



Pup E-Connection

The Southwest Region Puppy Raiser Newsletter

August 2006

“But how can you give them up?” (Why We Do What We Do)

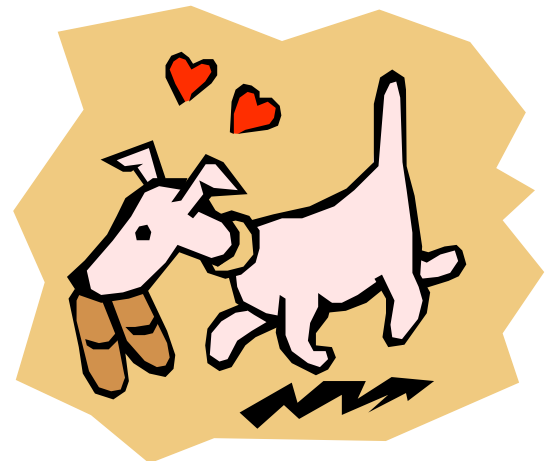
As a trainer, it is simple. Right from the beginning, these dogs are not ours. We are their teachers, their leaders, their playground monitors. We know our time is limited, and we know our responsibility to prepare these dogs to the ultimate level, so that someone with a disability has not an everyday pet, but a genuine working dog. As much as I give them love, snuggle with them, play fetch, and revel in the joy of teaching them new things, I always have a piece of my heart set aside, for these dogs are not mine to have.

Every three months, an amazing thing happens on our campus, and the reasons for a trainer's hard work become oh so clear. On August 7, nine amazing teams pulled onto the CCI campus. Within a week, within days really, extraordinary things started to happen. Children that have difficulty verbalizing became so motivated by their dogs that they started to build their vocabulary by adding commands. In a Team Training class a few years ago, the commands “Sit” and “Down” led a child back to the word “Mom”, which had not been heard by that mother in many years. Muscles become stronger and more relaxed as children reach out to pet their dogs, providing improvements that boggle the minds of their physical therapists. This is why we do what we do. For our new service teams, you can watch their eyes light up in Team Training as the unreachable becomes reachable, both as a metaphor, and as a reality. Suddenly an item dropped out of reach is not a big deal. For some students this means the increased independence of being home without an attendant, and allows caretakers more free time as well. For one successor grad, having a service dog meant having the confidence to go places on her own-- dropping the car keys or the remote for the van lift were no longer concerns. For a multitude of graduates, having a CCI dog means venturing out new places and spending much more time in public than they ever had before, as suddenly the barriers the public puts up towards people with disabilities were toppled by these amazing dogs. This is why we do what we do.

This past graduation was a great one, and really clarified things for me. As a graduate wrote to me last week in a card, “Keep training those dogs. We need them!” That summed it all up for me. Our graduates need these dogs—as companions, friends, and mobility tools. Each team gets countless benefits, ones that you and I can only imagine. A Puppy Raiser at graduation brunch made a great statement, by taking the graduate's gratitude towards them, and turning it around, saying, “You graduates are a blessing to me and to my family.” It is the greatest blessing in life to be able to truly give to another human being, to commit a selfless act and expect nothing in return but the knowledge that you have enhanced someone's life.

You as Puppy Raisers are a different part of this dog's life than I, much closer to being a parent figure. You take them into your homes, and spend the entire day with them by your side. Your job is much more difficult than mine-- a true sacrifice of free time, money, and especially love. For that, we at CCI applaud you.

But in the end, it isn't about you or I, is it? Our title, Canine Companions for Independence, sometimes leads our focus to be a bit too strongly upon the dogs. Certainly these dogs are extraordinary creatures, often seeming more than canines. And certainly this organization does not exist without them. Yet sometimes we forget that these dogs are only half of the equation, that an Assistance Dog team consists of two parts: one-half person, one-half dog. Improving the quality of life and the level of independence for our fellow man is what it is about. So when someone on the street asks you, "But how can you give them up?", just say, "It's easy. There is someone out there waiting for this dog, and they need them. This dog will change their life forever."



The Graduate/ Puppy Raiser Relationship

If the puppy you raised graduates, you are guaranteed one amazing day where you get to meet your graduate. After graduation, we all go back to the real world. For some graduates, keeping in touch with their Raisers on a regular basis is a given. For others that may travel, work long hours, or have countless other life commitments and medical challenges, it is more difficult to keep in touch. CCI's policy dictates to graduates that it is their personal choice whether or not they choose to communicate with their Raiser. In the article below, a graduate explains the wide variation in Raiser/Graduate Relationships.

My name is Erek Gerende and I have had the pleasure of being part of three service dog teams with CCI. Image, Teddy, and my current service dog, Honor III, have each brought immeasurable joy and previously unfathomable independence to my life.

One of the questions I get asked most often by puppy raisers is this: Do I keep in touch with my puppy raiser? To which I reply yes, I have always tried to stay in contact with my graduate dogs' puppy raisers, but with varying degrees of success.

With my first dog, Image, I lost contact after about a year when the puppy raiser moved without informing me. I had more success with Teddy's puppy raiser, Marion whom I stayed in contact with for the entire 6 1/2 years that Teddy was my partner. This was done primarily by mail and e-mail with the occasional phone contact. This was Marion's choice because it was simply too painful for her to see Teddy and not be able to take him home with her.

I have heard some puppy raisers and puppy raiser candidates ask why they go through everything they go through if they rarely hear from and might never see the graduate team after graduation. I can't answer that question. I can only say thank you. In a perfect world it would always be like my relationship with Becky Haggland and her family. Becky likes to say she didn't lose a dog--she gained a family! I wholeheartedly agree that getting Honor added much more than one 4-footed member to the Gerende clan.

Unfortunately, some graduates just don't have the time to keep in touch with their puppy raiser in the way they might like. Many have difficulty traveling and live far away from their puppy raisers. Others are unnecessarily afraid that seeing the puppy raiser too often will jeopardize the new bond they have forged with their service dog.

No matter how often you as puppy raisers hear from the human half of your graduate team, believe when I say that you have made a difference. Our lives have forever changed for the better, and we are extremely grateful for what you have done.

---Erek Gerende

Facility Teams

Often times, the importance of Facility teams is misunderstood, and they do not get the recognition they so clearly deserve. To illustrate the amazing effects of a Facility dog at work, please read the following story of Graduate Mary Aynn Shoemate (Albuquerque, New Mexico), and her Facility dog, Jibar.

“Goodbye, Ray. Love, Jibar”

There is never an easy way to say no to someone who needs help and probably never a good reason. Even when the task looms difficult or scheduling seems impossible; it might be well to remember that blessings can often follow the smallest acts of kindness.

However, I don't remember thinking such lofty thoughts when the telephone rang in the middle of a hectic morning of flying dog hair and long overdue chores. A staff member at a local hospital was calling for one of Jibar's specialties, Last Hour Therapy. A nurse had a patient who would soon be moving to hospice and he and his family needed something lovely to happen in that very sad room.

Hoping that I had put on two of the same colored socks and the proper security badges, a freshly groomed Jibar and I leaped into the van and hurried to the hospital. We were warmly welcomed by a lovely nurse who took us to meet her special patient, Ray. As soon as we entered the room, we felt a presence of love and joy that was to remain with us over the next ten days.

Ray was surprised and pleased to have a canine visitor, especially one that looked very much like a dog he had owned in the past. When Jibar put his head on Ray's bed, the two of them locked eyes and hearts. He later asked if Jibar could come closer and so two large paws went up on the bed and a big black head rested on Ray's chest. There was laughter and applause as the family rushed for their cameras hoping to capture what might be one of Ray's last smiles.

The family expressed an interest in having us come every day that we could so when Ray was moved to hospice, Jibar and I continued to spend a part of each day with him and his family. As he weakened, he seemed happy to just touch a velvety, black ear and Jibar seemed content to feel his gentle hand.

We were becoming somewhat of a fixture at the hospice unit. When the staff was tending to Ray's needs, we took those opportunities to meet other people who were there with their families. On one of those occasions, a delightful young lad asked a social worker why there was dog in the hospital. She told him Jibar was a special dog that helped people go to heaven and helped their

families to not be sad about it. As I was trying to recover from that beautiful and emotional statement, the boy asked if Jibar could help his great-grandpa because he had been trying to go to heaven for a long time. I desperately attempted to regain my composure while the social worker asked the family if we could meet great-grandpa. They were a bit taken aback but they agreed. Jibar greeted each family member and then laid his head on great-grandpa's arm. He was in a deep coma but we introduced ourselves and told him how much his great-grandson had wanted us to meet him. Feeling our brief visit was enough, we thanked everyone for their gracious welcome and left. The next day we were told that great-grandpa had died during the night. A loving little boy and a gentle dog prompted a moment that stilled my heart.

As each day passed, we all wondered how or why Ray was holding so strongly to this life. We continued our watch with him and shared Jibar's unique gift with others when we were asked. We like to think that Ray was waiting until everyone could experience the same special time with Jibar that he had known. Feeling that Jibar's work was becoming somewhat stressful, I took some time for him to compete in an agility trial. He had a wonderfully successful weekend. He released all of his energy, ran with abandonment and let his spirit soar. On Monday we returned to our vigil with Ray but he had slipped into a deeper coma and we had to be content with a soft goodbye outside of his room.

Ray died that night. Perhaps his and Jibar's real goodbye had been while one heart was running free and the other was trying to do the same. They were much alike those two joyful beings. Each in his own way was able to touch hearts with the same kind of tenderness. I traveled through that time in a dream. I am so grateful to have been a part of such an experience but feel quite small having walked in the footsteps of such giants...a courageous man and a wonderful dog who somehow cannot only connect to a person's life but to their very heartbeat.

Although life's blessings can come at unexpected times and may take many different forms, one thing is constant. They always follow love.





Notes from Puppy Program

***Puppy Reports due: September 1**

As a special request, please update the information at the top of your report each month. This includes the date you filled out the report, the age and weight of your dog, and how much food they are receiving. This is valuable information for CCI, and knowing the date you filled out your report helps us stay organized when we get the hundreds of reports that we do each month!

***Veterinary Paperwork**

The Puppy Program has been running into several challenges when trying to assist PRs with veterinary/medical issues. These challenges can be easily overcome by your assistance:

- 1) Please put the CCI puppy's official name on all veterinary documents, despite nicknames (ex: Joseph VI, versus Joey or JoJo). If paperwork comes in without the dog's official name, it often creates extra work to find where the file truly belongs or worse, it gets misfiled.
- 2) Please list CCI as the co-owner of the puppy on their veterinary records. Vet offices generally have good security, and will not release medical information to anyone but the owner of the animal. This presents a sizeable problem when CCI makes a request for medical records.

***Puppy Workshop -- Austin, Texas: September 16**
Don't miss it!

***Advanced Training Reports for new turn-ins: First week of October**

Matriculation: August 19, 2006

Thank you to the Puppy Raisers of all 34 August turn-in dogs!
We'll take great care of them at "college"! Congrats on a job well done!



Photo compliments of Ken Sergi.
For more photos, visit: www.kensergi.com

That's it for this issue—Release!