with us and be pain free.

I remember all the days that her pressure seemed fine but she was moody and know that she was most likely in pain from pressure spikes we didn't know she was having. Now that I look back, as hind sight is always 20/20, had I known what I know now, I would have made different choices. I would have had her eyes removed oh so much sooner. She would have had more years of no site yes. BUT she would have had so many MORE years pain free.

My Tosha is a fighter and has taught me much over the last 7 years. She taught me sight is not everything. Having love and not being in pain are so much more important. She still has her "Don't Worry, Be Happy" attitude. I am glad that now we live our days happily and pain free. She is one happy, spoiled little girl!

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Also remember that pets adjust and deal with body changes better than humans, they simply learn a new way, they do not fear looking silly, being embarrassed, being pitied, they dont have to worry about if they can work again, watch their children grow up and get married, watch TV, drive a car etc...all the things our mind conjures up when sight is suddenly taken. BTW, I am blind in my left eye as part of an auto accident and have had injury to my right eye that left me temporarily blinded (2 weeks) Its a long and amusing story, if you want to ask me why you should never stare a cat with a bad attitude in the face and hiss back...go ahead and you will get a private email with a story of how I was blinded for my wedding.

Anyhow....comparing my temporary experience with dogs and some cats, I find that when you *really* consider what is important to a dog for independence, not what is important to a human who goes blind. Dogs have the best life, they eat when they are hungry and don't have to worry about silverware. They potty when they need to and don't have to worry about missing the toilet, They learn fairly quick where the furniture is and they don't have that whole geez I hope nobody saw that, thing going on, they can sniff their way around, and understand space by scent, when a human sniffs blinded they only become more aware of what they have spilled lately and couldn't clean up. The blind dog doesn't care what they spilled or care if anyone else does.

We tend to feel sorry for them or think they are missing things in life simply because we would be missing so many things it would drive us insane. Dogs are better than humans, they do not need what we need to feel like a complete person. Once they learn not to bonk into things, find their food, their favorite places to sit/lay and can find their human or other companions when they want love/affection, and learn what sounds hurt, help, are background or command, they have the whole world. Its only we humans that believe there should be more.

The person who talked about the power going out made so much sense....life is not bad

because you are in the dark. Let your pup believe we are all in the dark and its ok...everyone finds their way to the candles or fusebox dont they? Dogs will find their way and they will have a great life...once we *really* believe that ourselves that is.

Becky
Handipets Haven

I just have this urge right now to share my Bear who I am so proud of. Bear is an 8 year old yellow lab with PRA. He was diagnosed about 5 years ago. His first symptoms (before he was diagnosed) were avoiding the see saw and dog walk in agility, and bank running in hunt tests. In retrospect, we realized he was also starting to have trouble in dim light. By then he had earned his CD and JH. When he was diagnosed, it was a tragedy for us. Here was this vibrant, happy, dog who was going to go blind. We could only envision a couch potato who would be stuck at home most of the time. But we were wrong.

Today he sees very little. He can see movement above his head, but absolutely nothing below, and except on a bright sunny day outside, he can't make out much of anything specific. We are his seeing eye people - he needs help going down the stairs (up is no problem) and he just stays right behind, feeling my leg as I take one step at a time. Sometimes he gets stuck, or he tries to go by himself (like if someone comes to the door) and we can talk him down by saying "step, step" until he gets to the bottom. Around the house he seems to negotiate quite well by following the runners on the hardwood floors. But if the kids leave shoes or their backpacks he'll trip. I have to lift him into the van to travel, but once he's in his crate or on a seat he's happy. I go to dog shows regularly. When we walk in unfamiliar places, that obedience training comes in handy. He heels well, lightly touching my leg, and I let him know if terrain changes are approaching a lot like guide dogs do with blind people. For a curb, for instance, I tell him to wait, then I say "step" and he sticks his paw out to feel if it's up or down and then we go on. He's got a lot of confidence and the casual observer would never pick out that he had a handicap.

We have 3 other labs, a cocker and 2 Havanese. Bear is everyone's friend and all the dogs treat him well. Our newest Hav is just 10 weeks old and weighs less than 3 lb. She figured out quick that it was a bad idea to get under Bear's feet, and after just a week they are great pals, which is hilarious because Bear weighs about 70 lbs! Normally having a 3 lb dog with a 70 lb dog is a recipe for disaster, but not with Bear. Little Razz (who is no bigger than a beanie baby) doesn't get free play with any of the other dogs except the other Hav. We also have a 5 month Lab who was born here, and Bear takes him out for his pee breaks during the day. It's like Uncle Bear hanging out with his nephew. When we have litters, Bear doesn't mind the pups at all, but if he gets overwhelmed he barks for help - up in the air! He'd never bark AT a puppy.

I'm so proud that in January he earned his AKC Rally Novice title. He had better sight than he does today (it's been a fast decline lately) but my daughter (who handled him) did have to invent some new ways to do circling and turns to the left without stepping on him. Lots of

patting her leg, telling him stay and then turning in front of him, and stuff like that. It was a lot different than doing the course with a dog that has perfect sight. His last score was in the 90s! And watching the two of them was a delight - the communication was so effective. Technically, a blind dog is not allowed to compete in the AKC, but he wasn't technically blind - visually impaired maybe! But other Rally organizations allow blind dogs and it's a great way to develop communication with your dog. Bear was always a "working" dog - he hunted, showed, did obedience and agility, and when he was diagnosed we had to cut out pretty much everything for his safety. He seemed to get depressed because the rest of the dogs were doing stuff, going on trips and the like. To compensate, we'd try to take him lots of places, give him lots to do around the house (he's the official sock picker upper) and play a lot of obedience games. The rally training and showing were a blast for him - you should have seen him with his head up, listening to my daughter, tail wagging, and with a spring in his step. We don't do anything special for him except try to keep everything in the same place. He's never had any trouble finding his water, and he certainly has no trouble jumping onto my bed!

I'm just busting with pride for my boy - can you tell? -Nancy

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(Reply to disappointment with a blind dog's progress after 6 weeks)

I really understand what you are saying. My Willie certainly doesn't have ALL good days. It's always up and down. What I think is happening here, (but I can only speak for myself in terms of what I am certain of), is that we speak of what we choose to focus on. I refuse to allow the lump to form in my throat when Willie bumps into the same wall 4 times in an hour. I refuse to scream in frustration when someone leaves a chair out, and he stumbles and then freezes for 10 minutes. No, we were dealt this hand, and we made a decision that we are going to breeze right past the failures and the trials. Yes, they are there. But our choice, the choice that we have to make every single day, is to focus on the strengths and ignore the weaknesses. We make the choice everyday to rejoice when there is cause (even the smallest of causes) to rejoice. We dismiss, look past, ignore, reject all that is negative. Willie has SARDS and there are a lot of other symptoms, too. But when you make that choice BEFORE you have to deal with each disappointment, you do not stop to think about it. You just do it, because the decision has already been made. I made a commitment to Willie that I think we all make (or SHOULD make, anyway) to our friends and family. And that is to see the good and not the bad, to build up and encourage and be positive and strong. When Willie bumps into something, I say in my most cheerful voice, "That's okay. Come on, Wil". And we do not waste a minute feeling bad about something we cannot change anyway. Every minute with him is precious, and I praise him for his efforts and I love him to pieces and I hug him and I kiss him and I scratch his tummy and I walk with him and I take him for his car rides and I make sure that he knows I adore him and that I do not think anything at all is wrong. I say "it's no big deal" a million times a day. He may not understand the words but I know he understands my tone and my total disregard for his mishaps. Can you find one thing a day or two things a day that Mickey does well? Praise him like crazy! And I guess I started by setting no expectations. Then every little thing was a big success. And Willie picked up on my attitude so quickly! And now, he will slam into something, and he will freeze and have this

look on his face. Shock, bewilderment, embarrassment. And then I say, "Come on Wil. Let's go. Forget it" in my 'Willie's Biggest Cheerleader' voice and his tail wags and his face changes and his dignity returns and he comes after me and we go on to the next thing. We have not changed our activities or our outings or anything. I know Willie adjusted because I adjusted. I never let him know that this thing got me down. Mickey may not follow your lead as quickly because of his age, but I really believe that six weeks is NOTHING! Willie took months, and he was 8. And it was a roller coaster, and we tried all kinds of different things. I think working with the dog is critical too. Start training (Living with Blind Dogs by Caroline Levin) and Mickey will have a 'responsibility', something to look forward to, a purpose, a job. And it will bring the two of you closer as well. I did not mean to ramble on for so long, but I am so passionate about this dog-human thing. Their impact on us, and ours on them is incomparable to anything else in life. So please please please.....make the decision today that as much as it is up to you, this thing is NOT going to diminish in any way, Mickey's life or his dignity. And make up your mind that this is not optional, from now until his very last day.

Sorry, everyone, if I went on and on. I just really believe in this line of thinking, because of how it's working for me and my Wil. All of our days are not great, but we are committed to seeing them that way. I did not choose this for him, but I do choose to make it the best it can be!

Colleen

Willie, 9 yr. Old lab/pointer X, SARDS 7/05

Tinker, 8 yr old border collie X

Dakota, 5 yr. old yellow lab, adopted from Georgia Lab Rescue

JAKE, 16 yr. old golden/yellow lab X, rescued fall of 2005

Daisy, 10 yr. old yellow lab, also a GLR dog

Fred, yellow lab, gone to the Bridge 8/14/05 at age 11

Shawnee, black lab X, gone to the Bridge 3/25/06, at age 13